



**Radboud University**

*Master's Thesis*

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***Higher Education for Refugees:  
From Micro Efforts to Macro Effects?***

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*May 3, 2019*



## Preface

You are currently holding or scrolling through the end product of almost two years of hard work in my studies at Radboud University Nijmegen, where I further specialized myself as a human geographer in Conflict, Territories and Identities. The road to finishing this thesis was a fascinating yet rocky one, on which I gained much new knowledge and many new skills and experiences.

My time as a student started in Utrecht, where I did my bachelor's in Human Geography and Planning. In these studies, I was given many opportunities to broaden my horizon, while continuously focusing on geography in general. Besides my work in university, I busied myself with my volunteer work in an international organization that focuses on children and youth, as well as in my work as a babysitter. This interest in working with youth has always been apparent in my life, which is why my bachelor's thesis was on children's sense of citizenship and belonging. When I was given the opportunity to continue research into youth as the future generation in my internship at SPARK, it felt like the perfect fit. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at SPARK in Amsterdam, where I have experienced working in an international organization that deals with vulnerable, yet inspiring groups of people. I am grateful for my internship supervisor Laura Brinks, who supported me during my time at SPARK. She was always available to provide me with the necessary feedback and mental support when needed, even when I did not realize I needed it. Both her and my colleague Nikolaos Koufos kept reading along with my thesis, also after my internship had ended.

Furthermore, my special gratitude goes out to my thesis supervisor Haley Swedlund, who I admire as a teacher, academic and person in general. Despite her own busy life, she made the time to guide me through the tough process of finishing such a big and important project. Haley, thank you for checking in on me from time to time and providing me with your helpful feedback when you knew I needed it.

Lastly, I would like to thank my many friends and family who supported me during the writing process. It was a challenge to keep going when things were not working out as I wanted them to, or when life got in the way, but due to good talks and uplifting messages I stayed motivated. Thank you to all my library buddies who made sure my lunch breaks were never a dull moment and who kept the coffee flowing. I could not have done it without you.

*Utrecht, May 2019*

*Katelijne Vanderveen*



## Abstract

In a world that continuously deals with war and conflict, the Syrian war has been a catalyst of the current refugee crisis since 2011. More refugees and internally displaced people than ever are in need of humanitarian aid and a place to rebuild their lives. Syria's neighboring countries have been dealing with unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers, where local populations are becoming increasingly dissatisfied. With a general duration of 17 years in exile, refugees are in need for ways of integrating into their new host countries, where they can resume some of their old daily activities. One of these activities entails the education for children and youth, who are increasingly prone to becoming refugees, due to the changing nature of contemporary war. In this thesis, it is argued that higher education for youth is a way of supporting refugee students both on the short and the long term at once. On the short term, education gives the students the opportunity to integrate into their host communities and gives them a way of coping with their new reality. At the same time, the students can use their education to build on their future. This idea of linking relief, rehabilitation and development is supported by the international non-governmental organization SPARK. In SPARK's 'Higher Education for Syrians' program, refugee students are provided with scholarships and extracurricular activities in their host countries to become educated, and to bring their conflict-affected home countries back into prosperity in the future. This suggests a link between integration and reconstruction, which has been the focus of this study's quantitative analysis.

Using a large-scale survey from SPARK, a scale has been created to test the integration and reconstruction constructs. Complemented by three interviews with SPARK members, this thesis has shown that this connection between both constructs, powered by education, is more apparent than the current academic debate suggests it to be. The students that were better integrated showed to be more willing to contribute to reconstruction efforts in the future, than those who scored lower on the integration scale. Moreover, male students showed to be better integrated, as well as to be more willing to contribute to reconstruction than the female students. Lastly, all interviewees indicated language skills being an obstacle for the refugee students to integrate into their host communities. Continued education for the students can provide ways to overcome these obstacles, as well as to build on a brighter future at the same time.



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## List of abbreviations

EURTF	European Regional Trust Fund
GDF	Global Dynamic Futures
HES	Higher Education for Syrians
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LRRD	Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development
NL MFA	Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories (West Bank and East Jerusalem)
PO	Program officer
PM	Program manager
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training



## 1. Introduction

‘It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men’, are the famous words from Frederick Douglass. However, building strong children and preventing broken men can often be hard in contemporary fragile countries and societies that cope with war and conflict or the aftermath of these. Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) that flee acute situations face the struggle of survival and need to adjust to and integrate in the culture of host countries. In order to participate in their new societies, refugees often need to learn a new language and cannot practice the job or continue the study they practiced in their home countries (Glastra & Vedder, 2010). Employment and education are two crucial factors for affected people to continue their lives and move on from war and conflict (SPARK, 2018). As there have been more refugees around the world in the past decade than ever before (Betts & Collier, 2015), effective strategies are most needed to support people in their recovery. These people are often youth, who are forced to discontinue the education they were receiving (Acedo, 2011; Betts & Collier, 2015). Being supported by and provided with the necessary skills and knowledge is crucial for these youth to build a brighter future after war and conflict.

As children and youth are that future, giving them special attention is crucial to prevent the occurrence of a lost generation due to war and conflict (Matsumoto, 2008). However, that special attention for refugees is often contested. Due to the refugee crisis that resulted from the Syrian civil war, which started in 2011, many countries in Europe and the Middle East have seen a continuous large influx of refugees, where most of these refugees apply for asylum. Many of these receiving countries are not keen on taking in the large amounts of refugees and often perceive them as a threat to their culture and economy (Betts & Collier, 2015). Moreover, many European countries are restricting their immigration and asylum policies (Bierling, 2016) to prevent themselves from more refugees entering the country and to ‘share the burden’ of hosting and distributing the refugees (Betts & Collier, 2015; Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016).

Although European countries have seen a big influx of refugees in the recent history, these numbers are negligible compared to those of neighboring countries of Syria. At the end of 2015, for example, Turkey was estimated to host around 2.5 million Syrian refugees, both Lebanon and Jordan around one million, and Iraq another 240,000 refugees, of which the latter also deals with an additional challenge of having an estimated one million IDPs themselves (Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016). Most of these refugees are or have been in need of immediate help, concerning food, water and shelter, which brings along high costs. Although this already poses a challenge for most countries, humanitarian aid and relief are only short-term. On the



longer term, most of the people who applied for asylum will need to integrate and (re)build their lives in their new host communities. This includes proper housing, a job to earn a living and an education for children and youth. In most cases, obtaining all these is easier said than done, as all host societies suddenly need to cope with thousands of new citizens. Whereas these integration efforts are difficult enough, refugees often want to return to their home countries once they are safe to do so.

This master thesis will address these issues, where the international non-governmental organization (INGO) SPARK will function as a case study. The organization 'develop[s] higher education and entrepreneurship to empower young, ambitious people to lead their conflict-affected societies into prosperity' (SPARK, 2018). More specifically, the Higher Education for Syrians (HES) program will be studied, which is one of SPARK's many programs. It involves Syrian and Palestinian refugees and IDPs that reside in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Syria, Iraq-KRG or the Palestinian Territories. The program supports refugees in accessing higher education, as well as extracurricular activities such as leadership development and economic empowerment, with the goal of helping these students become future leaders. Beneficiaries of the program follow their education and extracurricular activities in mainly Turkish or Arabic.

Both the higher education and extracurricular activities in the HES program are intended to support the refugees in their home communities. Moreover, these efforts have an intended effect on the larger scale: to empower refugees to engage in the reconstruction of their conflict-affected home countries. In this way, SPARK aims to link small-scale support to individual refugees to large-scale development of both host communities and home countries in the form of integration and reconstruction. For SPARK, it is important that these efforts are studied as they want to base their work on this link between these micro and macro levels. If this thesis shows the opposite or simply denies this assumption, this can be part of SPARK's lessons learnt and future policymaking.

### *1.1. Research questions*

Although education has always been an important topic in academic literature, there has been an increase in attention to its potential in (post-)conflict situations and in the wider debate on reconstruction and peacebuilding, as the number of refugees is at an all-time high (Pinto, 2014; Betts & Collier, 2015). In this research, there will be a focus on higher education for affected youth, where it will be scrutinized how higher education can contribute to short-term relief for refugee students in their host countries, but how it can also provide long-term opportunities. More specifically, and hence the research question of this thesis:



*To what extent can INGOs, such as SPARK, empower refugees to engage in integration and reconstruction efforts in their host and home countries, through higher education and extracurricular activities, in line with the LRRD framework?*

Three sub-questions have been formulated to break down this research question:

1. How can empowerment and higher education in line with the LRRD (linking relief, rehabilitation and development) framework contribute to the integration and reconstruction in refugees' host and home countries?

To answer the first sub-question, the main terms and concepts that will be used in this thesis will be studied. As these are mostly complex terms with a wide variety of definitions and interpretations, a thorough theoretical framework needs to be constructed. This will be done by a literature study, supported by a conceptual framework. Part of this conceptual framework will address the theory in practice:

2. How do SPARK's efforts in its HES program contribute to integration and reconstruction efforts in refugees' host and home countries?

This question will focus on integration and reconstruction in practice through SPARK's HES program. The program is active in six countries and is funded by three donors. Therefore, an elaborate understanding of the program is needed to be able to study its potential for refugees. Part of the answer to this question will be the analysis of one of SPARK's surveys that has been conducted with the beneficiaries of the HES program.

3. How do SPARK's efforts in its HES program align with the theorized empowerment of refugees to engage in integration and reconstruction efforts in their host and home countries, in line with the LRRD framework?

Lastly, theory will be combined with practice: how does the theory align with the current practice and vice versa? This third sub-question will be the steppingstone to answering the main research question.



## *1.2. Conceptual framework*

The research questions can be summarized in the conceptual framework (*Figure 1*), which depicts the order of the questions and how they will be discussed in this thesis. Section one in the conceptual framework depicts all relevant terms that will be studied in the theoretical framework, which is the second chapter of this thesis. This includes the main constructs integration and reconstruction, which will be focused on in this research. Moreover, the theoretical framework will include an elaboration on SPARK, its HES program and therefore also the broader debate on higher education and extracurricular activities for refugees. All these terms will be put in the framework of LRRD: linking relief, rehabilitation and development. An understanding of the theory will answer the first sub-question and will provide the opportunity to study the concepts in practice.

Section two depicts this practice and will be discussed in the methodology, analysis and results, which are chapter three and four. It entails the system and goals of the HES program: SPARK influences the way the program functions and the program, in turn, has an effect on the refugee students and how they perceive their scholarships. These students have the opportunity to provide SPARK with their feedback on the program, which can then be adjusted, according to their needs. The students can do this via the use of satisfaction surveys that are distributed among the students multi-annually and after attended trainings. Moreover, the HES program gets adjusted according to program-related obstacles and successes that are reported from the field. These are part of SPARK's lessons learnt, which are considered in policy making. Although their effects on the program are worth studying, this will not be part of this thesis. Therefore, these effects are indicated with a dotted arrow in the framework. Together with the actual HES program, these practices aim to realize the empowerment of SPARK's refugee students, indicated with the dotted red square titled 'empowerment', which will be studied. By providing the students with higher education, SPARK aims to empower refugees to lead their conflict-affected societies back into prosperity (SPARK, 2018). This means that SPARK aims to support refugees in their host countries, in order to give them the opportunity to make a future difference in their home countries. This is where the process of integration and reconstruction takes place, which will be studied in line with the LRRD framework, indicated with another dotted red square around the corresponding concepts. All this will answer the second sub-question.

Lastly, section three mentions the combination of the theory and the studied practice and how they constantly affect each other. This will be elaborated in the conclusion and discussion,



which is chapter five. Along with combining theory and practice, the third sub-question and finally the main research question will be answered.



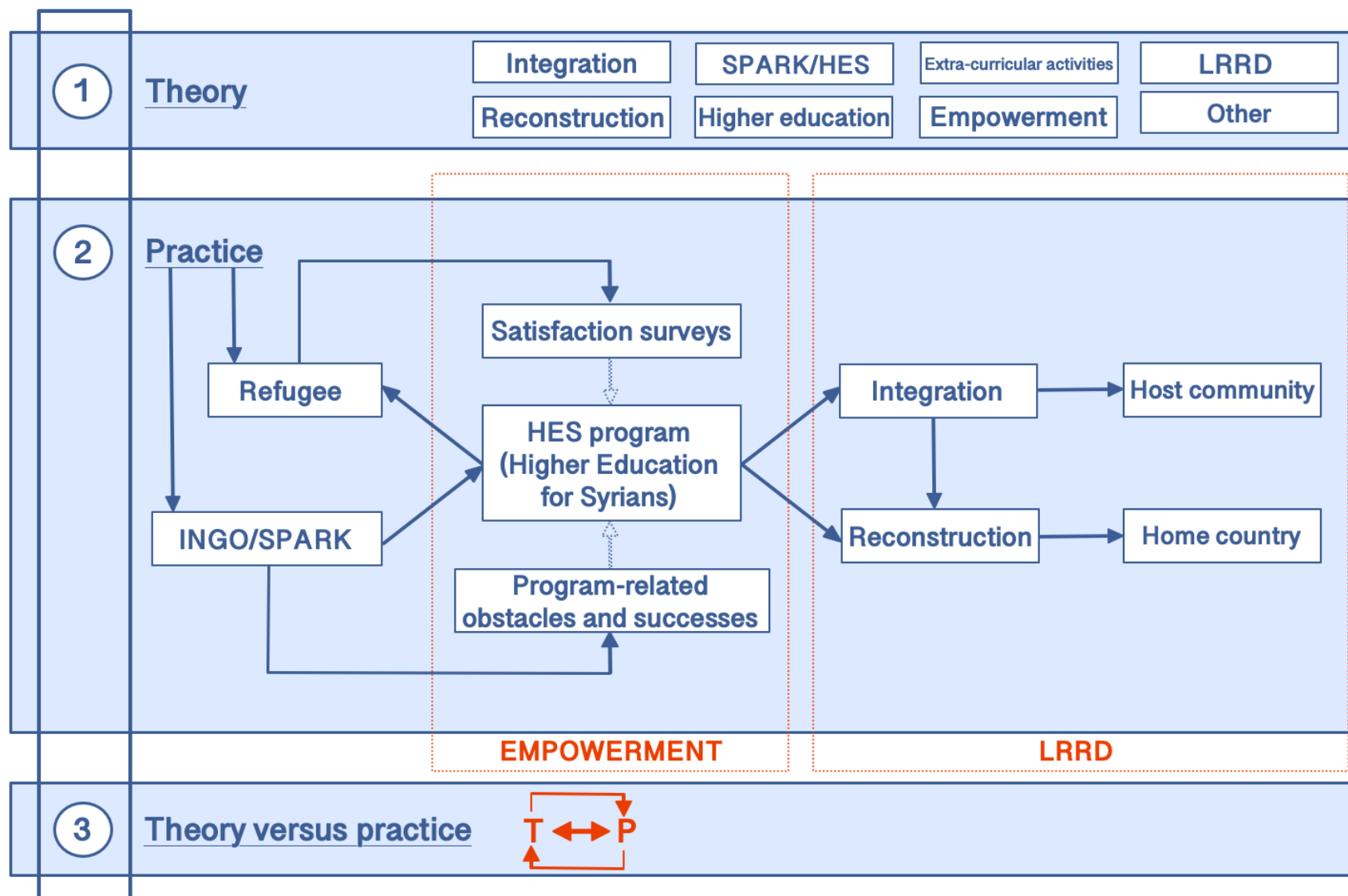


Figure 1 - Conceptual framework



### *1.3. Scientific relevance*

Studies on the integration of refugees have been going on for decades, whether this is via the use of case studies (Kuhlman, 1991; Korac, 2003) or by using of bigger frameworks (Strang & Ager, 2010; Beversluis, et al., 2017; Hynie, 2018). Education has also been a part of these integration studies, where there is a focus on the provision of all different types of education, such as primary, secondary, higher and peace education for refugees (Bekalo, Brophy, & Welford, 2003; Crea & McFarland, 2015; Culbertson & Constant, 2015; Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Moreover, reconstruction has been studied in many contexts and under many names, where reconstruction is often linked with peacebuilding (Goodhand & Lewer, 1999; Green, 1999; Acedo, 2011; Pinto, 2014; Milton & Barakat, 2016).

What has only rarely been studied, however, is the possible link between integration and reconstruction. Integration is often focused on the support and empowerment of refugees in their new host countries, without paying attention to their possible desire to return to their home countries to contribute to the reconstruction of their societies after violent conflict. This indicates a certain short-term focus on the refugees' lives, although a long-term prospect is just as crucial.

Additionally, in this thesis, the important role of higher education will be addressed as a key player for both these short- and long-term solutions. Higher education for refugee youth has only rarely been addressed in the current academic debate, compared to compulsory, primary education for refugee children. However, higher education concerns a different age group and therefore entails different needs and desires for the students. This provides different research opportunities, which have mostly been studied in European countries, such as the United Kingdom (Hek, 2005; Jack, Chase, & Warwick, 2018; Oliver & Hughes, 2018), rather than in and around the countries where the conflict takes place. As this study uses data of students from Syria's neighboring countries, this will start filling that scientific gap.

Moreover, current studies into refugees' learning opportunities and trajectories that have been conducted in European countries often report language barriers, preventing refugees to integrate into their host communities and lead their daily lives. SPARK's HES program provides refugees with the opportunity to follow their education in the local languages, which possibly prevents this language barrier from arising. This would not only make participating in education easier for the refugee students, but also predicts better integration into their host societies, so they become better able to provide for themselves. Studying SPARK's practices is therefore of scientific relevance.



Lastly, this thesis will adopt mixed methods, with the main focus on quantitative research methods. This is unusual for this type of studies, especially on integration, as most of the studies use qualitative research methods, such as interviews or focus groups (Psoinos, 2007; Stevenson & Willott, 2007; Crea & McFarland, 2015; Oliver & Hughes, 2018). Studying a large group of refugee students at once can provide a useful addition to the current academic debate.

#### *1.4. Societal relevance*

By filling the addressed scientific gaps in the academic literature on integration, reconstruction and higher education, practitioners in governments and organizations can benefit from the findings of the study. The main organization in this case is SPARK. The findings of the study can be part of the lessons learnt for the HES program and therefore of the future program design. Moreover, all others that busy themselves with the integration of the unprecedented number of refugees can benefit for continued research into this topic. If successful integration, for example, shows to promote the willingness of refugees to contribute to reconstruction of their home countries, this can be of major societal relevance. If improved access to higher education for refugees causes such improved integration, this can be of importance to the future policy-making of government or municipalities to develop more educational opportunities.

As this research will also address reconstruction, the findings can also be of importance to post-conflict societies. Education will be discussed as a way of short-term relief, but also as a way of long-term development opportunities for refugees in the light of reconstruction. This entails the education of the future generation, in which they develop the skills and knowledge that could be useful in reconstruction efforts, if the refugee students decide to return to their home countries. This makes the special attention to higher education of vital societal relevance, as these students can make the difference in their conflict-affected countries in a few years, more than the children in current primary education. Moreover, education in general is an important part of preventing a lost generation due to violent conflict (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). Therefore, it is worth studying the opportunities and effects of education. This will all be further elaborated in the theoretical framework, which will be the next chapter.



## 2. Theoretical framework

### *2.1. Refugees, IDPs and the Syrian civil war*

Conflict, violence and war have always been part of human history and still are to this day. The ways that wars are waged have changed over time, but in the last decades since the Second World War, there has been an almost linear increase of civil wars, peaking in the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Fearon, 2004). Although different types of wars have different durations – wars originating from coups or revolutions last shorter than civil wars or natural resource conflicts, for example (Fearon, 2004) – all wars and conflicts produce refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

A refugee is a person outside his or her country of origin, fleeing because of a well-founded fear of persecution and being unable to have a guarantee over his/her life in that country (UNHCR, 2004). IDPs are often displaced because of the same reason as refugees but did not cross any internationally recognized national borders (UNHCR, 2004). In the last decade, the number of (internationally) displaced persons has been at an all-time high (Hynie, 2018) and in 2007 the UNHCR reported 9.9 million refugees and 12.8 million IDPs world-wide (Burton & John-Leader, 2009), which has continuously been increasing ever since, mostly due to the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 (UNHCR, 2018).

The Syrian civil war has been one of the outcomes of the Arab Spring, which entailed protests against oppressive regimes that started in Tunisia in the early 2010s. These protests were both violent and non-violent and spread quickly across the region. Syria's government, led by president Bashar al-Assad quickly started taking strong measures to put a halt to these protests, causing more friction, dissatisfaction and – in the end – conflict (UNHCR, 2018). By now, the war has lasted for over seven years and has resulted in 6.1 million IDPs and 5.6 refugees that seek refuge in Syria's neighboring countries (UNHCR, 2018). This serious refugee crisis has forced the humanitarian response onto the global agenda (Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016). In recent years, international bodies and organizations have proposed a number of new initiatives and strategies, with aid budgets drastically increasing. Although these developments are promising, it is not yet enough to provide all needed help.

By the end of 2015, just five countries hosted more than two-thirds of all world's refugees: Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran and Ethiopia (Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016). Moreover, the influx of refugees in Syria's neighboring countries has been altering the demographics of these countries, where Lebanon's population has increased by 25 percent, and both Turkey and Jordan's populations by more than 10 percent (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). Money alone can



therefore not solve these issues, as many host countries already deal with their own political, economic and developmental issues, where the presence of refugees only places higher demands on these often-fragile systems (Culbertson & Constant, 2015; Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016).

Consequently, refugees reside in unhealthy conditions, where the prospects of improvement are unlikely. In the case of Lebanon, thousands of refugees live in the Bekaa Valley, where they live in unheated and unfinished tents and buildings, with cold winters and harsh storms (The Lancet, 2015). Lebanese hosting capacities are overstretched, and foreign aid and UNHCR is extensive, but far from sufficient to meet the needs of all refugees in the country (Refaat & Mohanna, 2013). The situation in Turkey is similar, where there already were fifteen refugee camps by the end of 2013 with thousands of refugees, of which thirteen camps consisted of tents. Most of these camps are located in Turkey's border region Hatay. Food in most camps gets delivered to the refugees three times per day, but nevertheless there is frequent reports of food poisoning or food that is hardly edible (Özden, 2013).

Although Syria's neighboring countries were initially welcoming refugees by taking in tens of thousands of refugees at the start of the Syrian civil war, by now an increasing number of borders is closing. Moreover, anti-immigrant and anti-Arab discourses start surfacing in Turkey, among others (Özden, 2013). Similar developments are present in European countries, where there is a large call for asylum-seeking refugees to return to their country of first asylum. Although only around 4 percent of the displaced Syrian refugees attempt to reach Europe, international policy is based on panic on how to distribute thousands of refugees (Betts & Collier, 2015).

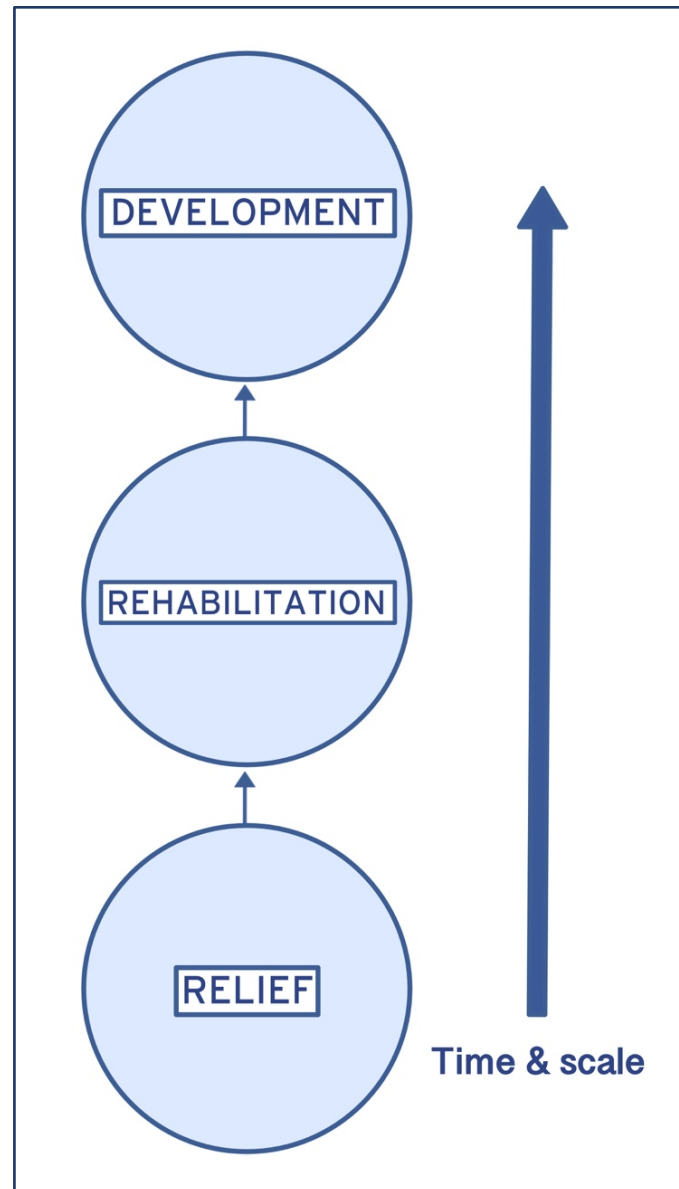
## *2.2. The LRRD contiguum*

Regardless of the number of refugees, it is up to host countries to, in some way, provide humanitarian aid and relief such as food and shelter security. This 'relief phase' is often perceived as the first, short-term phase in the management of such crises and emergencies, followed by phases of rehabilitation and development on the longer term, through which a 'normal' life or process of development can be reconstructed (Macrae, Bradbury, Jaspars, Johnson, & Duffield, 1997). These phases are often facilitated by different actors, such as INGOs, the United Nations and governments. However, relief aid can often be insensitive to complex political emergencies, and developmental policies are often insensitive to the reoccurrence of natural shocks and emergencies. Therefore, practitioners and academics



developed the concept of linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) in the 1980s, when battling the food crisis in Africa (Ramet, 2012).

In this continuum it is argued that better relief can contribute to development and that better development can reduce the need for emergency relief. It was believed that improved rehabilitation can ensure a better transition between short-term humanitarian aid and long-term developmental policy, as it was seen that there was a significant gap between the two (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell, 1994; Audet, 2015) (see *Figure 2*). However, it soon proved that LRRD should not be seen as a linear sequence of phases, where the one phase follows the other, as this fails to acknowledge the complexity of protracted or post-conflict situations (Maxwell & Lirenso, 1994). Rather, the concept was adjusted to a more mixed approach, with simultaneous and complementary use of different aid



*Figure 10 - Linking relief, rehabilitation and development continuum. Source: Katelijne Vanderveen*

instruments (Schütte & Kreutzmann, 2011; Ramet, 2012; Audet, 2015). In other words, there was a need for not just a continuum, but rather a *contiguum*, where the three phases are in a continuous back and forth connection with ongoing feedback (*Figure 3*). This should be done ‘in ways that [the phases] complement one another and are linked across space and time, reflecting the fact that operations in relief, rehabilitation and development may all be ongoing simultaneously in any given country’ (Audet, 2015, p. 113). This is needed in cases such as those of poor states that are in constant need of relief aid, where people plan their livelihood strategies with emergency and uncertainty as norm. In these places, ‘donor fatigue’ sets in and indicates the need for beneficiaries of relief aid to become more self-sufficient in order for donors to keep up their funding and progress towards developmental policies (Macrae et al., 1997).



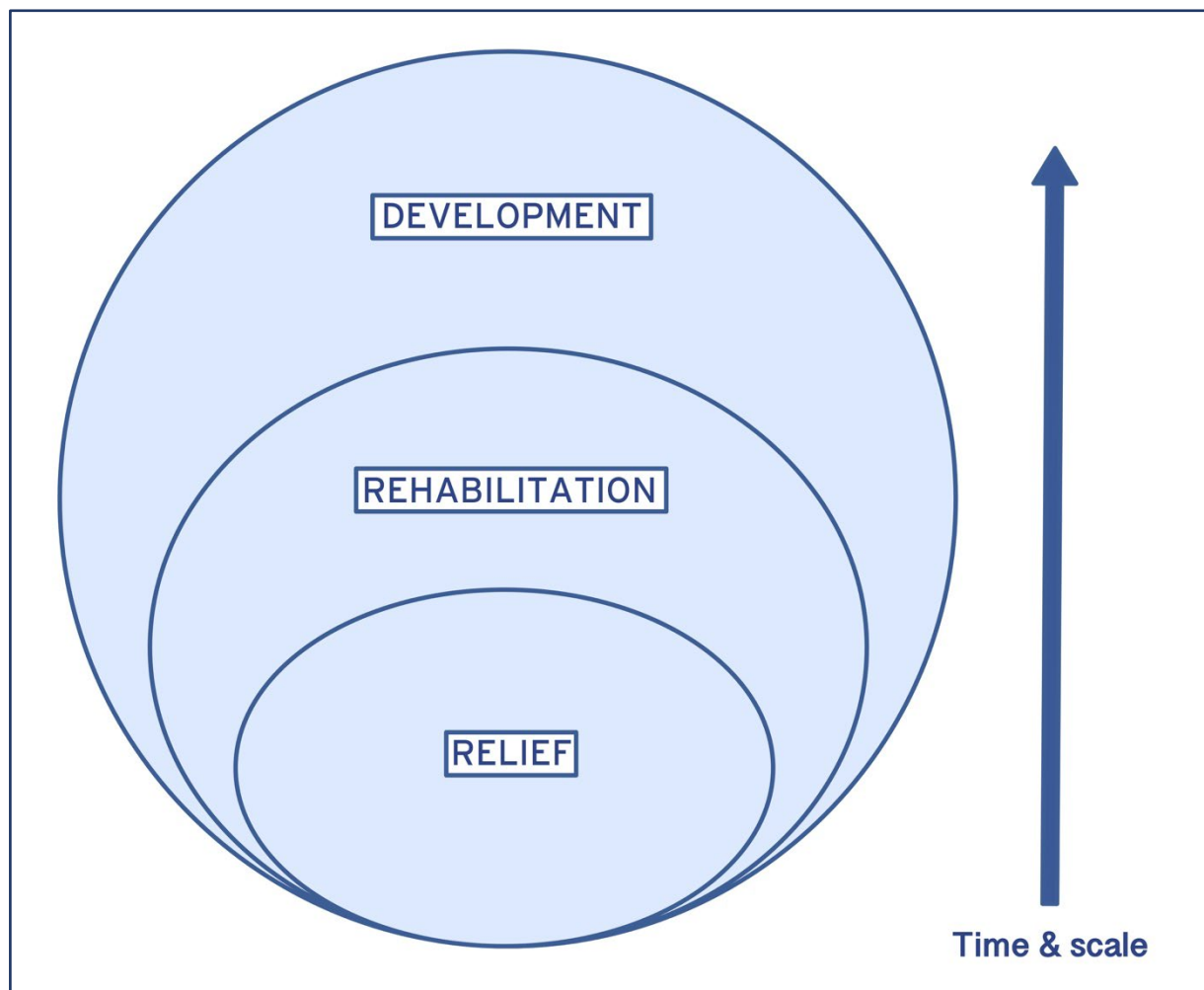


Figure 19 - Linking relief, rehabilitation and development contiguuum. Source: Katelijne Vanderveen

However, LRRD simply cannot provide a cookie-cutter line of action as different emergencies require different interventions. Therefore, Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell (1994) sketch four types of emergencies. Firstly, there are rapid onset emergencies, such as earthquakes and floods, where the crisis is mostly temporary. Secondly, slow onset emergencies are distinguished, such as droughts and disease attacks. Thirdly, there are ‘permanent’ emergencies, which include severe and structural poverty, where there is a constant need of increased welfare and relief aid. Lastly, there are complex political emergencies, associated with (internal) war and conflict that often force people to seek refuge (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell, 1994). The latter is the most understudied type of emergency concerning LRRD, due to its complicated and international character.

Acknowledging this last type is important, however, as it opens up a whole different set of issues that is related to linking relief and development: not only does it often include more than one (state) actor, it also includes large groups of people leaving the country, which makes it



hard for them to profit from humanitarian and developmental aid in their home country. Although the first two types of emergencies are more straightforward when it comes to LRRD, for all types it is a difficult concept to put into practice, which is also often its main point of criticism (Ramet, 2012). Affected populations may be in need of different things at the same time or in the same place, causing the need for separate approaches. Organizations that provide this specific help are often specialized in their field of work and are reluctant of working together. Moreover, efforts to link relief and development are often impeded by differences in political and operational cultures of both types of organizations, which cause practical barriers to success (Audet, 2015).

Part of the explanation for this is that relief and development aid have different goals and objectives (Ramet, 2012): the first is primarily focused on physical survival of individuals – on saving *lives*. The latter is mostly concerned with maintaining and ‘saving’ social and economic *systems*. In terms of policy, this means that relief operations are not built on international recognition and do not depend on legitimation of the government and authorities controlling the territory (Green, 1999). Unlike developmental operations, relief aid does not aim to build institutional capacity, which makes it easier to remain impartial and neutral in crises (Macrae et al., 1997, Green, 1999). Moreover, relief aid is ‘easier’ money, where the relationship between donor and receiver is less tight and more temporal than in developmental aid (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell, 1994).

However, instead of linking the separate phases of relief, rehabilitation and development, this thesis will elaborate on the potential of one single concept that covers all three phases at the same time: higher education. More specifically, the potential of higher education for refugees that fled complex political and war-related emergencies will be scrutinized, which is the above-mentioned fourth type of emergencies that are distinguished by Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell (1994). In this research, it will not be studied how higher education is practically maintained during, and built up after war, such as the use of temporal tent schools or the reconstruction of demolished universities. Rather, the importance of higher education for refugees’ lives will be assessed and how education on first arrival in a host country can already have an impact on their future.

### *2.3. Higher education for refugees*

People in war and conflict are often forced to discontinue the education they were following. This applies to both compulsory (primary) and post-compulsory (secondary and higher)



education. The first group consists of young children that are allowed to practice their human right of attending school, but often face a struggle to continue once they have arrived in their host country (Oliver & Hughes, 2018). Due to the changing character of contemporary conflict, it is more likely for children to become refugees: more civilian infrastructure such as schools get destructed, and child soldiers are becoming more common (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Therefore, the need for more places in primary schools becomes increasingly vital. Recent UNHCR data reports that, in 2014, about 50% of the refugees had access to primary education, compared to 93% of all children globally. However, these numbers vary greatly when countries of first asylum are assessed separately. In the Syrian case, at least half a million children in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan are not attending formal education (Culbertson & Constant, 2015), where in Lebanon only 37% of refugee children can access primary education (Dryden-Peterson, 2016).

Although these numbers are far below what is desired, the percentages of refugees that have access to secondary or higher education are even lower. Large numbers of all refugees are teenagers or adolescents that were following higher education or were already highly educated, before they had to flee their home country due to severe conflict (Psoinos, 2007). Although a refugee status is supposed to be temporal - in the hope that refugees can eventually return to their countries if desired - some of these conflicts have become protracted, forcing people to stay put. This leaves highly educated refugees un(der)employed and youth without an education (Psoinos, 2007; Glastra & Vedder, 2010). Moreover, once they do manage to enroll in schools or join the labor market, many refugees still experience obstacles, such as discrimination, the need for psychosocial support after traumatic events, and a lack of language skills.

Concerning discrimination, firstly, Oliver & Hughes (2018) have studied the effects of bordering and excluding practices through immigration status in access to post-compulsory and higher education. These practices are reported to be implicit and manifested 'through technically complex legal detail on funding regulations and fee remissions, and these restrictions have often surprising and devastating effects' (Oliver & Hughes, 2018, p. 141). Discrimination of refugees is often found in the content of the curriculum and in how they are treated by teachers and peers, which can make youth and their parents wary of schools and education in their host countries (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Not only does discrimination take place in school settings, it is also highly present in the labor market. Psoinos (2007) discusses barriers to refugee employment in the United Kingdom, where there is often a non-recognition of qualifications and skills of refugees. In order for these to get recognized, they must often be complemented by additional skills such as technological, teamwork and communication skills.



When adding racism, sexism towards women, and stereotyping to this equation, it equals high rates of un(der)employment and discouraged refugees in the labor market (Psoinos, 2007). This does not only result in financial and accommodation consequences, but also in a loss of valued social and occupational roles the refugees used to have in their home countries (Psoinos, 2007).

Secondly, the impact of forced migration calls for the need of psychosocial support once refugees arrive in their host country. Due to stressors prior, during and after their flight, refugees often deal with mental illness as a result of trauma and displacement (Refaat & Mohanna, 2013). Therefore, there is a growing literature on the psychosocial well-being of refugees, and on counselling in and outside of schools and universities for those that need help. Support groups and teachers can, for example, provide a way for refugees to deal with stress and trauma and to build up confidence (Jack, Chase, & Warwick, 2018). This can, in turn, be beneficial for the students in their studies and in their general daily lives. However, a lack of information on the topic of mental health, the stigma around it, and cultural practices and standards often make it unlikely for refugees to make use of these counselling services (Jack et al., 2018). Instead, refugees report loneliness due to a lack of friends (Hek, 2005) or experience anxiety towards what would happen if they openly discuss their affected mental health conditions with peers or with professionals (Jack et al., 2018). Improved access to and information on psychosocial support for refugees might alleviate these problems and therefore provide more opportunities for refugees' integration into their host communities.

Thirdly, many studies mention the importance of language training for refugees in their host countries, as a lack of it poses serious issues concerning the integration into all aspects of daily life, including school and work (Stevenson & Willott, 2007). Youth, for example, are often put in bottom classes with younger people, due to language difficulties, where they cannot meet people with the same aspirations and abilities (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Moreover, limited language skills can cause consequences when it comes to receiving health care and meeting the requirements for citizenship and visa tests (Oliver & Hughes, 2018). Tomlinson & Egan (2002) therefore describe language training as an important part of the process of transition from relative helplessness and neediness towards greater self-sufficiency and self-confidence of refugees. Furthermore, Hek (2005) touches shortly upon the importance of promoting the usage of refugee children's first language and the presence of support teachers that speak that same language to assist in case of addressing specific learning needs. However, many of these studies concern the English language in English-speaking societies, which is often far from the refugees' mother tongue and therefore creates a big language barrier. The same applies to other host countries with different languages of instruction, such as Sweden, Norway or France (Crea



& McFarland, 2015; Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Little seems to be known about how – and *if* – the language barrier is perceived in host countries that are closer to the refugees' home countries and how this affects refugees' educational experience. For example, Syria's neighboring states host millions of refugees, where the local languages are often used as the language of instruction, rather than English. It is worth scrutinizing if this can significantly improve the educational opportunities and experiences of the students, or if this is a mere detail in the web of challenges that refugees meet in their host countries.

Seemingly, education is an important part of relief and development in the lives of refugees, in order to give them a part of their lives back on both the short and long term and to build up confidence (Crea & McFarland, 2015). Betts & Collier (2015), for example, point out that many displaced Syrian refugees in refugee camps live under extreme dependency, where children and youth grow up without an education. Consequently, teenage girls are sometimes lured into prostitution, when they lack access to daily activities, such as education and work. Similarly, teenage boys are often lured back to war and conflict to join armed gangs, when there is nothing for them to do in their host communities (Betts & Collier, 2015). Going to school would temporarily decrease the chance for these events from happening, lifting children and youth out of boredom and dependency (Acedo, 2011; Crea & McFarland, 2015). Moreover, education can function as a way of empowering refugees, as they get the chance to expand their worldview and obtain a specific set of skills.

In this way, higher education helps to provide a future orientation and lets refugees become more self-sufficient in shaping that future (Crea & McFarland, 2015). Part of that future is obtaining a job or starting a business. Currently, job opportunities for refugees are scarce and the people that do get a job are often underemployed and over-qualified, or are working on casual, part-time or insecure basis. However, it has been shown that refugees are generally very motivated to work, even when qualifications after years of studying are not recognized (Tomlinson & Egan, 2002).

Both Psoinos (2007) and Glastra & Vedder (2010) have studied the attitudes of highly educated refugees in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Psoinos (2007) explored whether refugees have the potential to become active, integrated members of the knowledge economy of the United Kingdom and what socio-political factors marginalize them in that economy, therefore possibly not reaching their full potential. Glastra & Vedder (2010) studied the refugees' learning strategies and their attitudes towards their future (educational) careers. Both studies found that the refugees feel underestimated and that their image of being passive and incompetent is one that is created by the host countries, rather than perceived as such by



themselves (see also Tomlinson & Egan, 2002). Moreover, lengthy applications for asylum and long processes of validation of their previous qualifications made people feel helpless, insecure and dependent as they were unemployed or without an education. Acedo (2011) points out that it is often the refugees themselves who demand education to actively create a better future for themselves and their children and to become self-sufficient (see also Papademetriou & Fratzke, 2016).

Many of these studies have taken place in Europe or in the UK, but this is not where most refugees go: around 86% of world's refugees live in low-income countries that neighbor their conflict-affected countries of origin (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). These countries often deal with overstretched education systems and often tough and fragile economic and political institutions (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Due to the big differences between these complex situations and European countries and cultures, research is hardly generalizable. Thus, to assess whether education can also be a way of linking relief and development in these places, more research into educational opportunities in these places is most relevant and crucial.

## *2.4. Higher education for integration and reconstruction*

### *2.4.1. Integration*

In this research the many possibilities of education for refugees are being discussed. In the previous section it has been elaborated how education can empower refugees individually and what challenges come along with it. Next, it will be argued that education can contribute to both integration and reconstruction in refugees' host and home countries.

Education alone, however firstly, cannot ensure refugees' integration into their host communities, nor can it ensure reconstruction of their home countries. Integration is especially contested in countries where there are simply too many to care for, such as in Lebanon and Turkey (Betts & Collier, 2015). Education is a part of a complex integration web, where even the amount of different terms that are used to describe the process of integration – absorb, incorporate, participate, assimilate – point out the ambiguity and contention surrounding the concept (Korac, 2003). Several working definitions are used in current literature, but integration generally refers to

processes of interaction between migrants and the individuals and institutions of the receiving society that facilitate economic, social, cultural and civic participation and an inclusive sense of belonging at the national and local level. (Oliver & Hughes, 2018, p. 131)



This definition indicates that integration goes beyond providing refugees with basic needs and access to services, but also requires the host countries and civil societies to create a welcoming environment in which refugees have a sense of belonging and are supported to pursue long-term stability in all aspects of society, including equal human rights (UNHCR, 2013). As refugees spend a general amount of seventeen years in exile (Betts & Collier, 2015), basic integration into the host society will be necessary for daily life. As stated above, this includes social, civil, cultural, political and economic factors, where refugees often face more challenges than non-forced migrants. The difference here between integration and assimilation, for example, is that refugees are required to show preparedness to adapt to their new culture and lifestyle for integration, without having to lose their own sense of cultural identity.

There is no clear measurement as to when refugees are fully integrated, nor is there a clear-cut description for host countries concerning the establishment and delivery of refugee integration programs. This is due to the specific cultural, social and economic contexts in which integration occurs. These contexts differ strongly per host country, but also per systems and levels of governance, such as for national, regional, provincial, and municipal authorities. However, the empowerment of refugees again appears to play an important role in refugee integration. Guiding principles of UNHCR (2013), for example, explain the responsibility of the public, private and community sectors to facilitate the right environment for refugees to be empowered. If this responsibility is met, refugees can integrate themselves. Moreover, some countries focus on the establishment of refugee community organizations. These organizations provide community activities, support the development of political self-confidence and they try to bridge the gap between individual refugee members and the host community (Tomlinson & Egan, 2002).

Another way of closing this gap – or at least bringing refugees closer to their host communities – is by means of education. It is argued to be both a means and a marker of integration, where the degree of contact and interaction with people in the host country can be important indicators of integration. Education can clearly show where conditions for integration are absent or present, such as whether the refugees have access to educational opportunities to begin with (Oliver & Hughes, 2018). It can facilitate social integration in student networks (Dryden-Peterson, 2016) and it can help promote economic self-reliance (Jack et al., 2018). This promoted self-reliance is described by Betts & Collier (2015) as ‘help refugees help themselves’: they propose the establishment of special economic zones, where thousands of refugees can be employed to contribute to their host community. At the same time, they become



able to provide for themselves, with the possibility of relocating those jobs to the refugees' future post-conflict country.

This idea has received quite some critical remarks, as it is argued to violate a number of fundamental human rights and encourage segregation. Due to the zones, refugee camps are maintained and promoted, although those are often not in line with international law and jeopardize the refugees' civil, political and socio-economic rights (Bierling, 2016). Bierling (2016) states that 'separating refugees in camps and employing them in special work zones rather than integrating them into their local communities, seems legally problematic in regard to the fundamental objective of local integration and the right to equality and non-discrimination' (p. 2). So, special economic zones might not be the answer, but the idea of Betts & Collier (2015) to prepare the refugees to – *one day* – turn back to their home countries with a trained specialization is interesting with regard to the topic of reconstruction, which will be discussed in the next section.

#### 2.4.2. Reconstruction

Similar to the concept of integration which has many different definitions, synonyms and alternatives, so does the concept of reconstruction. It is part of a web of many intervention approaches in conflict-affected environments such as rehabilitation, reconciliation, peacekeeping, -making and -building (Milton & Barakat, 2016; Novelli, 2016). Whereas integration takes place in the host countries and communities, reconstruction takes place in home countries once the conflict is close to an end or after it has ended. Reconstruction efforts are often complex activities, where many different actors take part in a difficult political and fragile context, which causes these efforts to sometimes take decades, without clear endings (Sambanis, 2008; Audet, 2015). Different than reconstruction needs after rapid onset emergencies, societies that have experienced prolonged, complex political emergencies need a more thorough approach (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell, 1994). Rehabilitation and reconstruction after natural emergencies mainly involve restoring the physical infrastructure, whereas political emergencies deal with state structures and livelihoods that need to be restored (Green, 1999). Political emergencies corrode the political, social and economic institutions, where the way and order in which reconstruction efforts take place are crucial in the process of preventing to recreate unsustainable state structures. In the case of political conflict, it is therefore important to consider *what* needs to be rebuilt, rather than *how* to rebuild what was destroyed, such as in the case of natural disasters (Green, 1999). Milton & Barakat (2016) therefore describe post-war reconstruction as



a holistic process addressing rehabilitation of the built environment but also a range of interconnected challenges faced by post-war societies, including restoring service delivery capacity, addressing displacement crises, and restarting the development process (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 408)

Many argue that a secure and stable environment needs to be created in order to make these reconstruction efforts a success, without triggering new conflict. However, conflict-affected countries are known to run the risk of slipping back into armed conflict within ten years after the supposed ending of the conflict (Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom, 2008). Therefore, the question remains as to what these stabilization and securitization efforts should entail. Post-conflict activities are imagined as a sequence of phases where the one follows the other: from negotiated settlements during the conflict, to the withdrawal of international peacekeeping

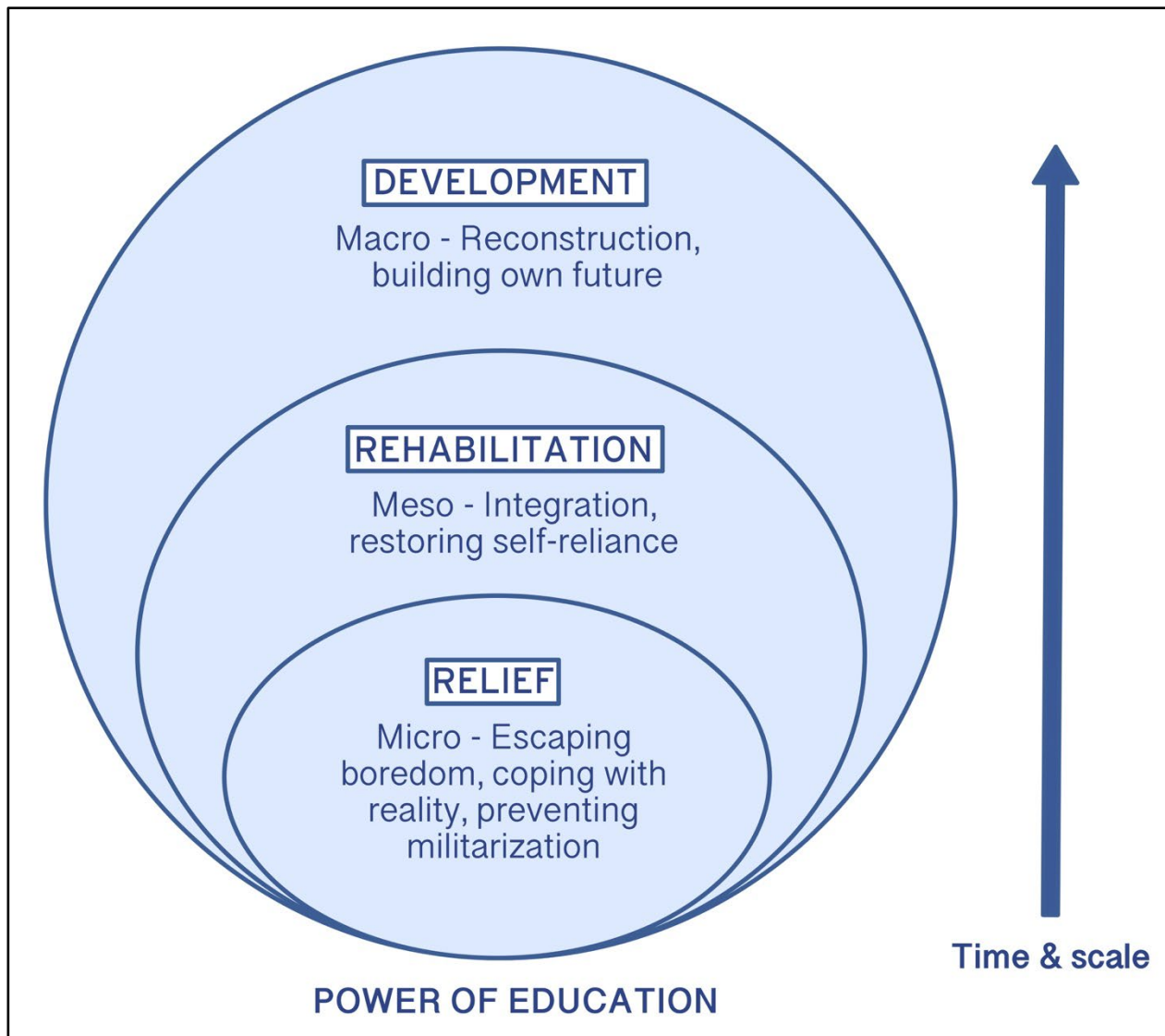


Figure 28 - Education and LRRD. Source: Katelijne Vanderveen



troops, to long-term development practices. Just as with linking relief, rehabilitation and development these types of activities cannot be seen as separate from each other.

One of the structures that need attention throughout all phases of post-conflict recovery is the educational system. International organizations such as UNICEF and UNHCR play a crucial role in providing young children with primary education within the first months after their displacement and spend enormous budgets on rebuilding schools, hiring teachers and paying for school supplies (Paulson & Rappleye, 2007). Although these practices are vital, the current academic debate on education for refugees has been one sided. The debate on education in a post-conflict setting has been focusing mostly on how the sector is rebuilt or protected. Instead, it has hardly been put the other way around: how can education itself contribute to general post-conflict recovery and reconstruction of the state (Milton & Barakat, 2016)? And more specifically, how can *higher* education make this contribution? Refugee students often view education as hope for a better future, where they can find a way to contribute to their host community, but also their home country, once they are safe to return if desired (Crea & McFarland, 2015). By means of education, refugees can build capacity and capabilities that can be of importance after a conflict. It gives them the opportunity to pass on these capabilities to future generations to move away from conflict and towards a socially sustainable society (Dubois & Trabelsi, 2007).

Educating refugees and providing them with necessary skills has the potential of turning around the ‘brain drain’ in their home countries. This ‘brain drain’ indicates the large-scale loss of highly skilled individuals, such as academics. Whereas this phenomenon is normally associated with globalization or suburbanization, in this case it is due to prosecution of and violence towards academics (Milton & Barakat, 2016). The potential of highly educated refugees in labor markets has been studied before (Psoinos, 2007; Glastra & Vedder, 2010), but these studies are often focused on refugees’ host countries. Only little is known about the potential of educating refugees in their host countries to contribute to the reconstruction of their *home* countries, once they choose to return when it is safe to do so. By educating refugees the brain drain of conflict zones can be turned into a ‘brain gain’. Moreover, reconstruction can be kickstarted with local knowledge and a lost generation can be prevented (Matsumoto, 2008; Culbertson & Constant, 2015).

*Figure 4* shows a summary of the discussed potential of education for refugees, concerning integration and reconstruction efforts in host and home countries. The figure shows how education for refugees is not only important shortly after their flight, but is crucial for their future life opportunities at the same time, therefore linking relief, rehabilitation and



development. In this way, community-level educational opportunities might be able to have an impact on the bigger picture of post-conflict reconstruction (Ernstorfer, Chigas, & Vaughan-Lee, 2015). An organization that provides such educational opportunities is SPARK and will now be introduced.

### *2.5. SPARK and the HES program*

In the case of Syria, over 400,000 people (and counting) in the age group 18-24 have fled the country, and less than 5% now have access to higher education (EURTF Madad, 2017). Frustrated and with lack of a future perspective in the region, young Syrians are prone to radical groups recruiting for the conflict in Syria or decide to take the risk and leave for Europe. The total number of refugees making the decision is growing fast: Syrian asylum application in the EU rose from 317,365 to 617,083 between July 2015 and January 2016 (UNHCR, 2018).

Losing the opportunity to educate this generation will affect their ability to participate in the reconstruction of the country. Many higher education institutions within Syria ceased to function, especially in Syrian Interim Government controlled areas. Financial as well as regulatory barriers prevent Syrian youth from entering higher education in neighboring countries. The spread of conflicts has been reshaping the political and socioeconomic profile of these neighboring countries and has resulted in large, young populations and relatively high population growth rates. To ensure these large groups of young refugees of playing a positive role within either their host community or upon returning to their home country, urgent measures are required to prepare them for such future roles.

SPARK is an organization that takes responsibility of some of these measures. SPARK's mission is to 'offer access to higher education and supports entrepreneurship development in fragile states so that young, ambitious people can lead their conflict-affected societies into stability and prosperity' (SPARK, 2018). It is a non-governmental organization that initially started 1994 as the 'Youth in Solidarity with Yugoslavia' (YSY) Foundation, which busied itself with enabling peers in the post-conflict Balkans by restructuring universities and improving the educational system. The foundation evolved into SPARK, letting go of the academic character. Later, business development became part of the organization's activities, where it is believed that sustainable, economic growth is essential for the alleviation of poverty. By then, activities had expanded to post-conflict countries far beyond the Balkans, which opened up opportunities for many programs and projects.

One of these programs started in 2016 when SPARK launched its HES program: Higher Education for Syrians. This program furthers the basic rights of Syrian (and Palestinian) youth



affected by the crisis or occupation to enjoy access to higher education and empowerment opportunities. With hundreds of thousands of Syrian youth applying for only a handful overseas scholarships, new regional approaches are set up to scale up access to higher education, particularly in Syria's neighboring countries: Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq-KRG, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (East Jerusalem and the West Bank; OPT) and Syria itself. The HES program aims on working towards

educated and trained leaders who are civic-minded, intellectually able and professionally skilled to become the community-, business- and national leaders of the future. The program aims to support over six thousand students of underserved backgrounds providing the essential building blocks through economic empowerment, leadership and development to actualize their potential by overcoming socioeconomic, political and cultural limitations and enable them to become productive members of society. (SPARK, 2018)

The students are supported with a mix of scholarship opportunities: four years of university to finish a three-year bachelor's degree, two years of training for a TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) diploma, or three to nine months of training for a TVET certificate. All these studies take place in specialized fields of relevancy to post-conflict economic reconstruction of Syria and integration in the societies and labor market in host communities, such as Engineering, Business Administration or English studies. During the first phase of the program in 2016, 3079 scholarship awardees were admitted to higher education institutions across the six program countries. At the start of the program, the target was set on 6345 scholarship awardees, so SPARK continues to seek ways to provide affected youth with higher education.

#### *2.5.1. Donors*

The financial support of the HES program comes from three different donors: the Education Above All Foundation (Al Fakhoora), the EU regional trust fund Madad (EU Madad) and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NL MFA).

Al Fakhoora is a program from the Education Above All Foundation and operates in Iraq-KRG, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). The foundation was initially established in 2009 as response to the conflict in Gaza that destroyed numerous schools and universities. Since this conflict, the program 'has grown to become a comprehensive and vital support system for education in Gaza' (Education Above All, 2014). Al Fakhoora has several projects, of which the Global Dynamic Futures (GDF) is the one that



supports scholarship empowerment and of which SPARK is its strategic partner. The GDF project is implemented with the help of four work packages: Quality Education, Student Affairs, Leadership Development and Economic Empowerment. All these packages have their own activities and indicators to break down the ultimate outcome of the program: to create opportunities and access to higher education for Syrian and Palestinian refugees unlocking a new generation of marginalized youth to become educated, professionally skilled, economically empowered, and inspirational leaders of the future in their country or host communities who can make meaningful contributions in their communities towards cohesion and prosperity. Therefore, the people that are awarded with a scholarship are selected on whether their studies can possibly contribute to the reconstruction and rebuilding of Syria.

The second main donor of the HES program is the European Union regional trust fund (EURTF) Madad, which will be referred to as EU Madad in this thesis. EU Madad operates in Iraq-KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government), Lebanon, Turkey and Syria and therefore adds the latter to the programming countries of the HES program. In this way, SPARK can provide Syrian refugees with higher education programs and training courses both in the host countries as to IDPs within Syria, as these cover most of the current displaced persons (UNHCR, 2018). However, due to security reasons, the SPARK office that busies itself with activities in Syria, is placed in Gaziantep, Turkey.

The last donor of the HES program is the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NL MFA). The subsidy provided by the NL MFA complements to the donations of EU Madad, so that more students can be supported with a scholarship. For example, the money from the NL MFA enables additional students to be enrolled in higher education in Iraq-KRG that could not be supported by EU Madad, due to a lack of funding.



### 3. Methodology

In this research, the efforts of SPARK in the HES program will be studied. These efforts aim to allow youth to be productive members of their host communities now so that they can be empowered to contribute to the reconstruction and rebuilding of their home country in the future. These aspirations are neither easily fulfilled, nor can they easily be measured to prove whether they are met or not. SPARK's way of keeping track of the beneficiaries' activities and progress in the HES program is through the use of surveys. After trainings, workshops and other activities, the students are asked to assess whether they found the activities useful or relevant. Not only are the students questioned after these individual activities, the donors of the HES program each have their own impact evaluations that are done twice a year to check how the students are doing, in both their education and their daily lives.

Because of SPARK's generally quantitative approach when it comes to gathering data of its beneficiaries, the research methods in this thesis will also be mainly quantitative. For this, the Progress survey will be used, which is a large evaluation from donor Al Fakhoora and one of the most recent surveys in the HES program. It is an extensive survey with questions about the students' lives and their education, and therefore gives a good indication to SPARK on how the students are doing. However, surveys will never be able to give a complete picture. When conducting a survey, it should always be taken into account that questions can be misinterpreted, that the timing of conducting the survey can be wrong, or that respondents simply do not understand the questions. Moreover, in the case of refugee students, questions regarding integration and reconstruction can be sensitive and need to be revised thoroughly before distribution.

Taking into account these challenges regarding survey-based research, this study will also make use of qualitative research methods, making this research one with mixed methods. This will be done in the form of semi-structured interviews with some of the program managers and officers (PMs and POs) in the program countries of HES. In these interviews program-related successes and obstacles will be discussed from the point of view of the people that work in the field and who are in close contact with the students. The information retrieved from the interviews will function as data triangulation and will not function as a database in itself.

Firstly, the Progress survey will be discussed, which will be the main database for this study. After that, it will be elaborated how the PMs and POs will be reached and how the interviews will take place.



### *3.1. Progress Survey*

The survey that will be used to answer the research questions is the Progress survey from the Global Dynamic Futures project by Al Fakhoura, the main donor of the HES program. It is the follow-up survey to SPARK's Baseline survey, which was sent to all the beneficiaries at the beginning of the HES program, and which also where the Progress survey derives its name from. The survey is a tool to bi-annual check on the students throughout their study program (either being a bachelor's degree, a TVET diploma or a TVET certificate). The survey was developed by SPARK's PMERL (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning) Unit.

#### *3.1.1. Collection*

For the construction of the Progress survey, the questions of the Baseline survey were used as the basis, in order to build on this former survey. The results and the lessons that were learnt from the Baseline survey were used to add questions to or edit or remove questions from the Progress survey to make it most relevant and accurate for the students. The biggest adjustment that was made to form the Progress survey was merging the non-anonymous and the anonymous sections that were used in the Baseline survey. Consequently, the survey was made completely anonymous. The expectation was that this would grant more trustworthy answers, as the tendency of giving politically-correct answers is less likely when answering anonymously.

Moreover, some questions from the Baseline survey were perceived as suggestive by the students and were therefore removed. Other questions were changed by the SPARK team, due to a variety of reasons, such as small amounts of responses in the Baseline survey, confusing phrasing of the question, or unclear answer options. All these changes resulted in the following ten categories of questions in the Progress survey. The complete survey can be found in ANNEX 1.

1. Personal information (18 questions)
2. Contribution to the reconstruction of Syria and/or to the well-being of host communities (8 questions)
3. Motivation for future activities at the likely place of residency (4 questions)
4. Economic empowerment assessment (10 questions)
5. Global citizenship assessment (6 questions)
6. Civic leadership and advocacy assessment (4 questions)



7. Satisfaction with SPARK's student services (16 questions)
8. Study progress and educational experience (6 questions)
9. Educational barriers (5 questions)
10. Completed studies effectiveness (12 questions)

Once the final questions were formulated, several Arabic-speaking SPARK members were asked to translate the English questions into Arabic. By providing the survey in both English and Arabic, it is made sure that all students could understand and answer the questions. After translation, the survey was exported into Google Forms, and the survey was disseminated. It was decided to conduct the survey online, since the respondents from the Baseline survey indicated that the technology that was used for the hard copy version was too complicated. This so-called Bubble Form technology requires specific ways of filling out the survey and when these are not followed, the answers become unusable. Moreover, the SPARK teams in the program countries indicated that the usage of the technology was resource intensive and therefore relatively difficult.

Solely using digital means for conducting the survey made distributing it easy and put less pressure on the country managers. The beneficiaries were invited to participate in the Progress survey via e-mails that were sent to them via the Student Information System, which is SPARK's registration system for its students. The link to the Google Form was sent to the currently enrolled, dropped out, cancelled, and graduated students, so that a complete picture of study progress could be constructed. All these students together formed a group of 2,903 people that were sent the link.

The survey was published on June 1, 2018 and was closed on June 11, 2018. To grant the highest response rate, all PMs and POs were also asked to contact the students via their own channels (e.g. WhatsApp and Facebook groups). Moreover, SMS reminders were sent to the students and the Jordan office called some of their students to remind them to participate in the survey. This was done out of their own initiative, which is the reason this did not happen in the other program countries. After the survey was closed, the results were exported to Excel, where the data was cleaned. Part of cleaning the data was the deletion of the answers of two respondents, due to inconsistent answers and therefore unreliable data. After deletion, the dataset included the responses of 1,410 students, which indicates a participation rate of 49% out of the total 2,903 addressed students. Basic descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses of the students to the survey questions to get a general idea of the data. Based on



these basic statistics, a report was written for SPARK itself. For this research, however, the data will be used more extensively and more specifically, as not all survey questions will be used.

### *3.1.2. Operationalization*

For the in-depth analysis of the data, a scale will be made to assess the complex concepts of integration and reconstruction to answer the research questions. Such constructs are called latent variables, which indicate variables that are not directly observable or quantifiable. Scaling is an often-used method in the social sciences and provides the possibility of quantitative measurement of such latent variables and therefore also the inclusion of a moderately large number of items to measure single constructs (DeCoster, 2005). It involves the creation of a continuum upon which these measured variables can be located (Hab, 2006). Potocky-Tripodi (2004), for example, uses a scaling technique to assess human capital, which is influenced by many different indicators.

This study deals with several abstract constructs, such as integration and reconstruction, and also with a large database of survey answers, which makes this form of quantitative data analysis a good fit. The scale will be based on the model that depicts the indicators for both integration and reconstruction (*Figure 5*). These indicators are derived from prior research, academic knowledge and SPARK's current practice. However, although a thorough discussion of the theories on integration and reconstruction has been set out in the previous chapter, there is no consensus in the literature as to what the 'best' indicators of these concepts are. Consequently, using the most appropriate way of measuring these is even less evident. The selection of the indicators for the model on integration and reconstruction was guided by the availability of relevant survey questions from SPARK's Progress survey. These relevant questions were extracted from the survey and formed the dataset. Most of these questions were polytomous items (having several answer options) and some were dichotomous items, meaning they could only be answered by 'yes' or 'no'. All answers were then coded, which made it possible to create an 'integration score' and 'reconstruction score' for each respondent. Quantifying both constructs like this makes statistical analysis possible. The guided selection led to nine indicators for integration and three indicators for reconstruction. Every indicator includes one to five survey questions. It must be noted that the indicators will be aggregated to a final score, which means they will not be tested separately. Although a higher or lower score on either of the constructs does provide information on the students' lives, it will not be possible to test the separate effects of SPARK's activities on the students.



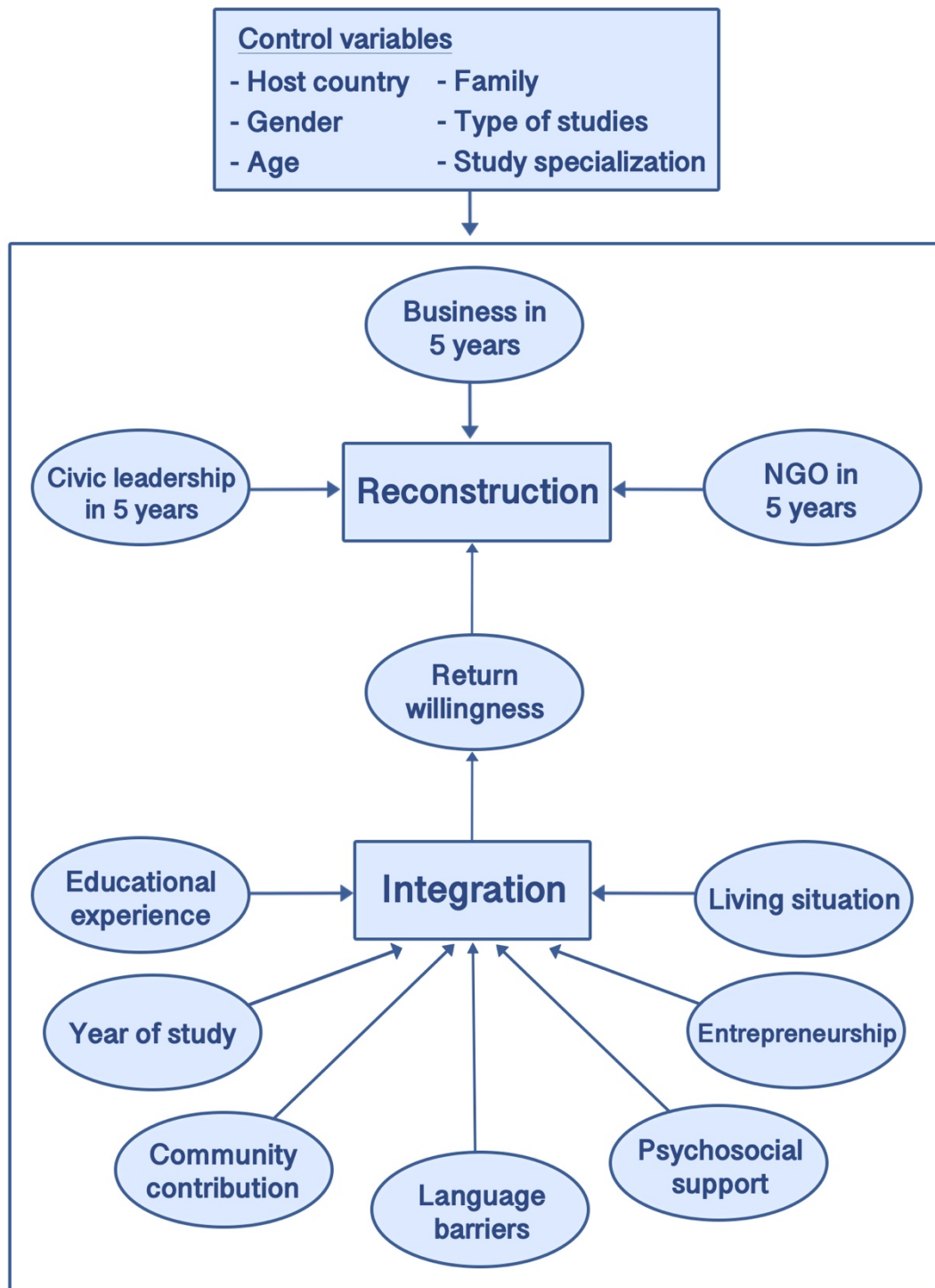


Figure 29 - Model for quantitative scale analysis. Source: Katelijne Vanderveen

Next, the variables that will be used in the analysis will be explained, along with their working definitions. Moreover, for every variable the way of coding will be stated. *Table 1* (page 32) shows the variables' corresponding survey questions that were derived from SPARK's Progress Survey.



**Integration** is the first construct in the scale that will be discussed. Integration has earlier been defined as ‘the processes of interaction between migrants and the individuals and institutions of the receiving society that facilitate economic, social, cultural and civic participation and an inclusive sense of belonging at the national and local level’ (Oliver & Hughes, 2018, p. 131). This study focuses on education as a way of integration and will therefore not assess all defined factors of integration. However, due to the extracurricular activities that the beneficiaries of the HES program are allowed to follow, some additional indicators can be assessed. The indicators that will be elaborated below are the indicators that will construct a final integration score, which will be used in the statistical analysis to answer this study’s research questions.

*Educational experience.* The main part of this study is the students’ assessment of their educational experience. SPARK provides grants to students who want to study something that can possibly contribute to the reconstruction of the students’ conflict-affected home countries in the future. Therefore, it is hypothesized that the better the educational experience of the students is, the bigger the chance that they will participate in reconstruction efforts in the future. To assess this educational experience, five questions were extracted from the Progress survey.

*Year of study.* An addition to the students’ educational experience is their year of study. It is expected that the longer the student is studying, and therefore the longer the student is studying in the host country, the better this would be for their integration. In the HES program, students can receive a scholarship up to four years of studying as a (bachelor) student. The longer the student turned out to be studying in the question in the Progress survey, the higher the score was during the coding process. In this, ‘Not applicable’ to ‘Four’ was respectively coded from 0 to 4.

*Community contribution.* A strong indicator for refugee integration is whether they are active in their host community. This can be by means of volunteer or political work, for example. SPARK assesses community contribution by a variety of questions. All included questions could be answered by means of a five-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The stronger the student agrees with the question, the more it is expected that he or she will be able to integrate into the host community. Therefore, answer option ‘strongly disagree’ is coded with a score of 1 and ‘strongly agree’ with a score of 5.

*Language barriers.* As discussed in the theoretical framework, many refugees experience language barriers when they try to integrate into their host society. Although struggling with the English language is discussed most in the current academic literature, other languages can also pose difficulties. The HES program therefore offers language training to Arabic students that experience language barriers due to Turkish being the lingua franca in most program



countries. To assess this variable, two questions have been extracted from the Progress survey. Both include a five-point Likert scale as answer options. The first question attributes higher scores the stronger the student agrees (1 to 5). The second question, however, was asked negatively and was therefore reverse coded, meaning that ‘strongly *agree*’ was attributed a score of 1 and ‘strongly *disagree*’ a score of 5.

*Psychosocial support.* Refugees often experience trauma before and during their flight, which indicates the need for psychosocial support in their host communities. Although this is a contested topic that has been elaborated in the theoretical framework, SPARK offers this support, which is the reason that this variable is included in the scale. It is assumed that this psychosocial support can improve the students’ integration, as it takes care of their mental health, which can be beneficial for their daily practice. Again, the question could be answered by means of a five-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The stronger the student agrees with the question, the higher the score that was attributed to it. Therefore, answer option ‘strongly disagree’ is coded with a score of 1 and ‘strongly agree’ with a score of 5.

*Entrepreneurship.* Although employment and entrepreneurship have only shortly been touched upon in the theoretical framework, it is an important part of the HES program. It is assumed that when the students have a (salaried) employment position, their integration into the host community will be better. Two questions from the Progress survey have been included to assess the students’ employment for their integration. The first question asked the students whether they are in a salaried employment position and the second asked if this position contributed directly to their current community. Both questions could be answered with ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, where the first in both cases is coded with a score of 2 and the second in both cases with a score of 1. The second question could also be answered with ‘Not applicable’, which was coded as 0.

During and after their education, beneficiaries of the HES program are encouraged to develop their sense of entrepreneurship and to possibly establish their own businesses afterwards. As the survey does not specifically focus on businesses, however, there was only one question that assessed (future) businesses. The students could strongly disagree to strongly agree with the question whether they already know what kind of business they would like to open. Again, the stronger the student agreed with the question, the higher the score that was attributed to the answer, ranging from a score of 1 for ‘strongly disagree’ to a score of 5 for ‘strongly agree’.



**Reconstruction** is the second construct that will be discussed for the scale. The extent to which refugees can (or want to) engage in the reconstruction of their home countries, depends on many different aspects and can differ per individual. Post-war reconstruction has earlier been defined as ‘a holistic process addressing rehabilitation of the built environment but also a range of interconnected challenges faced by post-war societies, including restoring service delivery capacity, addressing displacement crises, and restarting the development process’ (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 408). However, it will not be scrutinized to what extent Syria has already been reconstructed. Rather, several indicators will be assessed that indicate whether the students are willing to return to Syria in the future and contribute to its reconstruction. This will be done via the use of three questions from the Progress survey.

Different than for the integration construct, the analysis of this construct will not happen with the answers from all survey respondents. Instead, one survey question was used as a filter. This question asked the students where they thought it was most likely for them to live in five years: their current (host) country, Syria, or a third country. Only the answers of those students that indicated to find it most likely to live in Syria in five years were then used for the analysis of the reconstruction construct, leaving a remaining N of 395. This has been done, because it is assumed that those students that are optimistic about returning to Syria in the near future are also the people that are likely to contribute to its reconstruction. Therefore, the answers of the other students that indicated to find it most likely to live in their current (host) country or a third country were all coded with 0 and were left out of the analysis. They were left out, as it is assumed that when the students think it is likely for themselves to live somewhere else in the near future, they are less willing to contribute to reconstruction efforts. Leaving these students out means that the analysis will not be skewed by the many zeroes, which would strongly alter the mean of the variable. It must be noted, however, that this is a simplified way of looking at the students’ situations, as it might also be possible to contribute to reconstruction efforts, without living in Syria.

*Civic leadership position in five years.* In the HES program, the students are encouraged to engage in community activities to become civic-minded leaders. Currently, these activities take place in their host communities, but this question focuses on their future lives. The students were asked to what extent they thought it was likely for them to be in such a position in five years in Syria. The more the student thought this was likely, the higher the score that was attributed to the answer, ranging from a score of 1 for ‘strongly disagree’ to a score of 5 for ‘strongly agree’.



*NGO in five years.* A similar question was asked regarding whether the students thought it was likely for them to have started an NGO in the next five years. Just as for the previous item, the students could also answer this question by a five-point Likert scale, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ (coded as 1) to ‘strongly agree’ (coded as 5).

*Business in five years.* Lastly, the students were asked how likely it was for them to have started their own business in five years. As explained in the previous section for integration, entrepreneurship is an important part of the HES program. Although the focus of this thesis will still be on education, rather than on entrepreneurship, this question about the students’ future life was still included in the analysis. The question could again be answered the five-point Likert scale, ranging from codes of 1 to 5.

***Control variables*** will be used for the statistical analysis. These variables are all personal characteristics of the students and can shed more light on their integration and willingness to contribute to the reconstruction of Syria in the future.

*Host country.* The current academic literature provides little information on whether integration is related to the students’ host country. For each host country a dummy variable will be created, in order to be able to analyze them separately. This makes it possible to check whether the different host countries make a difference for the extent to which the students are able to integrate in their current countries.

*Gender.* The same as for the previous variable will be done for the students’ gender. Although there are reports of sexism towards refugee women, the variable ‘gender’ will not be included in either of the scales. Instead, it will function as a control variable, where a potential relation between gender and both integration and reconstruction will be studied. This variable will also be a dummy variable, where a code of 0 indicates a male student and code of 1 indicates a female student.

*Age.* The next control variable will be the students’ age. The academic literature does not provide clarity on whether the refugee students’ age matters when it comes to their integration or their willingness to return to their home countries or not. Therefore, this variable can also not be included in either of the scales, as no higher or lower scores can be attributed to certain ages. Only the last category of this question is coded: this was the answer option ‘Older than 25’, which was coded as 26.

*Family.* Whether the students have a family that they are taking care of can have an impact on whether they have the desire to return to Syria. However, in the survey it was not asked who this family included. The question can therefore be interpreted as having a family of themselves



(e.g. children and a partner) or other family members they take care of (e.g. (grand)parents or siblings). Moreover, it was not asked where this family currently lives, which can make a difference in whether people are willing to return to their home country. For example, if a student has a partner and two children, who are currently growing up in Turkey, it is assumed for him or her to be less likely to want to return to Syria. However, if the student is a young student refugee who takes financial care of his or her parents who remained in Syria, it is assumed for him or her to be more likely to want to turn back to Syria. Because of the insecurity of the question and its answers, this variable will function as a control variable: it will not be included in either of the scores, but will be tested separately on its possible effects on the students' integration and/or willingness to contribute to reconstruction efforts. It will be used as a control variable, where not having a family to take care of is coded as 0, and 1 indicates that a student does have a family to take care of.

*Type of study.* Another variable that will be tested separately from the scale analysis is the students' type of study. Beneficiaries of the HES program can either study for a bachelor's degree, a TVET diploma, or a TVET certificate, which all have different durations. The available academic literature, however, does not provide clear answers to whether a longer study program can predict better integration, nor can it predict more or less willingness to engage in reconstruction efforts. Therefore, this variable will also not be included in the creation of an integration or reconstruction score, but will function as another control variable. All three studies will be made dummy variables, so each study can be tested separately.

*Study specialization.* The same as above goes for the students' study specialization: it will not be assumed that the one specialization (e.g. Business & Management) will have a bigger impact on integration or contribution to reconstruction efforts than the other specialization (e.g. Health care). Therefore, this variable will also not be part of either of both scores and will be treated as a control variable. A dummy variable will be created for all different specializations. In this way, a potential relation between the variable and integration and/or reconstruction can be studied.

*Table 1 - Selected survey questions*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Answer options and coding</i>
<b><i>Integration</i></b>		
<i>Living situation</i>	Currently living in a refugee camp	1 – Yes 2 - No



<i>Year of study</i>	Year of study	0 - Not applicable 1 - First 2 - Second 3 - Third 4 - Fourth
<i>Educational experience</i>	Since the beginning of my education, I passed	0 - None of my exams 1 - Less than half of my exams 2 - Half of my exams 3 - More than half of my exams 4 - All of my exams
	I am satisfied with my study progress so far	1 - Strongly disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neither agree nor disagree 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly agree
	I am satisfied with my overall educational experience so far	Idem ditto
	I am satisfied with the quality of my education in my current country	Idem ditto
	I believe my study has increased my employability	Idem ditto
<i>Psychosocial support</i>	I am satisfied with the psychosocial support I receive(d) from SPARK	Idem ditto
<i>Language barriers</i>	I am satisfied with the language training I receive(d) from SPARK	0 - Not applicable 1 - Strongly disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neither agree nor disagree 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly agree
	Lack of language skills is a problem for me in my current studies	0 - Not applicable 1 - Strongly agree 2 - Agree 3 - Neither agree nor disagree 4 - Disagree 5 - Strongly disagree
<i>Community contribution</i>	I currently participate in a volunteer project/activity in my community.	1 - No 2 - Yes



<i>Entrepreneurship</i>	I currently occupy a leadership/influential position within an organization/group that contributes directly to my community	1 - No 2 - Yes
	I have started a non-governmental organization (NGO) or creative works etc. that contributes directly to my community	1 - No 2 - Yes
	I am actively involved in a religious, governmental or non-governmental organization in my community	0 - Not applicable 1 - Strongly agree 2 - Agree 3 - Neither agree nor disagree 4 - Disagree 5 - Strongly disagree
	I have a salaried employment position	1 - No 2 - Yes
	My work contributes directly to my current community	0 - Not applicable 1 - No 2 - Yes
	I already know what type of business I would like to open	0 - Not applicable 1 - Strongly agree 2 - Agree 3 - Neither agree nor disagree 4 - Disagree 5 - Strongly disagree
<i>Reconstruction</i>		
	In 5 years, it is likely that I will work in a civic leadership position in that country	<i>Third country or current (host) country:</i> 0 - Not applicable 0 - Strongly agree 0 - Agree 0 - Neither agree nor disagree 0 - Disagree 0 - Strongly disagree
		<i>Syria:</i> 0 - Not applicable 1 - Strongly disagree 2 - Disagree 3 - Neither agree nor disagree 4 - Agree 5 - Strongly agree
	In 5 years, it is likely that I will start a non-governmental organization (NGO) in that country	Idem ditto
	In 5 years, it is likely that I will start a business in that country	Idem ditto



***Control variables***

<i>Host country</i>	Current place of residence	Iraq-KRG Jordan Lebanon Palestine Turkey
<i>Gender</i>	Gender	0 - Male 1 - Female
<i>Age</i>	Age	17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 – Older than 25
<i>Family</i>	I currently have a family I take care of	0 - No 1 - Yes
<i>Type of studies</i>	Type of current studies	TVET certificate TVET diploma Bachelor
<i>Study specialization</i>	If you are studying for a bachelor's degree, what is your academic specialization?	Business & management (Accounting & marketing) Construction Creative industry Design & architecture Economics Engineering Health care Humanities Medical sciences Natural sciences Other



	If you are studying for a TVET diploma, which sector does your diploma relate to?	Business & management (Accounting & marketing) Construction Creative industry Design & architecture Education Engineering & mechanics Health care Natural sciences Other
	If you are studying for a TVET certificate, which sector does your certificate relate to?	Business & management (Accounting & marketing) Construction Creative industry Design & architecture Education Engineering & mechanics Health care Other
<i>Return willingness</i>	In 5 years, it is likely that I will live in	0 - A third country 0 - My current (host) country 1 - Syria

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### 3.2. Interviews

Complementary to the quantitative research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with some of SPARK's program officers and managers. These interviews provided the opportunity to gain more insight into the successes and obstacles of SPARK's efforts from the people that work in the field and are at the head of the execution of the HES program. Whereas the surveys provide much information on the students in their current study programs, the program officers and managers elaborated their ideas for the future and about their lessons learnt from the past.

Three people were interviewed face to face and/or via Skype. Skype was used because most of the interviewees work in the remote HES program countries; visiting these countries falls outside the scope of possibilities for this thesis. A conversation with these program officers and managers was useful as these people are in close contact with 'their' students and often know better what they are up to than the people in the Amsterdam headquarters. Therefore, they were able to give additional comments on the activities in the HES program.



Interviews or focus groups with beneficiaries from the HES program were not conducted due to several reasons. The main reason to this is a lack of time and money and the fear of interview fatigue that is expressed by SPARK's PMERL (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning) department. Moreover, many of the students do not or hardly speak English, because they follow their education in either Arabic or Turkish and there was no possibility of interviewing the students in these languages. Therefore, interviewing this latter group was the second-best option for gathering qualitative information as an addition to the quantitative research methods.

### *3.2.1. Collection*

For the collection of the qualitative data, it was assessed what information from the Progress survey needed clarification or could be complemented by the interviews. Moreover, several topics for the interviews were derived from the theoretical framework. Most of the chosen topics deal with how the students experience and spend their daily lives, which cannot be fully questioned in a survey.

After a general idea was formed on the interview topics, the process was initiated to contact SPARK's program officers and managers. In first instance, the interviews would exclusively be conducted via the use of Skype. However, the opportunity presented itself to meet with some of the PMs and POs during SPARK's annual conference IGNITE in Amsterdam. In order to arrange a meeting with some of them, the details of the duration of their stay were requested from the SPARK team. After that, the POs and PMs were e-mailed with the question whether they were willing to participate in an interview of around twenty minutes about the HES program and their experiences in their program countries. Three of the seven addressed SPARK members indicated to be willing to and to have the time to meet up during their stay in the Netherlands. All of them are officially based in the SPARK office in Gaziantep, Turkey. Here, they fulfill the roles of Syria Education Manager, Regional Deputy Manager and Entrepreneurship Expert (Business Development and Acquisition). In the Gaziantep office, both the Syrian and the Turkish students are taken care of, as SPARK's activities inside Syria have been suspended due to safety issues.

After the meetings were set up, the final interview guide was constructed (see *Table 2*). This guide consists of an introduction and three sections of questions: general, integration and reconstruction. In the general questions, the interviewees were asked about their work in SPARK and their connection to the students. After this, the integration of the students into their host communities was discussed. In this section, several topics that were discussed in the



theoretical framework were touched upon. This concerns questions regarding the students' daily lives, feelings of empowerment and underestimation, experiences with language barriers, and the role of education in the students' integration. In the last section, the topic of reconstruction of the students' home countries was discussed. Rather than questioning to what extent the refugees already take part in reconstruction efforts, the sentiment on this topic was discussed. This includes questions regarding the willingness and/or skepticism of being able to turn back to their home countries in the upcoming years. Lastly, it was questioned to what extent reconstruction is topic of conversation in the students' lives and education.

Although the order and formulation of the questions are defined down below in *Table 2*, they functioned as a guide and could be deviated from when the conversation led in a different direction. It was taken into account that this makes it impossible to generalize the interviews and made them prone to possible bias, due to the connection of the SPARK members with the students. On the other hand, each interview was introduced in the same manner. In every interview, the role of the interviewer in the organization was explained, along with the purpose of the interview, the goal of the research and the main topics of the interview. Moreover, the anonymity of every interviewee was ensured and their permission was asked to record the interview, in order to process the conversation for the research. The interviews were transcribed, so that useful quotes or interesting stories could be used as an addition to the quantitative data analysis. How the interviews were reported, and therefore, how the qualitative data will be operationalized, will be discussed in the next section.

*Table 2 - Interview guide*

<i>Interview guide</i>	
<b>Introduction</b>	
Greeting	Thank you for agreeing to meet with me to help me with my research for my thesis. My name is Katelijne and I have been an intern at SPARK for five months. In this time I worked in the M&E department for the HES program and busied myself mostly with the design, content, review and report of the program's surveys.
Goal of the research	In my research I look at the potential of higher education for refugees for both integration now and reconstruction later in life in their home countries. It is based on SPARK's idea of empowering young refugees to lead their conflict-affected societies into prosperity.



Topics	<p>Topics of the interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of POs/PMs</li> <li>• Communication with students</li> <li>• Integration and reconstruction</li> <li>• Extracurricular activities</li> <li>• Language barriers</li> <li>• Feelings of students (feeling empowered, underestimated, excited about future, etc.)</li> </ul>
Anonymity	This interview is anonymous, which means your personal details will not be used or shared. Moreover, the things you tell me and the information you give me will solely be used for <i>this</i> research.
Stopping the interview	When you decide not to continue with this interview, you are entitled to indicate this at any time. The interview will be stopped in that case.
Recording	I brought recording devices in order to record the interview. This will help me correctly process my data. However, your permission is needed to record. This is why I will ask you if you give your permission to record the interview as soon as the recorder has started.
<i>'Do you give your permission for this interview to be recorded?'</i>	
<b>Questions</b>	
General	<p>Can you tell more about your role as a program manager/officer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>How did you get into this position?</i></li> <li>- <i>Have you worked in this field before?</i></li> </ul> <p>How is your connection with the students? Do you see or speak to them often?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Are there set moments of seeing each other?</i></li> <li>- <i>Do you mostly see each other formally or informally?</i></li> </ul>



## Integration

How do the students mostly spend their days?

- *How many hours of class do they generally have?*
- *Are there regular SPARK meetings?*

Who do they spend their time with?

- *How common is it for them to spend time with 'locals'?*

How is the feeling of the students in their host community?

- *What role does empowerment play for them?*
- *Do they feel underestimated concerning their skills and knowledge?*

Concerning those skills and knowledge: to what extent is the lack of language skills a problem?

- *Are there many students who cannot speak the lingua franca/the common language?*

How do you think education influences the students' integration into the host community?

- *Does it help them get used to the new country easier?*

## Reconstruction

While being in the host country, how big is the focus on potentially turning back to the home country?

Is there a willingness to turn back to Syria?

- *Is there skepticism of the war being over soon? Or rather optimism?*

To what extent is reconstruction or turning back a topic of conversation among the students?

- *How is their flight addressed during their education?*
- *Do they participate as 'normal' students?*

## Closing interview

Is there anything you would like to add to this conversation?

Are there things you find important on this topic that haven't been discussed?

## Member checking

I will transcribe this interview and will use this as part of my data for my research. If you want, I can provide you with a copy of this transcription. Moreover, I can keep you up to date about my thesis, if you would like to.

## Thanking

Thank you so much for your time and participation. I wish you the most of luck in your work in SPARK. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

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### 3.2.2. Operationalization

Once the interviews are conducted, they were transcribed. These transcriptions provided additional information to the quantitative analysis. For this, the same indicators and constructs that were used for the quantitative analysis were identified from the interviews so that the interviewees' responses can shed light on some of the quantitative findings. This type of analysis is called 'content analysis', which is defined by Ritchie & Lewis (2003) as 'a type of analysis in which both the content and context of documents are analyzed: themes are identified, with the researcher focusing on the way the theme is treated or presented and the frequency of its occurrence. The analysis is then linked to 'outside variables' such as the gender and role of the contributor' (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 200). In this way, the interviews function as triangulation of the data.

The concept of triangulation was initially developed in the light of validation of different quantitative research instruments or methods to increase the validity of the study results in the 1960s. A decade later, the concept was also used to justify mixing quantitative and qualitative research methods, again to validate research methods and results. Later on, it was believed by some authors that triangulation was more suited to *complement* the different theoretical approaches, rather than to *validate* them (Kelle & Erzberger, 2004). This last interpretation also applies to this study, where it is believed that the interviews with SPARK members can provide an enlargement of perspectives and a fuller understanding and explanation of the research topic.

The analytical approach of qualitative data strongly depends on the primary aims and focus of the research. Several forms of qualitative analysis, such as discourse or conversation analysis focus on the use of language and symbolism, in which the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee(s) is vital. In these approaches, precise ways of transcription are needed, where non-verbal language such as nodding, head-shaking and people raising or lowering their voices are included. Although the notation of these kinds of communication can be valuable to many types of social research, it is not deemed necessary for this study. For this study, a more descriptive and interpretative approach was chosen, which aims to study and report on the interviewees' views and stories. Other examples of this type of approach include life histories, grounded theory and policy analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Once the interviews were transcribed, the same topics that were used for the quantitative analysis were manually identified from the transcriptions. Common answers or experiences could then provide complementary information on the quantitative results. In this way, the results can be explained and interpreted in further detail by a narrative approach. All these results will be discussed in the next chapter, after the analysis of the quantitative results.



## 4. Analysis and results

In this chapter, the results of the analysis of the both the quantitative and the qualitative research will be provided in order to answer the research questions. In the first section, the quantitative analysis will be discussed. The descriptive statistics will first be provided, followed by the reliability and the validity of the scale. After that, a regression analysis will explain the relations between the dependent and the independent variables in the scale.

After the quantitative analysis, the qualitative part of the research will be discussed. Within this section, the main outcomes of the interviews will be stated, which will provide additional information on the quantitative results.

### 4.1. Quantitative results

#### 4.1.1. Descriptive statistics

##### *Constructs*

To conduct the quantitative analysis, some basic descriptive statistics need to be provided. In the previous chapter, it has been elaborated how both an integration and a reconstruction score would be constructed. Setting up these scores resulted in an integration score that ranges from 21 to 60, with a mean of 41.4 and a standard deviation of 6.8. The N of this group was 1410, which is the full group of survey respondents. The reconstruction score had a range of 15, when including all 1410 students. However, for the analysis of the reconstruction score only the answers of the students that indicated to want to return to Syria in the next five years were coded. The rest of the answers were assigned a value of zero. For an accurate analysis, these zero-coded answers were excluded. This resulted in an N of 395, ranging from 5 to 15, with a mean of 12.1 and a standard deviation of 2 (see *Table 3*).

*Table 3 - Descriptive statistics of the main constructs*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Integration	1410	39	21	60	41.4	6.8
Reconstruction	1410	15	0	15	3.4	5.5
	395	10	5	15	12.1	2



### *Control variables*

To get an idea of the population that was involved in SPARK's Progress survey, the basic descriptive statistics from all control variables in the scale will first be discussed and are shown in *Table 4*.

*Host country.* To study the integration of refugee students in their home countries, it is important to know where they reside. Most students who participated in the survey currently live in Turkey (61%), followed by Lebanon (23%). This has implications for the findings of this study, as the majority of the answers concerning integration therefore apply to these two countries and not to Iraq-KRG, Jordan and Palestine.

*Gender.* Unlike the skewed division of students in the host countries, there was a near equal division of men and women: there were 51% male and 49% female respondents. This finding suggests that the voices of the male and female students are evenly reflected in the results of the Progress survey.

*Age.* Concerning the students' age, most were 20 years old (15%), 21 years old (16%) and 22 years old (15%). The youngest two students were 17 years old and 11% of the students answered to be older than 25 years old.

*Family.* In the survey, 70% of the students indicated to have a family to take care of. This is important to take note of, as it indicates off-study responsibilities, regardless of whether this family lives in the host country, in Syria, or elsewhere. Having to take care of a family can compromise the students' study progress and therefore their general study experience. In turn, this might have an effect on their integration into the host country.

*Type of studies.* The students can choose from three different types of studies as a beneficiary of the HES program: a bachelor's degree, a TVET diploma or a TVET certificate. In the survey, the vast majority of the students (69%) indicated to be enrolled in a bachelor's program. Moreover, 12% indicated to be studying for a TVET diploma and 19% for a TVET certificate. These results indicate that the answers to the survey questions on study progress and educational experience are mostly relevant to bachelor students.

*Study specialization.* Concerning the students' study specialization, most students who were enrolled in a bachelor's program indicated to study in the field of Engineering (32%). For the other two study programs, most students indicated to study in the field of Business & management (Accounting & marketing): 41% of the TVET diploma students and 37% of the TVET certificate students.



Table 4 - Descriptive statistics of control variables

<i>Descriptive statistics – Control variables</i>	<i>Integration</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>
	Percent	Percent
<i>Host country</i>	(N = 1410)	(N = 395)
Iraq-KRG	5.7	6.8
Jordan	8.2	5.8
Lebanon	22.6	31.9
Palestine	2.3	0
Turkey	61.2	55.4
<i>Gender</i>	(N = 1410)	(N = 395)
Male	51.1	58.5
Female	48.9	41.5
<i>Age</i>	(N = 1410)	(N = 395)
	Mean (SD) = 22.2 (2.2)	Mean (SD) = 22.4 (2.3)
17	.1	.3
18	2.1	3
19	9.1	8.9
20	15	8.9
21	16.2	14.2
22	15.2	16.2
23	14	17.7
24	10.3	9.6
25	7.5	8.1
Older than 25	10.5	13.2
<i>Family to take care of</i>	(N = 1410)	(N = 395)
No	30.1	24.1
Yes	69.9	75.0
<i>Type of studies</i>	(N = 1410)	(N = 395)
Bachelor	68.7	64.6
TVET diploma	12.2	12.9
TVET certificate	19.1	22.5
<i>Bachelor specialization</i>	(N = 885)	(N = 239)
Business & management (Accounting & marketing)	14	12.6
Construction	.2	.8



Creative industry	3.3	3.3
Design & architecture	5	3.3
Economics	13.9	16.7
Engineering	31.5	25.9
Health care	3.4	4.6
Humanities	2	3.8
Medical sciences	4.6	2.9
Natural sciences	6.6	7.1
Other	15.5	1.8
<i>TVET diploma specialization</i>	(N = 148)	(N = 47)
Business & management (Accounting & marketing)	40.5	27.7
Construction	2	0
Creative industry	1.4	0
Design & architecture	6.1	6.4
Education	12.2	14.9
Engineering & mechanics	15.5	27.7
Health care	16.2	14.9
Natural sciences	.7	2.1
Other	5.4	6.4
<i>TVET certificate specialization</i>	(N = 161)	(N = 56)
Business & management (Accounting & marketing)	36.6	30.6
Construction	.6	1.8
Creative industry	.6	0
Design & architecture	6.2	5.4
Education	26.7	23.2
Engineering & mechanics	5.6	7.1
Health care	18	21.4
Other	5.6	10.7

#### 4.1.2. Validity analysis

When using instruments to test data, such as the development of a model or a scale, it is important to test the validity and the reliability of such instruments, in order to obtain high-quality research results. In this research a scale is used to test the effect of higher education on integration and reconstruction, where many items are included. Testing on validity will show whether the scale is valid, meaning whether it is able to measure what is desired to be measured.



Moreover, a validity analysis will assess the items' correlations, where the size and direction of the relation between the variables will be established. The correlations will be assessed via the use of Pearson's correlation coefficient (bivariate correlation). This coefficient measures the linear correlation and can have a value between -1 and +1, where 1 is total positive correlation and 0 is no linear correlation.

To test the validity and the correlation of the scale's constructs and variables, integration and reconstruction were analyzed separately. First, the validity of the integration construct was tested. All coded items for the integration score were included in the analysis. *Table 5* (next page) shows that not all items were significantly correlated to one another.

Next, the validity of the reconstruction construct was tested. This construct included fewer independent variables. This construct included three items and therefore three questions from the Progress survey. *Table 6* shows that all independent variables are strongly, positively correlated with each other. All items were significant at the .01 level.

*Table 5 - Pearson correlations for reconstruction*

<i>Correlations (**. Correlation significant at the .01 level (two-tailed)</i>	<i>Civic leadership position in future country in five years</i>	<i>NGO in five years</i>	<i>Business in future country in five years</i>
Civic leadership position in future country in five years	1	.515**	.378**
NGO in five years	.515**	1	.404**
Business in future country in five years	.378**	.404**	1

#### *4.1.3. Reliability analysis*

After testing the scale's validity, the reliability of the scale will be tested via the use of Cronbach's alpha. This coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 indicating greater internal reliability and consistency. Generally, alphas of .7 to .8 are desired when creating a scale, but some writers argue that lower alpha's of around .6 are also acceptable in early stages of research, or when complex constructs are involved (Field, 2018). Reliability analysis also tells whether the reliability of the scale improves when one or several items are deleted. This makes it possible to improve scales before proceeding to further analysis, such as regression analysis, which makes the results more reliable.



Table 6 - Pearson correlations for integration

Correlations **. Correlation significant at the .01 level (two-tailed), *. Correlation significant at the .05 level (two-tailed)	Refugee camp	Year of study	Exams passed since beginning	Satisfaction study progress	Satisfaction overall experience	Satisfaction quality education	Study increasing employability	Satisfaction psychosocial support	Satisfaction language training	Language skills a problem	Participation volunteer project	Occupation leadership role	Started NGO, creative works etc.	Involve ment in organization	Salaried employment position	Work contributing to community	Knowing type of business
Refugee camp	1	.100**	-.024	-.011	.038	.061*	-.020	-.134**	-.078**	-.002	.025	-.004	-.037	-.031	.012	-.049	-.011
Year of study	.100**	1	.011	.072**	.047	.006	.053*	-.021	-.166**	.047	.074**	.063	.057*	.043	.066*	-.028	.143**
Exams passed since beginning	-.024	.011	1	.385**	.210**	.121**	.172**	-.009	.031	.020	-.004	-.005	-.018	-.034	.030	.031	.017
Satisfaction study progress	-.011	.072**	.385**	1	.647**	.459**	.535**	.094**	.099**	.006	.077**	.048	.065*	.038	-.023	.039	.022
Satisfaction overall experience	.038	.047	.210**	.647**	1	.535**	.562**	.130**	.116**	.013	.061*	.058*	.068*	.062*	-.001	.031	.006
Satisfaction quality education	.061*	.006	.121**	.459**	.535**	1	.556**	.174**	.141**	-.006	.028	-.003	.038	.063*	-.028	.063*	.033
Study increasing employability	-.020	.053*	.172**	.535**	.562**	.556**	1	.081**	.104**	-.002	.080**	.029	.047	.063*	-.047	.031	.083**
Satisfaction psychosocial support	-.134**	-.021	-.009	.094**	.130**	.174**	.081**	1	.434**	.008	.051	.052	.079**	.215**	-.017	1.55**	-.011
Satisfaction language training	-.078**	-.166**	.031	.099**	.116**	.141**	.104**	.434**	1	.066**	.089**	.077**	.125**	.216**	.058*	1.66**	-.023
Language skills a problem	-.002	.047	.020	.006	.013	-.006	-.002	.008	.066*	1	-.035	-.017	-.024	-.031	.043	-.010	.024
Participation volunteer project	.025	.074**	-.004	.077**	.061*	.028	.080**	.051	.089**	-.035	1	.455**	.382**	.297**	.159**	.082**	.128**
Occupation leadership role	-.004	.063*	-.005	.048	.058*	-.003	.029	.052	.077**	-.017	.455**	1	.399**	.313**	.258**	.162**	.149**
Started NGO, creative works etc.	-.037	.057*	-.018	.065*	.068*	.038	.047	.079**	.125**	-.024	.382**	.399**	1	.237**	.221**	.181**	.158**
Involvement in organization	-.031	.043	-.034	.038	.062*	.063*	.063*	.215**	.216**	-.031	.297**	.313**	.237**	1	.078**	.136**	.130**
Salaried employment position	.012	.066*	.030	-.023	-.001	-.028	-.047	-.017	.058*	.043	.159**	.258**	.221**	.078**	1	.321*	.022
Work contributing to community	-.049	-.028	.031	.039	.031	.063*	.031	.155**	.166**	-.010	.082**	.162**	.181**	.136**	.321*	1	.063*
Knowing type of business	-.011	.143**	.017	.022	.006	.033	.083**	-.011	-.023	.024	.128**	.149**	.158**	.130**	.022	.063*	1



*Table 7* shows the reliability analysis of both constructs. First, it shows a Cronbach's alpha of .55 for the integration construct, which is a relatively low alpha. For several items it is shown that Cronbach's alpha would increase when that item was deleted, but this is not more than a .02 increase. Therefore, it was decided to not delete any of the items before further analysis. The low alpha can be explained in several ways. One of these is the large number of items that are included in this construct, meaning there might be too many items that have too little in common to make up for a reliable scale. Moreover, low alphas are common in research that deals with complex constructs that are often difficult to measure, due to the diversity of such constructs (Field, 2018).

Next, the reliability analysis of the reconstruction construct is shown. The general alpha is around the .7 mark, which indicates a good reliability. None of the items indicate to increase the Cronbach's alpha when deleted. This higher alpha can easily be explained, as this construct included fewer items than that of integration.

*Table 7 - Reliability analysis of integration and reconstruction*

<i>Item</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha if item deleted</i>
<i>Integration</i>	<b>(.550)</b>
Currently living in a refugee camp	.557
Year of study	.563
Since the beginning of my education, I passed	.545
I am satisfied with my study progress so far	.511
I am satisfied with my overall educational experience so far	.510
I am satisfied with the quality of my education in my current country	.513
I believe my study has increased my employability	.517
I am satisfied with the psychosocial support I receive(d) from SPARK	.514
I am satisfied with the language training I receive(d) from SPARK	.512
Lack of language skills is a problem for me in my current studies	.572
I currently participate in a volunteer project/activity in my community.	.537
I currently occupy a leadership/influential position within an organization/group that contributes directly to my community	.538
I have started a non-governmental organization (NGO) or creative works etc. that contributes directly to my community	.538
I am actively involved in a religious, governmental or non-governmental organization in my community	.514



I have a salaried employment position	.547
My work contributes directly to my current community	.535
I already know what type of business I would like to open	.561
<i>Reconstruction</i>	<b>(.695)</b>
In 5 years, it is likely that I will work in a civic leadership position in that country	.571
In 5 years, it is likely that I will start a non-governmental organization (NGO) in that country	.549
In 5 years, it is likely that I will start a business in that country	.674

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#### 4.1.4. Regression analysis

Where the validity and reliability analyses can only explain correlations between items, regression analysis can explain causal relations between dependent and independent variables. This research studies the effect of higher education and extracurricular activities on integration and reconstruction, therefore indicating the need for such analysis. Linear regression works with a simple formula, that includes a constant  $b_0$  (the intercept) that increases or decreases when a predictor is added, while taking into account some error associated with that prediction (Field, 2018):

$$Y_i = b_0 + b_1X_i + error_i$$

In light of this research, this means that it can be predicted whether either the students' integration scores or their reconstruction scores are influenced by the control variables, or variations of those. This was done using of single linear regression analysis. Multiple linear regression was not used, as the effect of the individual control variables is being studied, rather than of several indicators at the same time.

**Integration.** First, the students' integration scores were analyzed by testing the relationships between the construct and the separate control variables. The outcome of these analyses will be elaborated next. Only the indicators that indicated significant relationships were provided with the corresponding regression results.

*Host country.* All five host countries were included in the analyses, therefore making up for five dummy variables that were analyzed with single linear regression. Two of the five host countries indicated a significant relationship with the students' integration score. The first



significant regression equation was found for Lebanon ( $F(1, 1408) = 54.919, p < .000$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .038. The students' predicted integration score is  $40.659 + 3.155$ . The students' integration score increased 3.155 points when they indicated to live in Lebanon, opposed to not living there (see *Table 8*).

Moreover, a significant regression equation was found for Turkey ( $F(1, 1408) = 43.017, p < .000$ ) with an  $R^2$  of .030. The students' predicted integration score is  $42.843 - 2.405$ . The students' integration score decreased 2.405 points when they indicated to live in Turkey, opposed to not living there (see *Table 8*).

For the other three host countries, no significant regression equations were found.

*Gender.* Next, the relationship between the students' gender and their integration score was analyzed. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(1, 1408) = 8.001, p = .005$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .006. The students' predicted integration score is  $41.871 - 1.023$ . The students' integration score decreased 1.023 points when 'gender' increased one point. This means that the integration scores of the female students (coded as 1) were significantly lower than the scores of the male students (coded as 0) (see *Table 8*).

*Age.* Next, the relationship between the students' age and their integration score was analyzed. No significant regression equation was found. This indicates that neither younger, nor older students have significantly higher integration scores.

*Family.* Next, the relationship between whether the students indicated to have a family to take care of and their integration score was analyzed. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(1, 1408) = 10.544, p = .001$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .007. The students' predicted integration score is  $40.478 + 1.279$ , meaning that their integration score becomes significantly higher when the students indicate to have a family to take care of (see *Table 8*).

*Type of studies.* Next, the relationship between the students' type of studies and their integration score was analyzed. All three types of studies (bachelor, TVET diploma and TVET certificate) were analyzed separately via the use of dummy variables. No significant regression equations were found, meaning this research does not point to one type of studies causing higher integration scores.

*Study specialization.* Lastly, the relationship between the students' study specializations and their integration score was analyzed (see *Table 8*). Although the previous variables of their type of studies did not indicate a significant relationship, separate study specializations might make a difference. Several significant regression equations were found. Firstly, a significant equation was found for the bachelor's specialization of Engineering ( $F(1, 1408) = 4.281, p = .039$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .003. The students' predicted integration score is  $41.557 - .941$ , meaning



that their integration score significantly decreases when they indicate to study Engineering as a bachelor's specialization.

Another significant regression equation was found for the TVET diploma specialization of Design & architecture ( $F(1, 1408) = 3.934, p = .048$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .003. The students' predicted integration score is  $41.4 - 4.511$ , meaning that their integration score significantly decreases when they indicate to study Design & Architecture as a TVET diploma specialization.

Another significant regression equation was found for the TVET diploma specialization of Engineering & mechanics ( $F(1, 1408) = 6.053, p = .014$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .004. The students' predicted integration score is  $41.428 - 3.515$ , meaning that their integration score significantly decreases when they indicate to study Engineering & Mechanics as a TVET diploma specialization.

The last significant regression equation was found for the TVET certificate specialization of Health care ( $F(1, 1408) = 5.280, p = .022$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .004. The students' predicted integration score is  $41.311 + 2.931$ , meaning that their integration score significantly increases when they indicate to study Health Care as a TVET certificate specialization.

**Reconstruction.** Next, the single linear regressions for the reconstruction construct will be elaborated. Note that these analyses were conducted with an  $N$  of 395, including only the answers of those students that indicated to most likely live in Syria in five years.

*Integration.* First and foremost, a significant regression equation was found for the relationship between the students' integration score and their reconstruction score ( $F(1, 393) = 33.185, p < .000$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .078. The students' predicted reconstruction score is  $8.645 + .080$ , meaning that their reconstruction score significantly increases when their integration score increases.

*Host country.* Four of five host countries were analyzed for a possible relationship with the students' reconstruction score. One of the host countries (Palestine) was left out, as there were no students from this country who indicated to find it most likely to live in Syria in five years. For the rest of the host countries no significant regression equations were found. This means that it cannot be stated that the students in one host country indicate to be more willing to contribute to reconstruction than students in the other.

*Gender.* Next, the relationship between the students' gender and their reconstruction score was analyzed. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(1, 393) = 5.724, p = .017$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .014. The students' predicted reconstruction score is  $12.268 - .488$ , meaning that the



reconstruction scores of the female students (coded as 1) were significantly lower than the scores of the male students (coded as 0) (see *Table 8*).

*Age.* Next, the relationship between the students' age and their reconstruction score was analyzed. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(1, 393) = 19.216, p < .000$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .047. The students' predicted reconstruction score is  $7.750 + .193$ , meaning that the reconstruction score is significantly higher for older students, than for younger students.

*Family.* Next, the relationship between whether the students indicated to have a family to take care of and their reconstruction score was analyzed. No significant regression equation was found, meaning it cannot be stated that the students are more willing to contribute to reconstruction when they have a family to take care of.

*Type of studies.* Next, the relationship between the students' type of studies and their reconstruction score was analyzed. No significant regression equations were found, meaning it cannot be stated that students from either a bachelor's degree, a TVET diploma or a TVET certificate are more willing to contribute to reconstruction than the others.

*Study specialization.* Lastly, the relationship between the students' study specialization and their reconstruction score was analyzed. Of all different types of studies, two significant regression equations were found. First, a significant regression equation was found for the bachelor's specialization Design & architecture in relationship with the students' reconstruction score ( $F(1, 393) = 4.195, p = .041$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .011. The students' predicted reconstruction score is  $12.036 + 1.464$ , meaning that the reconstruction scores of those students that indicated to study Design & architecture was significantly higher than that of other students.

The second significant regression equation was found for the students that indicated to study the bachelor's specialization of Engineering ( $F(1,393) = 7.681, p = .006$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .019. The students' predicted reconstruction score is  $11.946 + .764$ , meaning that the reconstruction scores of those students that indicated to study Engineering was significantly higher than that of other students.

***Interactions.*** Besides testing for single linear regression between the main constructs and the control variables, interaction terms were included. These interaction terms make it possible to look at the combined effect of two variables, where those two variables are simply multiplied. This provides more detailed information on the research population besides simple regression analysis. All control variables were separately multiplied with the students' integration score to assess whether there are combined effects on reconstruction, rather than single factors. The results of this analysis will be elaborated next (see also *Table 8*).



*Host country.* First, the interactions between the students' host countries and their integration score were tested to assess a possible combined effect on their reconstruction score. One significant regression equation was found for Lebanon ( $F(1, 393) = 3.964, p = .047$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .009. The students' estimated reconstruction score is  $9.407 + .062$ , which suggests that Lebanese students with higher integration scores are more likely to be willing to contribute to reconstruction than the ones from other host countries. No other significant regression equations were found for the interactions between the students' host countries and their integration scores.

*Gender, age, family and type of studies.* All interactions for these control variables were tested, but no significant regression equations were found. This suggests that these interactions do not make a significant difference on the students' willingness to contribute to reconstruction efforts in the future.

*Study specialization.* Two significant regression equations were found regarding the interactions between integration and the students' study specializations. The first significant interaction term was found for the bachelor's degree Engineering specialization and the students' integration score ( $F(1, 393) = 5.212, p = .023$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .012. The students' predicted reconstruction score is  $7.905 - .086$ . This suggests that the students' integration score is a better indicator for a higher reconstruction score for those students that *do not* study Engineering as a bachelor's degree specialization, than for those that *do*.

Lastly, a significant interaction term was found for the TVET certificate Health care specialization and the students' integration score ( $F(1, 393) = 6.049, p = .014$ ), with an  $R^2$  of .014. The students' predicted reconstruction score is  $8.346 - .180$ . This suggests that the students' integration score is a better indicator for a higher reconstruction score for those students that *do not* study Health care as a TVET certificate specialization, than for those that *do*.

Table 8 - Single linear regression analysis

<i>Integration (N = 1410)</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Lebanon	7.411	.000	.038	54.919	.194
Turkey	-6.559	.000	.030	43.017	-.172
Family	3.247	.001	.007	10.544	.086
Gender	-2.829	.005	.006	8.001	-.075
Bachelor – Engineering	-2.069	.039	.003	4.281	-.055
TVET Diploma - Design & architecture	-1.983	.048	.003	3.934	-.053



TVET Diploma - Engineering & mechanics	-2.460	.014	.004	6.053	-.065
TVET Certificate - Health care	2.298	.022	.004	5.280	.061

<i>Reconstruction (N = 395)</i>	<i>t (SE)</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Beta</i>
Integration	5.761	.000	.078	33.185	.279
Age	4.384	.000	.047	19.216	.216
Gender	-2.393	.017	.014	5.724	-.120
Bachelor - Design & architecture	2.048	.041	.011	4.195	.103
Bachelor - Engineering	2.772	.006	.019	7.681	.138
Integration * Lebanon	-.313 (.031)	.047	.009	3.964	.062
Integration * Bachelor – Engineering	-2.283 (.037)	.023	.012	5.212	-.086
Integration * Certificate – Health care	-2.459 (.073)	.014	.014	6.049	-.180

## 4.2. Qualitative results

Next, the qualitative results will be analyzed. As discussed in section 3.2.2. about the operationalization of the interviews, the qualitative data functions as a descriptive and interpretative way of complementing the quantitative data. First, it will be elaborated how the interviews were conducted and transcribed, followed by an analysis of the three interviews that were conducted with SPARK members.

### 4.2.1. Conduction and transcription

Two of the three interviews that were conducted for this research were done face to face at the SPARK office in Amsterdam. The third was done in a public office in Amsterdam. The meetings were set up in the days prior to the interview to make sure that the SPARK members could take their time for the meeting. The first two interviews took place on the same day and the third was conducted a few days later, as the interviewee indicated not to have enough time to meet on the day that the other two interviews were conducted.

Whereas it was communicated to the SPARK members that the meeting would take around twenty minutes, the first interview lasted around 45 minutes. Many details, stories and experiences were shared in this interview. However, the interview guide was strongly deviated from, where the focus was more on SPARK in general, rather than on the specific research



topics. Therefore, it was made sure that the other two interviews were kept more concise and focused. This resulted in the other two interviews lasting around 25 minutes. The interviews were recorded with the microphone of a mobile phone and the recordings were transcribed afterwards.

The transcription of the interviews was done in Microsoft Word and transcribing the first interview took around six hours. The other two interviews took around two to three hours to transcribe. As discussed in the operationalization of the qualitative research methods in the previous chapter, the interviews were not transcribed word for word. For example, when one of the interviewees started their sentence but did not finish it, this sentence was most of the time not included in the transcription, unless it was deemed necessary and useful. Moreover, some of the names that were mentioned in the interviews were left out, to ensure the privacy of those people that were mentioned.

Another issue that arose during the transcription was when the interviewee was difficult to understand and therefore to quote. The interviews took place in work spaces that were mostly quiet, but noises such as closing doors, music or other conversations sometimes disrupted the recording. However, by using the context of the conversation it was still possible to understand what the interviewee was meaning to say.

#### *4.2.2. Analysis and results*

All interviewees were based in the same office, being Gaziantep in Turkey, which caused the range of issues identified in the light of integration and reconstruction to be similar. However, all three SPARK members fulfilled different roles in the organization, which caused them to share different ideas, experiences and stories. The transcriptions of these interviews were analyzed manually, where the use of a professional program for analyzing qualitative data (i.e. Atlas.ti) was deemed unnecessary, as the amount of data was relatively small. The same topics as from the scale model from the quantitative analysis were used in the analysis of the qualitative data. For this, the transcriptions were read, and the topic-related texts were identified and highlighted. It should be noted that the interview guide steered towards specific topics, which makes those topics more prominent in the transcriptions.

#### *Integration*

After the interviewees explained their position in SPARK, the topic of integration of the refugee students was introduced. In the quantitative data, the indicators for integration were used to construct the students' integration scores, but were not analyzed separately. These topics were



therefore discussed in the interviews. One of these topics that was discussed elaborately was the potential language barrier that the students possibly experience when arriving in their host country and whether or not this posed difficulties for their integration.

Firstly, one of the interviewees mentioned the immediate language barrier upon the students' arrival in their host country:

*'When you're forced to [integrate], in a way, people have resistance anyway, so the ones who do not resist, could survive easily, but I also understand the people who are resisting.'*

*Who stay to their own language?*

*Exactly, because it's not their choice to learn it, so they are kind of forced to learn the language. So that's why it's not being stubborn, but there is something psychological in the brain that doesn't let you do that, so I understand. So yes, that's a big problem, because you feel confident when you speak your own language and that's why, of course, the inclusion is not that possible because they talk among themselves, which is very understandable.'* (Interviewee 2)

One SPARK member also mentioned difficulties for them communicating with the students once they arrived in Turkey:

*'Nowadays, there's no bad feelings or problems. In the beginning, it was difficult in communicating with them, because they didn't know the language well. [...] So, in the beginning it was a huge problem around three/four years ago, because the universities were accepting students, without the exams.'* (Interviewee 1)

Most often it was mentioned by the SPARK members what the importance of language is, when it comes to integrating into a host society, and how frustration can arise when the students are not able to speak that language and therefore cannot express themselves properly:

*'Yes, exactly, [...] but most things, as you said, the biggest frustration is the language: they cannot present themselves in the better way they want it.'* (Interviewee 2)

*'[...] integration is not only going through language, but it's like a big component, especially in the countries where, for example, art or some other components is not assisting you.'* (Interviewee 2)

*'People say [Turkish and Syrian students] are close culture, but getting over the barriers is the language, the communication, and is done through culture.'* (Interviewee 2)



To solve this language problem, the interviewees explained the possibility for students to follow language courses so that they can follow their education in Turkish, as there are only a few options for the students to continue their Arabic education:

*'After students are accepted into university, students need to go to this Turkish language course for one year, then they come and continue their education, because in Turkey the education language is mostly in Turkish.'*  
(Interviewee 1)

*'[The university has] Turkish language courses, we have a budget for that as well, so they learn Turkish and English, but they can also continue their Arabic programs, but unfortunately when you compare with the number of the Turkish courses which are provided; it's less, because Turkey is not an Arabic-teaching country.'* (Interviewee 2)

*'Now it has been four years, most of the students started to learn Turkish, so the sense of feeling that it's a foreign language has really decreased. However, it is very crucial for them also to get language courses and we do this. We offer short courses, we offer language programs in order to help them integrating, feeling integrated, and to understand everything in the country. The case is different in Lebanon and Jordan. In Turkey, the language barrier is crucial, but they have relative access to the labor market and to education. And in Lebanon and Jordan, there is no language barrier, but they are suffering when it comes to access to the labor market and they have the education basically. So, like, every location has its own pros and cons.'*  
(Interviewee 3)

This last comment mentions the differences between the host countries that the students reside in. The quantitative analysis showed that the students from Lebanon and Turkey have significantly higher integration scores than the students from the other countries, which is also mentioned by interviewee 3: the students from Turkey supposedly have better access to the labor market, and the students in Lebanon have an advantage as they speak the language. Moreover, it was mentioned multiple times that students can integrate more easily in Turkey, due to the Syrian and Turkish culture being similar:

*The best things, actually, in the east of Turkey the culture and food is all the same. So, they are not feeling very different. Actually, when you go somewhere, for example, in that university place, that city, Harran, you cannot find Turkish restaurants actually. It just feels like you're in Syria, so it's easy for them to live there. [...]* *The culture is exactly the same, the food is more or less the same. So, no problem to integrate into society.'* (Interviewee 1)

*'So, of course the integration is not that easy, but in terms of the number and the resistance coming from the host community, for example Turkey, we have less resistance. So, there are always conflicts about the*



*host communities and the immigrants or international students coming to the country, but although when you look at the numbers in Turkey it's the least. ' (Interviewee 2)*

*'Imagine a man who wants to go back to Syria. The culture is close in the east, but in the west it is completely different. Turkey as a whole is very diverse, in the east side it's the Middle East and in the west, it's European. It's really different in Turkey. So, if you want to raise your child in Turkey, you need to choose one side. If you decide to go to the west side, your kids are more or less European, culture-wise. But the east side it's the Middle East side, it's alright, it's like the Syrian culture. It's totally true that they can easily integrate and find a job and even communicate with them easily. ' (Interviewee 1)*

Several other topics regarding integration that were assessed in the quantitative analysis were also discussed in the interviews, such as the students' gender, their age, entrepreneurship, and the availability of psychosocial support. Moreover, the topic of empowerment came forward, combined with many of above-mentioned topics.

Firstly, although the quantitative analysis indicated a significant difference between the integration of men and women, the interviewees hardly talked about these differences caused by gender. The only mention was that of facilitating a committee management by both male and female students, to make sure the women were given a voice in their studies. Interviewee 1 explained that this committee was made for each institution and faculty, through which they communicated with the students.

Next, the interviewees mentioned differences between the students due to their age several times. This difference seems to lie in that the younger students start or continue their studies in their host countries, while older students sometimes study to regain the diplomas that they already earned in Syria. This regained diploma then makes it possible again for them to get a job:

*'Yeah, so this is mostly for life, actually, for surviving, that they're coming, not for an academic career. We have some training for this. The trainings are really old, where there's people from, like, 33 or 34 years old when they couldn't find a job in Turkey. Because in some places, it's really difficult, but usually it's good, they can find jobs. And also, they need acknowledgment of their diploma and these things, which they lost, actually, during the war. ' (Interviewee 1)*

The same interviewee shared a story about two students that started studying in Turkey upon arrival, but later decided to move to Germany to look for a better education:

*'They were in Turkey, learning the Turkish language and started an education in Turkish university and*



*I think they just changed their mind and went to Germany. ' (Interviewee 1)*

Another interviewee further elaborated on this point of view as seeing the student refugees as international students:

*'I am seeing them as international students, but the international students who might be disadvantaged because of their language, because of their diplomas, or because of their assessment of their degrees of qualification. So, what we're doing is to give them the opportunity to make them equal. ' (Interviewee 2)*

Lastly, the topic of entrepreneurship was identified from the interviews that often went hand in hand with a conversation about extracurricular activities and the empowerment of the students. This is a common conversation for the SPARK members, as the HES program focuses both on education and entrepreneurship by the use of extracurricular activities. The third interviewee was the SPARK member that specifically focuses on the entrepreneurship pillar, but via the use of education:

*'What do you think then is the most important indicator for integration for the students? Is it the higher education?*

*Of course, it is the access to higher education and to the labor market, two very important indicators in that sense. So, once it is likely to find a job once you graduate within the community, this means that you will have the access to the labor market and before that you have access to education. ' (Interviewee 3)*

The interviewee then continues to explain the importance of access to the labor market, accompanied by stating the importance and responsibility of other parties to facilitate integration for the students:

*'In some countries the students and refugees feel like they're not integrated, because they don't have access to the labor market, for example, or even to the private sector at large. In other countries they have the access to that, so it depends. What I surely would like to say is, unless the international community and the donors help the host communities to absorb and to serve refugees, things will continue to have the same tensions and problems for refugees to feel unintegrated to the community. ' (Interview 3)*

Concerning SPARK's extracurricular activities, he specifically elaborated on the psychosocial support that is offered to the students, as a way of empowering them in their host countries:



*'No, they use [the psychosocial support] and it's very crucial for them. But they need awareness. They might not know that they need this, so we do a lot of efforts, workshops, events to disseminate the concept and the benefit and the need for that. So, yes, they need it, but more they also need to be aware of the importance of such services to be empowered.'* (Interviewee 3)

The conversation about empowerment of the students was discussed further in light of reconstruction and the students' willingness to return to their home countries, which will be discussed in the next section.

### *Reconstruction*

In general, the opinions and ideas of the interviewees about the willingness from the students to return to their home countries and to contribute to its future reconstruction were diverse. All three interviewees expressed skepticism about the students' willingness to return to Syria, which was explained in several ways. The main reason that was mentioned was that the students do not want to abandon their current studies, along with the life that they have built up in the past few years:

*'Because students are studying already, they don't want to, like, break their courses or education in the middle and therefore don't want to go back. They want to complete and do this course.'* (Interviewee 1)

*'They cannot force any people to go back, no, you cannot, this is humiliating people. So, what they need to do is to give them a chance, 'if you want to go, yeah! If you don't want to go, okay!' So, that's why, in Turkey, some people are planning to leave and go to a third country, especially for those who are focused on their academic career.'* (Interviewee 1)

*'They're more integrated, because now it's been also 6-7 years now, so most mostly it seems that going back is not an option still for most of them. And they prefer staying in Turkey as far as I understand than going back to Syria.'* (Interviewee 2)

*'They have been in the host communities for more than four years, most of them. Their priority is not going back to Syria, their priority is to establish and proceed with their lives, because they have missed everything. We don't blame them. So, I wouldn't say that their first and biggest dream is to go back to their country.'* (Interviewee 3)

One of the other reasons that was mentioned for the students possibly not wanting to return to Syria is when having a family of their own in their host countries, which did not come forward in the quantitative analysis as a significant indicator:



*'Think of the structure of the family as well, for example. So, if you have two or three children born and raised in Turkey. Maybe you would question going back, but if you have experience, for example, I have lived in the Netherlands for three years and go back, because I was alone here. My job was done, and I said 'great country, but...'*

*Going back now, going back home.*

*Yeah, it's going back home, so it's different than that.'* (Interviewee 2)

The third interviewee again expressed that the students might not immediately be willing to turn back to Syria, but adds that they will try to transfer their knowledge and businesses to their home country by now. In this way, the students might not return to Syria, but would still be able to contribute to its reconstruction:

*'We've been speaking to students and graduated business leaders and entrepreneurs with 'are you willing to go back to Syria, once the conflict ends?' And the answer was, I mean, yeah, they have been now establishing a new life in a country that is completely different than their country, but now it's been four years. They managed to establish a life and now it's their life, so they said 'look, we're not going to go tomorrow, like, leave everything and go back to Syria, however, we will try to transfer some of our businesses operations, we will keep our businesses, everything, and we will try to transfer this knowledge to our countries, so we will keep both connections to here and there.' So, yes, we feel that they're still attached to their country and their homeland. They want to go back, but they're not going to leave the host community, where they established a new life, just to go back to Syria.'* (Interviewee 3)

The SPARK members all expressed their feeling of responsibility to support and empower the students. When the topic of the reconstruction of Syria and the return of the students was introduced, all interviewees shared the opinion that the HES program is not focused on sending the students back. Rather, they think of it as a way of giving the students an alternative to the life they might have had without the support in their host countries:

*'No, the thing is like, higher education or this kind of components give you an option, that's the thing. So, we give them an option. Either they go, or they don't go, but you have to offer them an option. If they don't have this higher education, they won't have the option. They would be kicked out the system, they could either go, or die. That's not giving them an option. The system then shows you one path. The higher education, or SPARK role, is giving them an option.'* (Interviewee 2)



*'They have been in very bad moments and situations, due to the war. If I speak from our point of view as SPARK, yes, we offer them other means of support, like the psychological support and student services, advice and counselling for students. As long as the host communities also know they are treated according to their tailored needs in some locations.'* (Interviewee 3)

In the interviews there was only little conversation about what the students are planning to do once they do turn back to Syria, although the quantitative reconstruction score was constructed of questions relating to those topics from the survey. As quoted before, there was some mention of students being willing to transfer their knowledge and businesses back to Syria. Moreover, one of the interviewees mentioned short courses related to agriculture so the Syrian students can kick-start reconstruction efforts once they decide to turn back, but which they can also use in their Turkish host communities:

*'Because in Turkey, many people, local people, left their lands and went to city centers. City centers are starting to get really crowded. They all left the villages and these kinds of places. So, these Syrians they need a job and some of them are really similar to agriculture. There is a lot of land that no one is using, but they have to produce something. So, the good thing that we train them with good topics, not only needed in Turkey, but inside Syria as well. Because once they start reconstruction of Syria, they will need these things. Agriculture for me is the best thing about reconstruction, because you need the plant, you need things produced.'* (Interviewee 1)

This last quote seems to summarize the focus of the SPARK members: their main work and attention is invested in the students' integration and giving them the possibility to thrive in their host communities, with only limited focus on their return to their home countries. This is useful information when it comes to complementing the quantitative data as it gives an insight in SPARK's daily practice and policy.

The next section will provide the conclusion and discussion to this thesis. Both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis will be used to answer the research questions and recommendations for future research will be provided.



## 5. Conclusion and discussion

The last chapter of this thesis will provide the conclusion and discussion regarding the findings of this thesis. In this thesis, it was assessed to what extent INGOs, such as SPARK, empower refugees to engage in integration and reconstruction efforts in their host and home countries, through higher education and extracurricular activities, in line with the LRRD framework. To be able to answer this elaborate question full of complex concepts, it was broken down in three sub-questions that were each assessed in different chapters. In this section, these questions will be answered, and their shortcomings will be stated. Furthermore, questions that remained or have arisen during the research will be mentioned, together with recommendations for future research.

### 5.1. Conclusion

As stated above, this section will provide a conclusion to this thesis via the use of the research questions that were formulated in the introduction. After repeating the main research question, the sub-questions will be answered in the same order as in the introduction, as this was also how they were assessed in the thesis. By answering the research questions, parts of the theoretical framework will be summarized. Furthermore, the results from the quantitative analysis will be used, together with some of the complementary qualitative analysis results.

In this thesis, an answer was sought to the following research question:

*To what extent can INGOs, such as SPARK, empower refugees to engage in integration and reconstruction efforts in their host and home countries, through higher education and extracurricular activities, in line with the LRRD framework?*

The first sub-question included most of the keywords that were used in this thesis. It was therefore the question that was assessed in the theoretical framework, which was formulated as follows:

1. How can empowerment and higher education in line with the LRRD framework contribute to the integration and reconstruction in refugees' host and home countries?

All concepts mentioned in this sub-question were discussed in the theoretical framework in the light of the Syrian refugee crisis. It was explained how such crises require immediate responses,



such as humanitarian aid. After this so-called relief phase, other measures are needed to provide support on the longer term, measures that were explained as the rehabilitation and development phases. In order to ensure a smooth transition between these phases to serve those in need, the framework of 'linking relief, rehabilitation and development' (LRRD) was introduced in the nineties. However, it was soon argued that such a continuum of phases is not sufficient. Instead, a contiguum needs to be put in practice where all three phases take place at the same time with constant feedback. It was then stated that higher education for young refugees is a way of linking all these phases. Higher education turns out to be beneficial on both the short and the long term for refugee students who follow an education, when having had to discontinue their education in their home countries. On the short term, it provides a way for the students to fill their days and to interact with the local community, therefore facilitating integration. On the long term, it provides the students with an education they can use for the rest of their lives, preventing a 'lost generation' of youth, due to war and conflict. The last and overarching concept is that of empowerment. Although it has not gotten a clear-cut definition in this thesis, it is a recurring term that includes all ways of supporting the students to thrive in their host communities, specifically via their higher education and their extracurricular activities.

These last two lead to the second sub-question, which is the question that assesses the case study of this research:

2. How do SPARK's efforts in its HES program contribute to integration and reconstruction efforts in refugees' host and home countries?

SPARK was introduced as an international non-governmental organization where they 'develop higher education and entrepreneurship to empower young, ambitious people to lead their conflict-affected societies into prosperity' (SPARK, 2019). In this thesis, the Higher Education for Syrians (HES) program was used as a case study, in which young refugees are offered higher education opportunities and extracurricular activities, such as language training. To keep track of how the students are doing, SPARK has developed and conducted the Progress survey, which was used as the quantitative database for this study with the responses of 1410 students. Multiple questions from this extensive survey were used to construct an integration score, as well as a reconstruction score for each individual respondent, which made quantitative analysis possible.

First, the students' integration scores were analyzed, using single linear regression analysis. This analysis showed that the students from Lebanon and Turkey integrated significantly better



in their host countries than the students from Jordan, Palestine and Iraq-KRG. Both Lebanon and Turkey were also mentioned by the interviewees as host countries where integration is possibly easier for the students, along with Jordan. In the case of Lebanon and Jordan, it was mentioned that this was because the Lebanese, Jordan and Syrian students all speak Arabic, which eliminates the language barrier. In the case of Turkey, it was mentioned several times that the cultures of (parts of) Turkey and Syria are similar, which possibly accelerates the integration process.

Next, the male students showed to have significantly higher integration scores than the female students, despite the even division of male and female students in the survey population. Gender roles were only briefly discussed in the interviews, where it was mentioned that a student committee was set up, managed by an even division of men and women, to make sure the women were given a voice. However, other examples of gender differences or discrimination were not forthcoming.

Concerning the students' age, no significant result was found, meaning that age did not seem to make a difference in the students' integration scores. However, the interviewees explained several differences between the younger and older students. The older students were mentioned to be studying mostly for recognition of their diplomas they earned back in Syria, while the younger students rather started or continued the studies they had been following.

Although it was not defined for the students what it meant to 'have a family', the students that indicated to have a family to take care of did show to have significantly higher scores than the students that indicated not to. It was discussed that this family could indicate parents and/or siblings, but that it could also be interpreted by the students as having a partner and children of their own. It was also not defined where this family would currently live. Therefore, this result might not say much, but the interviewees gave some examples of how a family can influence the students' integration. One of these examples included a father whose children were born and raised in Turkey since he immigrated, which causes him most likely to be well integrated and unlikely to want to return to his home country. On the contrary, a young student that still has a family back in Syria, would be assumed to be more likely to want to return to that family in the future and would possibly have less ties in the host country.

Lastly, the students' studies were assessed. Concerning their type of studies - meaning whether they were following a bachelor's, TVET diploma or a TVET certificate program - no significant results were found. The main differences between these types of studies are the duration of the programs and the different study specializations. Four of these specializations did give significant outcomes, of which three showed to have a negative effect on the students'



integration: Engineering (bachelor), Design & architecture (TVET diploma) and Engineering & mechanics (TVET diploma) all decreased the integration scores of the students that indicated to study these specializations. However, the students that indicated to study Health care (TVET certificate) showed to have significant higher integration scores. A clear conclusion as to why these differences show up cannot be stated, as it can have many causes. Some of these causes can be how, where and when the studies take place, which people take part in it or what the content of the studies is. In order to discover this, further research would be needed which would go into more detail about the studies and specializations themselves.

Next, the reconstruction scores of the student were analyzed, along with interactions between the direct variables. This score was again constructed by using several of the survey questions, although there were fewer questions included than for the integration score. Before the scores were analyzed, only those students were included that indicated to see themselves returning to Syria in five years, leaving 395 responses for analysis. Therefore, it is a score that indicates to what extent the students are *willing* to return and contribute to reconstruction efforts, rather than to what extent they are actually ‘reconstructing’.

From the analysis resulted, most importantly, that the students’ integration score had a positive significant effect on the students’ willingness to contribute to reconstruction efforts in the future. This is an important finding, as SPARK aims to educate and empower students in their host countries (therefore encouraging integration) to later contribute to reconstruction efforts in their home countries (therefore encouraging reconstruction). This result seems to support this aim, although possible flaws in the analysis should be taken into account, which will further be elaborated in the discussion.

Other significant results for the relation with the students’ reconstruction score were the students’ age and gender. Concerning their age, it showed that older students are significantly more willing to contribute to reconstruction efforts in the future than younger students. The interviews seemed to complement this finding, mentioning that younger students generally show more interest in staying in their current host country or are planning to go to a third country in the future. However, it was also mentioned several times by the interviewees that the students generally do not seem to plan on returning to Syria, as they now have established their new lives in their host countries.

The next significant result was that male students show to be more willing to contribute to reconstruction efforts in the future than female students. Just as when the male students showed to have higher integration scores, no clear explanation that is derived from either the quantitative or the qualitative analysis can be given for this result.



Furthermore, two study specializations showed to have a significant positive effect on the students' reconstruction score: the bachelor's specializations Design & architecture and Engineering. Again, no direct cause can be linked to these results, as no further research was done into these specific specializations. Although it could be possible that these specializations make the students more eager to contribute to reconstruction efforts in the future, many other factors can make this a significant outcome. As the interviewees indicated that the students do not seem to have a direct focus on returning to Syria, the interviews did also not provide a clear explanation for this result.

Lastly, interactions between the students' integration scores and the other variables were tested in their effect on the students' reconstruction scores. Three significant outcomes resulted from this analysis, the first one being the interaction between integration and Lebanon as a host country. This suggests that Lebanese students with higher integration scores are more willing to contribute to reconstruction than the ones from other host countries. This is an interesting finding, as it was mentioned several times in the interviews that students from Lebanon are more likely to integrate into their host country as there is no language barrier. In turn, this often-experienced language barrier was mentioned several times as one of the biggest obstacles for students to integrate in their host countries. This finding therefore suggests that when the students do not experience this language barrier, they will be more likely to return to Syria and contribute to reconstruction efforts in the future.

Concerning the combined effect of the students' integration scores and their study specialization on the students' reconstruction scores, two significant negative results were found for Engineering (bachelor) and Health care (TVET Certificate). This suggests that the students' integration score is a better indicator for a higher reconstruction score for those students that *do not* study Engineering or Health care than for those that *do* study these specializations. These are interesting findings, as Engineering already showed a negative effect on the students' integration score, but Health care now also shows this negative effect, instead of its previous positive effect on integration.

Many of the discussed results give an important insight in what the effects of SPARK's practice are on the students that participate in the HES program, both in their host countries now as possibly in their home countries in the future. Now, this practice will be combined with the discussed theory, which will answer the third and last sub-question:



3. How do SPARK's efforts in its HES program align with the theoretical empowerment of refugees to engage in integration and reconstruction efforts in their host and home countries, in line with the LRRD framework?

In the theoretical framework it was argued that higher education can facilitate relief, rehabilitation and development at the same time, therefore suggesting an additional way of using the LRRD framework. The benefits of higher education for refugee students were explained and were further scrutinized in the analysis of the HES Progress survey. The outcome of that analysis shows to support the argument that higher education can facilitate students on the short term (supporting integration), while at the same time facilitating longer term development (willingness to engage in reconstruction).

Another topic that was discussed in the theory that seemed to align with SPARK's practice is the importance of the extracurricular activities, with language training in particular. All three interviewees stated multiple times what the importance for refugee students is to learn the language of the host country in order to survive and thrive there. In the theoretical framework it was noted that most academic literature about refugee students focuses on students in Western countries, therefore studying different languages and cultures. It was questioned whether higher education in the neighboring states of Syria could alleviate this language barrier, as those local languages are closer to Arabic, the students' mother tongue. This did seem to be the case for the students in Lebanon, where the integration scores were significantly higher than those of students from other host countries. However, Arabic is the lingua franca in Lebanon, which therefore makes integration easier. There still seemed to be a considerable language barrier between Turkish and Arabic, which needs to be overcome with language training and courses.

One of the topics that was highly apparent in the quantitative analysis, but did not result from either the literature study or the interviews, was the difference between male and female students regarding their integration and willingness to contribute to reconstruction. The gender division was near equal in the Progress survey, but male students nevertheless scored higher on both assessed scores.

Altogether, this study has shown to support some of the current theories on integration and reconstruction for young refugees, but has suggested several new insights and perspectives. Next, some new questions and topics that have arisen during this research will be elaborated in the discussion, along with some of the shortcomings of the study.



## *5.2. Discussion*

During this research, several issues have arisen that might compromise the results of it. Moreover, several new questions have come to light, which will be discussed in the context of future research recommendations.

The first and most important issue that needs to be taken into account when interpreting the results of this study is the complexity of the constructs integration and reconstruction. As was mentioned in the theoretical framework, both constructs deal with many different actors and dimensions, which makes a clear-cut definition and research policy impossible to identify. The focus of this research was on higher education, which excludes many political, economic and cultural aspects from consideration. Therefore, it should be taken into account that both the integration and the reconstruction scores do not paint the perfect picture of the students' actual situations and are much more complicated in reality. This could, for example, also explain why the integration construct was not reliable in the quantitative analysis. Another possible reason for this is that the construction of both scores was not directly based on previous models on integration and reconstruction, and therefore being untested. Moreover, it was assumed that students who are not planning to return to Syria in the next five years are unlikely to contribute to engage in Syria's reconstruction. They were therefore not included in the reconstruction score, although there are several ways they could contribute to reconstruction efforts, such as by transferring money or knowledge to their home countries. Limited previous quantitative research on these constructs and the link between them made it necessary to manually compose the scores for this research, which makes them susceptible to flaws. It is SPARK's aim to facilitate the students with the possibility of returning to Syria, but the many other possibilities of contributing to its reconstruction makes way for different types of future research.

Another important issue to take note of in the interpretation of the results concerns the research population itself. Despite the large group of students with a near equal gender division, the distribution of the students across the host countries was skewed. Many students from Turkey and Lebanon participated in the survey, whereas the students from Iraq-KRG, Jordan and Palestine were underrepresented. Moreover, the limited access to the internet for the students prevented them from participating in the interviews for this research. This makes that their views and ideas are only represented in their survey answers, rather than those answers being elaborated in an interview. Therefore, it was chosen to interview the SPARK members as a second-best option. However, all three SPARK members that were interviewed are based in Turkey, which prevents a comprehensive view on the target audience.



The interviews with the SPARK members provided ways to discuss several topics that could not be scrutinized in the quantitative data analysis. However, many of the indicators that *were* included in the integration and reconstruction scores were still not thoroughly scrutinized, as they were merely a part of the final scores. The opportunity to test the relationship between these indicators and the constructs was therefore missed, although this could have provided interesting insights into the students' integration and willingness to contribute to reconstruction in the future. A different way of assessing the quantitative analysis in future research could possibly provide answers to these questions.

Furthermore, SPARK's HES program functioned as this research' case study, which means that future research on integration and reconstruction for refugee students would possibly need more or different indicators and tools. The research population was large, but specific, where the students are dependent on their grants provided by SPARK. This dependency also indicates the crucial vigilance when it comes to the students' survey answers.

Nevertheless, it seems important to conduct such further research when it comes to higher education for student refugees and the connection between their integration and their possible desire to return to their home countries to engage in its reconstruction. Furthermore, in a few years, it will become even more interesting whether the students actually will return, because of the education they were provided with. This thesis has shown that, in this case, this connection between education, integration and reconstruction is more apparent than the current academic debate suggests it to be. More qualitative research could shed light on the students' situation in their host countries and their view on their future, either if this is in a host, home or third country.



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<https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>



## ANNEX 1 – Progress survey

nr	Question	Answer													
Personal Information															
1	Nationality	Syrian	Turkish	Lebanese	Jordanian	Iraqi-KRG	Palestinian	Other							
2	If Syrian, area of origin (If not Syrian, please tick 'Not applicable')	Aleppo	Al-Hasakeh	Ar-Raqqa	As-Sweida	Dar'a	Deir-ez-Zor	Hama	Homs	Idleb	Lattakia	Quneitra	Damascus	Tartouss	Not applicable
3	Current place of residence	Turkey	Lebanon	Jordan	Iraq-KRG	Palestine									
4	Currently living in a refugee camp	Yes	No												
5	Gender	Male	Female												
6	Age	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	Older				
7	Deceased father	Yes	No												
8	Disability (e.g. long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which might hinder your full and effective participation in society. This	Yes	No												



	includes chronic disease)														
9	I have a family I take care of	Yes	No												
10	The current monthly income of my family is	Zero	Low (below subsistence )	Medium (enough for subsistence )	High (above subsistence)										
11	My current monthly income without my scholarship is	Zero	Low (below subsistence )	Medium (enough for subsistence )	High (above subsistence)	I don't have a family I take care of									
12	Type of current studies	Bachelor	Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) diploma)	Short Course (Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) certificate											
13	Year of study (in case of short course/TVET Certificate, please tick 'Not applicable)	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Not applicable									
14	If you are studying for a Bachelor's degree, what is your academic specialiation?	Engineering	Natural Sciences	Medical Sciences	Economics	Humanities	Education	Health Care	Business & Management (Accounting & Marketing)	Construction	Design & Architecture	Other	Not applicable		
15	If you are studying for a TVET diploma, which sector does your diploma relate to?	Education	Health Care	Engineering & Mechanics	Business & Management (Accounting & Marketing)	Construction	Design & Architecture	Other	Not applicable						



16	If you are studying for a TVET certificate (previously called 'short course'), which sector does your certificate relate to?	Education	Health Care	Engineering & Mechanics	Business & Management (Accounting & Marketing)	Construction	Design & Architecture	Other	Not applicable						
17	Did you attend any remedial courses offered by SPARK before starting your educational programme?	Yes	No												
18	If yes, which course did you attend?	English	Biology	Chemistry	Philosophy	Mathematics	Sociology	Psychology	Other						
Contribution to the reconstruction of Syria and/or to the well-being of host communities															
19	I currently participate in a volunteer project/activity in my community.	Yes	No												
20	I currently occupy a leadership/influential position within an organisation/group that contributes directly to my community.	Yes	No												
21	I occupy a leadership/influential position within an organisation/group that contributes to the reconstruction of Syria.	Yes	No												
22	I have started a non-governmental organisation (NGO),	Yes	No												



	or creative works, etc. that contributes to my community.														
23	I have a salaried employment position.	Yes	No												
24	(if having a salaried employment position) My salary is sufficient to take care of my family.	Yes	No	Not applicable											
25	(if having a salaried employment position) My work contributes directly to my current community.	Yes	No	Not applicable											
26	(if having a salaried employment position) My work contributes directly to the reconstruction of Syria.	Yes	No	Not applicable											
Motivation for future activities at the likely place of residency															
27	In 5 years, it is most likely that I will live in	My current (host) country	Syria	A third country											
28	In 5 years, it is likely that I will work in a civic leadership position in that country (which you stated above: host or third country or Syria)	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
29	In 5 years, it is likely that I will start a non-governmental	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								



	organisation (NGO) in that country (which you stated above: host or third country or Syria)														
30	In 5 years, it is likely that I will start a business in that country (which you stated above: host or third country or Syria)	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
Economic empowerment assessment															
31	I already know what type of business I would like to open (if you have already started a business or you're not interested in opening a business, please tick 'Not applicable')	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
32	(if you already know what type of business you would like to open) I envision my business in the following sector	OPEN OPTION													
33	The internship that I participated was useful for me (if you didn't participate in this activity please tick 'Not applicable')	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								



34	The dissemination workshop that I participated was useful for me (if you didn't participate in this activity please tick 'Not applicable').	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
35	The entrepreneurship training that I participated was useful for me (if you didn't participate in this activity please tick 'Not applicable').	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
36	The entrepreneurship bootcamp that I participated was useful for me (if you didn't participate in this activity please tick 'Not applicable').	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
37	The seminar on the economic reconstruction of Syria that I participated was useful for me (if you didn't participate in this activity please tick 'Not applicable').	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
38	The business plan competition was very useful for me (if you didn't	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								



	participate in this activity please tick 'Not applicable').						
39	The coaching to start my business was very useful for me (if you didn't participate in this activity please tick 'Not applicable').	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable
40	The financial support to start my business was very useful for me (if you didn't participate in this activity please tick 'Not applicable').	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable

Global citizenship assessment

41	I am interested in global events and their effects on people	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree								
42	I actively connect with people from other cultures because I value them and their point of view	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree								
43	I actively connect to people in other countries, because I know my local actions can affect them	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree								
44	I believe the needs of other people are equally important as my own and	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree								



	change is achieved by working together														
45	I think sustainable development is important for future generations, therefore I try to protect the earth	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
46	I am aware of universal human rights and actively support their promotion	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
Civic leadership and advocacy assessment															
47	I am well aware of the issues more pressing in my community	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
48	People often come to me for advice and consoling	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
49	I am actively involved in a religious, governmental or non-governmental organisation (NGO) in my community	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
50	I am good at motivating people.	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
Satisfaction of with SPARK's student services															
51	The information I received from SPARK before applying for a	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									



	scholarship was sufficient														
52	I was able to get sufficient support from SPARK during my application process	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
53	Since I have my scholarship it is easy to receive answers on my questions from SPARK	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
54	It is easy for me to express my complaints to SPARK	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
55	I believe that my complaints are addressed by SPARK	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
56	I am fully aware of the student services that SPARK offers	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
57	It is easy for me to access the student services that SPARK offers	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
58	I am satisfied with the psycho-social support I receive(d) from SPARK (if you didn't receive this service please tick 'Not applicable')	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
59	I am satisfied with the special support for disabled students I receive(d) from	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								



	SPARK (if you didn't receive this service please tick 'Not applicable')														
60	I am satisfied with the legal counselling and advice I receive(d) from SPARK (if you didn't receive this service please tick 'Not applicable')	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
61	I am satisfied with the remedial course(s) I receive(d) from SPARK (if you didn't receive this service please tick 'Not applicable')	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
62	I am satisfied with the summer course(s) that I receive(d) from SPARK (if you didn't receive this service please tick 'Not applicable')	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
63	I am satisfied with the language training I receive(d) from SPARK (if you didn't receive this service please tick 'Not applicable')	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
64	I am satisfied with the career counselling I receive(d) from SPARK (if you didn't	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								



	receive this service please tick 'Not applicable')														
65	I am satisfied with the monthly allowance provided to me by SPARK (if you were not entitled to an allowance please tick 'Not applicable')	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
66	Overall, I am satisfied with the support I receive(d) from SPARK	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
Study progress and educational experience															
67	Since the beginning of my education, I passed	All my exams	More than half of my exams	Half of my exams	Less than half of my exams	None of my exams									
68	I am satisfied with my study progress so far	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
69	I am satisfied with my overall educational experience so far	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
70	I am satisfied with the quality of education in my current country	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
71	I believe my study has increased my employability	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
72	Using SIS to access information regarding my scholarship and extra-curricular	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								



	activities has been easy (if you don't use SIS in this way please tick 'Not Applicable')														
Educational barriers															
73	My travel/commute to my current studies costs me a lot of time	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
74	My travel/commute to my current studies costs me a lot of money	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
75	Lack of books and other study material is a problem for me in my current studies	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
76	Lack of computer literacy is a problem for me in my current studies	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree									
77	Lack of language skills is a problem for me in my current studies (if your studies are in your mother-tongue/own language, please tick 'Not applicable')	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable								
Completed studies effectiveness (please fill this section if you have already graduated from a SPARK funded study programme e.g. TVET and short courses - if not having already graduated from any SPARK funded study programme then please tick Not Applicable in the questions below)															
78	I have already graduated from a	Technical and Vocational Education	Short Course (Technical and	Not applicable/ I am still studying											



		and Training (TVET) diploma)	Vocational Education and Training (TVET) certificate	and haven't graduated from any SPARK funded study programm e											
79	<b>The field of the study programme that I graduated was</b>	Education	Health Care	Engineering & Mechanics	Business & Managemen t (Accounting & Marketing)	Construction	Design & Architectur e	Other	Not applicable						
80	<b>(if you have a salaried employment position) My employment is relevant to the studies that I completed (if not currently employed please tick 'Not applicable' )</b>	Yes	No	Not applicable											
81	<b>I have participated in a career counselling service</b>	Yes	No												
82	<b>The studies that I completed had a positive impact on my own financial situation</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable/ I am still studying and haven't graduated from any SPARK funded study programme								



83	<b>The studies that I completed had a positive impact on the financial situation of my family</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable/ I am still studying and haven't graduated from any SPARK funded study programme								
84	<b>The studies that I completed helped me in becoming a leader</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable/ I am still studying and haven't graduated from any SPARK funded study programme								
85	<b>The studies that I completed helped me in developing social skills</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable/ I am still studying and haven't graduated from any SPARK funded study programme								
86	<b>The studies that I completed helped me in developing advocacy skills</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable/ I am still studying								



							and haven't graduated from any SPARK funded study programme								
87	<b>The studies that I completed helped me in developing time management skills</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable/ I am still studying and haven't graduated from any SPARK funded study programme								
88	<b>The studies that I completed helped me to prepare for a successful career</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not applicable/ I am still studying and haven't graduated from any SPARK funded study programme								
	<b>Please write here any further remarks you might have relevant to your studies and the support you receive</b>														



from SPARK (such as major needs in your studies , which are not currently addressed by SPARK's student services, or feedback on the scholarship program and the quality of implementation as well anything related to this survey)									
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