



Problems Encountered in The Education of Refugees in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the educational problems of refugee students of Syrian origin. It is a qualitative research designed as a phenomenological study. Phenomenology, a qualitative research method, was the design of choice. The sample group consisted of two administrators, two school counselors, and 11 classroom teachers from a temporary education center in Altındağ/Ankara, Turkey. The data of the study were collected using the interview method. The data were analyzed using content analysis. According to the research findings, Syrian refugee children face socio-emotional, family, language, and school problems and hate speech, discrimination, isolation, and exclusion. Syrian refugee children should undergo an orientation and preparation program before enrolling in Turkey's public schools. Seminars should be offered to the Turkish population to help them develop empathy for refugees and understand what they are going through. Teachers should be trained in multicultural education.

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1. Introduction

Migration is a stress-inducing life experience (Şahin, 2014). They are losing loved ones, living amid an armed conflict or war, and witnessing victim of sexual exploitation and abuse cause mental problems (Candappa, 2000; Güçer, Karaca & Dinçer, 2013). Such traumatic events make children feel worthless and unaccepted, resulting in isolation and alienation (Rothbart & Jones, 1998). Migration can cause post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, nightmares, aggression, memory loss, loneliness, low self-esteem, and poor social cohesion and academic performance in children (Yayan, Düken, Özdemir & Çelebioğlu, 2020; Samara, El Asam, Khadaroo & Hammuda, 2020; Khamis, 2019; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Immigrants need skills and coping strategies to deal with stressors. Refugee children who face numerous challenges in the host culture become more vulnerable to peer bullying or external interventions (Chuang & Monero, 2011; Fandrem, Strohmeier & Jonsdottir, 2012). Therefore, schools have to provide a safe environment for refugee children, whose life opportunities have become more difficult due to social prejudices. Schools should increase access to education for refugee children and provide opportunities for self-development, regardless of their status and background (Arnot & Pirson, 2005).

The Syrian civil war has taken its toll on women and children, causing deep wounds and mental, social, and behavioral problems that are yet to heal (Measham et al., 2014). Uprooted and displaced, Syrian families have difficulty supporting their children and providing a suitable environment for their development (Lunneblad, 2017). The ongoing stress and dire conditions are still negatively affecting refugee children's well-being and

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development in all aspects of life (Samara, El Asam, Khadaroo & Hammuda, 2020). For example, six in ten children witnessed violence, and two in ten were subject to physical or psychological violence during the Syrian civil war (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Along with all this, the education problems of refugees have also come to the fore. Education is a critical tool for refugee children to adapt to society. For a healthy integration, the education rights of refugees should be recognized and improved. Therefore, the importance given to education should be increased.

1.1. Refugee's Right to Education

Article 22 of the 1951 Refugee Convention stipulates that the Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals regarding free and compulsory primary education and introduce a set of regulations that allow them to enjoy their right to education. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2000), education is a fundamental right, and a useful way to treat traumatized refugee children. However, Zygmunt Bauman argues that globalization, mobility, diaspora, and forced migration make it difficult for people to enjoy their modern rights (Pinson & Arnot, 2007). Turkey hosts about two million refugee children, about 450,000 of whom are deprived of their education rights (UNHCR, 2017). The circular titled "Measures Regarding Persons of Syrian Origin outside the Camps in Turkey" (issued on April 26, 2013) was the first step taken by the Turkish Ministry of National Education (MNE) towards the education of refugees. With the circular, the MoNE aimed to identify the education centers providing education to Syrian refugee children (Seydi, 2014). The Circular "Educational Services for Persons of Syrian Origin under Temporary Protection" of 26 September 2013 provides for the MNE to coordinate the education of Syrian children, select teachers from volunteers, develop a curriculum that is based on but independent of the Syrian education system, and ensure that Turkish education and vocational training are offered to those who so desire. The circular introduces significant decisions and improvements for Syrians to enjoy their education rights. According to another circular titled "Educational Services for Foreigners" issued on September 26, 2013, foreigners can pursue a degree after they have provided a certificate of equivalence qualifying them for admission to universities in Turkey, and those who have not yet registered can, if they apply, pursue a degree starting from the grade they were in back in the country of origin (Seydi, 2014). In pursuance of the circular, temporary education centers (TECs) were established, where the MNE implemented the EU-funded project "Support for the Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System" (SISCTES) to increase Syrian children's access to high-quality education (UNHCR, 2019). The TECs provided Syrian children with an education based on the Syrian curriculum. The circular also prescribed that refugee children be provided with Turkish education, vocational courses, and counselling service to help them adapt to school. Lastly, the government decided to gradually shut down the TECs and integrate Syrian children into the Turkish education system (Demirci, 2017). Syrian children still continue their education in the Turkish education system, with the same rights as other children.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

Given the importance of acculturation in the education of refugees, the theoretical framework of this study was based on John Berry's taxonomy (1974) consisting of four types of acculturation strategies: assimilation (melting pot), separation, marginalization, and integration (democratic pluralism). Assimilation is a process by which a person loses her ties with her culture, language, values, beliefs, and traditions completely when absorbed into the dominant culture. In assimilation, the person adopts the dominant culture to attain shared goals and enjoy opportunities. Separation is a process by which a person clings tightly to her own culture, language, values, beliefs, and traditions while rejecting the dominant culture and avoiding communication with its members. An example of separation is newcomers moving into ghettos and separating themselves from the rest of the society. Marginalization is a process in which a person rejects both his own and the dominant culture because the former caused his displacement in the first place, while the latter discriminates against him. Therefore, neither of the two cultures means something to her. Lastly, integration is a process by which a person receives an education that integrates her own culture, beliefs, and traditions.

Cultural diversity promotes academic performance and socioemotional development. Schachner (2017) argues that equality, inclusion, and cultural pluralism are vital in educating people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Refugees should be provided with education, employment opportunities, healthcare service, and accommodation to help them adapt to the dominant culture. Other factors that make the adaptation

successful are communicating and creating social relationships with the local community, participating in social activities, removing language and cultural barriers, and having a sense of security (Soylu, Kaysılı & Sever, 2020; Çelik & İçduygu, 2019). Lastly, refugees enjoying their fundamental and special rights are more likely to adapt to the host society (Ager & Strang, 2008). Adaptation's success depends primarily on whether the host society is open to cultural diversity. Refugees can easily integrate into a society that respects cultural diversity (Berry, 2011). It should also be stated that respect for cultural pluralism and diversity means that the host society may sometimes change its norms and expectations that define what it deems to be proper and legitimate (Castles, De Haas & Miller, 2013).

There is little published research addressing the educational problems faced by refugee children. Turkey hosts two million refugee children who need effective education and support for well-being and adaptation (Kağnıcı, 2017). This study aimed to identify the educational problems faced by refugee children. We believe that results will pave the way for further research and guide policymakers in designing educational programs and reforms.

This study aimed to determine what kind of educational problems refugee students of Syrian origin face and what kind of attitude teachers and managers have towards them. To this end, the study sought answers to the following question:

- What kind of educational problems do Syrian refugee students face?
- What is the interaction like between Turkish and Syrian students?
- What should be done to ensure that refugee children adapt to life in Turkey?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Model

This study adopted a descriptive phenomenology design, a qualitative research method, to analyze what teachers and administrators think of refugee students. Qualitative research focuses on analyzing, exploring, and interpreting a phenomenon or event as it is (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Creswell, 2009). Descriptive phenomenology design is used to analyze phenomena or events we are aware of but lack a deep understanding (Reiners, 2012). In qualitative research, the researcher takes an inductive approach to develop a research design and collecting data and is flexible enough to modify the former based on the latter. The most important feature of qualitative research is that it focuses on what people with a shared experience of a phenomenon or an event think about it and then evaluates the situation and process that has led them to think that way (Yıldırım, 1999).

2.2. Research Sample

The sample consisted of two administrators, two school counsellors, and 11 classroom teachers (14 Turkish and one Syrian; 13 women and two men) of a TEC in Altındağ/Ankara, Turkey. Participants were recruited using homogeneous sampling, a nonprobability purposive sampling method. Homogeneous sampling focuses on situations or events with minimal within-group variations (Büyüköztürk et al., 2012). Participants had 1-2 years of work experience. A participant with a sound knowledge of Turkish was recruited because TECs had no Syrian educators who could speak Turkish.

2.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedure

Qualitative data were collected in the spring semester of the 2017-2018 academic year using a semi-structured interview based on expert feedback and a literature review and needs analysis conducted by the researchers. The interview form consisted of nine open-ended questions addressing what educational issues and problematic behavior teachers think refugee students have and what they think should be done to improve the education for refugee students (Büyüköztürk et al., 2012). Three experts in preschool and counselling evaluated the form for language, meaning, clarity, and content validity.

2.4. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using content analysis to develop themes and codes (Patton, 2002). Content analysis encodes written or verbal statements and converts them into numerical values for detailed analysis (Creswell,

2009). Content analysis allows the researcher to associate and interpret themes and make predictions based on them (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The researchers followed the three consecutive stages Miles and Huberman (1994) recommended for qualitative data analysis. First, they read the transcripts (raw data) over and over again to get a general idea and then sorted them for analysis by removing the irrelevant and redundant information (data reduction) (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2012). Second, two researchers coded the data separately, coded the relevant data, and developed themes (patterns and inferences). Third, they produced results and interpreted them inductively (conclusion and confirmation).

The researchers and another independent researcher checked the themes and codes repeatedly to increase reliability. They converted the data into frequencies and used direct quotations from participants to provide an accurate and coherent picture of their views. Data presentation was based on frequency, quotation selection, diversity, and extreme examples (Carley, 1993). They specified the codes on which they agreed and disagreed and then discussed the latter to reach a consensus. An interrater agreement greater than 90% indicates acceptable reliability in qualitative research. The researchers used the formula [Reliability = (number of agreements) / (number of agreements + number of disagreements)*100] (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and calculated the interrater reliability as .947, indicating high reliability. All participants were assigned codes based on their initials (M.T., Y.T., I.T, etc.).

In qualitative research, validity refers to the degree to which a measure accurately measures what it intends to measure, while reliability is about consistency (Creswell, 2009). To ensure validity, the researchers looked into the school environment and needs before the study and then had the interviewees review the transcripts and interpretations for approval (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To ensure reliability, the researchers consulted with experts (preschool education, assessment and evaluation, and counselling) to develop measures and then code and analyze the data.

2.5. Ethical

Prior to data collection, the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Hacettepe University (date: 09.05.2017 – number: 433/1744). The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews in the teachers' or counsellors' room after informing the teachers about the purpose and procedure of the study and obtaining consent from those who agreed to participate. They recorded all interviews (361 minutes and 27 seconds in total) and remained as neutral as possible during the interview.

3. Findings

This section addressed participants' views of educational problems faced by refugee students of Syrian origin.

3.1. Challenges of Education for Refugee Students

The problems faced by refugee students were grouped under four categories: socioemotional, family, language, and school. Participants addressed aggression, school adaptation problems, disciplinary problems, lying, and peer-bullying as socioemotional problems. Family problems were cultural differences, malnutrition, poor self-care, and a lack of family engagement and appropriate accommodation. The most prominent language problems were as follows: refugee students cannot express themselves, teachers cannot communicate with parents, schools do not have enough educational material, and there is no prep program for refugee students. School problems were multigrade classes, poor physical conditions, inadequate transportation, and understaffing.

The following are direct quotations about aggression and low school adaptation:

Y.T. *"They [refugee students] beat the Turkish students, and tear their notebooks, or walk around and make too much noise during class. They are too prone to violence, I mean, they're always using violence, even their games are very violent; I mean, they just don't have a culture of playing games in peace. They make toy guns out of paper and play-shoot one another; that's just what they do all the time."*

P.T. *"The war is a recurring theme in their games; I mean, they are sometimes very aggressive, so you can see that in their games, too. For example, they slap each other on the back of the neck and run away. Turkish students just play jump rope, or, I don't know, games that are appropriate to their age, but Syrian students play violent games, so, this shows that they've been affected by the war, even if they didn't witness it in person."*

M.T. *"Yesterday, for example, when I was on duty, I broke up several fights in the corridor. I asked them why they were fighting, and they said, "We were not fighting, we were just playing games." So that's how they play games, even their games are violent, they kick and shove each other, it's very violent. I do not think the war is the only reason. I mean, even those who did not witness the war are like that. I think that's how they communicate. I mean, the culture of violence is too pervasive."*

K. T. *"I especially observe that some children are prone to violence and have trouble adjusting to their classmates and interacting with them."*

The interviews show that aggression/violence and a lack of family engagement and self-expression skills undermine refugee students' education.

3.2. Interaction between Syrian and Turkish Students

Participants claim that refugee students face bias, marginalization, and discrimination, which they say is decreasing over time. They do, however, mention that refugee kids are going through an identity crisis. Turkish pupils do not want refugee students as classmates or friends. Here are a few direct quotes about Syrian and Turkish students' interactions: I.T. *"It was more common last year. I mean, parents were more prejudiced against their children studying together with refugee students, but I guess they've kind of come to terms with it. All our students are Syrians, so we don't see it that much in our classrooms, it's more apparent in mixed classrooms, but we've had some incidence in our classrooms, too. For example, there are GEMS (Great Explorations in Math and Science) sessions in the afternoon. Once I walked into the classroom and saw that the curtains were all torn; when I asked who did it, they all said "Syrians!," and I was like, "Aren't you all Syrians?" and they all crack up. Refugee students are going through a phase; they feel like they belong to neither here nor there; I think they are in some sort of limbo."*

Ö.T. *"Once in class, I unfurled a Syrian flag, and they got into a hot debate over whether it was the Syrian flag or not. They don't even know what the Syrian flag looks like. They are having some sort of an identity crisis. I ask them about their national anthem, and one of them starts reciting it, and another snaps at him and tells him not to recite it. They have mixed feelings about their own identity. I don't know how to address that; I don't know what to do to help them integrate into society. They should mingle with the Turkish community and live where they live."*

Y.T. addressed Turkish parents' existing, but slowly diminishing, prejudice against Syrian students:

Y.T. *"At first, that was the case. For example, I had some parents of first graders who were prejudiced against Syrian students. Actually, it was the parents, not the kids, because kids don't discriminate against kids. They just think of them as friends to play together. But some parents didn't want their kids to make friends with Syrian students. They told them to stay away from them, saying that they were dirty and bad, which affected how Turkish students looked at their Syrian peers. But I didn't let that happen, and I talked a lot about it to the parents. They filed tones of complaints with BIMER (Prime Ministry Communication Center) and the school administration, saying that they didn't want their kids studying together with Syrian students, like they didn't want them in their kids' classrooms."*

M.T. *"It's quite different today than it was about three months ago. Now it is impossible to separate Turkish students from their Syrian classmates. So I think that [discrimination] is avoidable. I mean, these kids are influenced by their parents and social media, but when they meet them in person, they change their minds about them."*

Some participants stated that Turkish parents believed that refugee students of Syrian origin were positively discriminated against Turkish students:

H.T. *"Yes, absolutely. For example, neither Turkish students nor their parents like refugee students. I actually had an incident where a Turkish parent came at me and was all like, 'You're are taking their [Syrian refugees] side!, you are favoring them!'"*

Ö.T. *"International organizations supply books and materials to Syrian students, and when Turkish parents see that, they're like, 'Why don't you give stuff to our kids? They are the citizens of this country, but they [Syrian students] aren't; why are you giving them stuff but not to us?' Besides, kids who hear their parents say such things are affected by that."*

Some interviewees emphasized that the only way to fight discrimination against Syrian children and their parents is if teachers reach out to Turkish parents and help them develop empathy for refugees and understand what they go through:

A.T. *"Teachers should respond when they suspect even the tiniest bit of discrimination; that's how they can eliminate it, because kids know no discrimination unless taught by their parents. Teachers should talk to the parents of students who discriminate against their refugee peers, because kids take their parents seriously. In fact, some TV channels are saying terrible things about refugees, like 'Why are Syrians here?' and whatnot. Teachers should warn parents about that kind of stuff because kids learn discrimination from television, too; so, parents should be careful what their kids see on television."*

M.T. *"Some colleagues are too reactive; you'll see it yourself. A great responsibility falls on us teachers; I mean, we should be uniting, not dividing. We should eliminate any sort of discrimination and approach students in a welcoming way. It's not only teachers but also neighbours, and local communities that need to come to terms with the fact that we all live together."*

ME.T. *"Talking to the kids doesn't make much of a difference because they take their parents as role models. They listen to what you have to say, but it all goes in one ear and out the other. So, what we should do first is change the parents' minds to change the kids'. For example, this student keeps complaining about the Syrian students and says things like 'I want Syrians gone, I don't want them here, I don't want them in my classroom, Turks should have their own class, and Syrians should have their own.' I'm not surprised at all, because that's probably what he hears from his parents."*

As the quotes above illustrate, some teachers are concerned about Syrian students being discriminated against by their Turkish peers. However, some other teachers have reservations about letting Syrian students study together with Turkish students. They think that the former may be in danger of assimilation and alienation from their own culture. For example:

ME.T. *"Some parents say that their children forget to speak Arabic. For example, I have a Syrian student who speaks Turkish impeccably, and I ask him to translate what he said into Arabic, but he says he can't. So, they are forgetting their native language. Still, our goal is not to alienate them from their cultural identity, we want to integrate them into our culture, but while doing that, we want them to retain their Syrian/Arabic culture. But that doesn't seem to be the case; I mean, they end up being alienated from their culture as they adopt the way of living here. That's what Syrian parents object to; they say they may as well send their kids to a mosque."*

Ö.T. *"Most refugee parents don't want to send their kids to Turkish schools. We offer half-day Arabic education, so that's why they are okay sending their kids here. We have a hard time getting them to enroll their kids in Turkish schools because, obviously, they are afraid of assimilation. I mean, they know that Turkish schools do not teach their language and history and Syrian culture."*

Children lose their ties with their culture more quickly because they are more open to adopting a new way of living than their parents. First, they lose command of their native language, which is the main component of cultural identity. Language attrition results in a profound cultural chasm between refugee children and their parents (UHNCR, 1994). Therefore, multicultural education is of paramount significance.

3.3. Refugee Children's Adaptation to Social Life and School

Multicultural education is based on the premise that respect for diversity, effective dialogue, and combating prejudice, racism, and xenophobia promote social cohesion. The following are some quotations from participants about multicultural education:

Ö.T. *"We should have been taught about Syrian culture; I mean, we knew nothing about the daily life in Syria, and what is considered wrong or inappropriate there, or what is sacred to them. Yes, we have something in common when it comes to religion, but there are things that make us different. But we don't know any of that; I mean, for example, I use a word during class, but it turns out to be a slang word in Arabic, but I have no idea!, so the whole class bursts out laughing."*

A.T. *"We should eliminate exclusion, isolation, or prejudice so that Syrians can adapt to Turkish culture. Besides, people should receive a multilingual and multicultural education, and everyone should respect each other. Turkish people should do more to learn about the culture of Syrian people; that's how two peoples can learn from each other, and*

that's how they know that when someone does something wrong, they do it not because they are bad but because it's their culture."

Ö.T. *"First, the ghettos should be closed down to promote refugee children's integration. But the most important thing is raising public awareness. Ghettos pop up because Turkish people discriminate against Syrian refugees. Our school is a school for Syrians. There is also a school for Arabic people, where most students are Arabs, who don't speak Turkish at all. In its corridors, labs, and classrooms, noone speaks Turkish, except for the teachers, so it takes the students forever to learn Turkish and Turkish culture. But if those kids were accepted by society, then they would be all around the city and learn Turkish and Turkish culture from their neighbours and local communities, and friends."*

H.T. *"If you accept that they [Syrian refugees] have their own country, that we have the same faith, and that we are neighboring countries, and if you draw a Syrian flag next to the Turkish flag on the blackboard, then all negative perceptions are removed; as it turned out, that was all I had to do all this time, and it took me a whole month to figure that out. To help them adapt to our culture, we should respect their culture, language, traditions and customs.. Yes, we are Turkish, and we are here, and they are Syrians, and they are here, too; we all are here. When you get this across to them, they become more open to education. So, we should have a policy of acceptance. Once we do that, they lay down their shields."*

As the quotes above illustrate, teachers are aware that they should respect the culture and values of refugee students and provide them with multicultural education. They also believe that refugee children who participate more in social life and communicate more with locals are more likely to adapt to Turkish culture.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

Refugee children of Syrian origin face socio-emotional, family, language and academic problems throughout their school years in Turkey. Turkish parents discriminate against them, and Turkish students neither want to make friends nor study with them. Although attitudes and behaviors toward refugee children are sometimes positive due to feelings of empathy and compassion (Nickerson & Louis, 2008), settled society has a negative outlook that usually takes the form of prejudice, racism, social exclusion, and xenophobia (Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller & Lalonde, 2007; Mestheneos & Loannidi, 2002). The most prevalent socioemotional problem is refugee children's tendency to violence. According to Haider (2010), children subject to violence and aggressive behavior are more likely to normalize and tolerate violence. Our results also show that refugee students normalize violence and use it a lot in their games, probably due to their traumatic experiences or social exclusion. However, they have been living in Turkey for a long time, and therefore, their tendency to violence may have more to do with the violence they witness in their homes.

The major family-related problem refugee students face is the lack of family engagement in their education, which is also associated with cultural differences. Szente, Hoot, and Taylor (2006) report that parental engagement in preschool education among refugees is so low that some parents do not even go to school to meet their children's teachers the whole school year. Not only are refugee parents not engaged in their children's education, but they mostly ask for help and talk about their economic problems during seminars and home-visits (Göktuna Yaylacı, Serpil & Yaylacı, 2017). Our participants also stated that they could reach their Syrian students' parents in urgent situations only by phone or Syrian colleagues. According to Rousseau, Drapeau, and Corin (1996), cultural difference is the greatest challenge for teachers. Soyly, Kaysılı, and Sever (2020) argue that teachers with little knowledge of refugee students' cultural backgrounds are more likely to have difficulty providing education, which effectively integrates refugee children into the host culture. In general, refugee families cannot participate in their children's education because they know little about the education system back in the country of origin. Some refugee parents may even pressure their children to drop out and get a job to help support the family (Taylor, 2004).

The language barrier is another obstacle to education. Syrian refugees cannot speak Turkish well, and therefore, have difficulty expressing themselves and communicating with teachers. Hurley, Medici, Stewart, and Cohen (2011) state that refugee students feel bad because they cannot communicate with their teachers due to the language barrier. Research, in general, shows that the language barrier prevents children from accessing high-quality education (Başar, Akan & Çiftçi, 2018; Erdem, 2017; Kardeş & Akman, 2018; Tosun, Yorulmaz, Tekin & Yıldız, 2018). Children who receive language support from their parents are more likely to have high academic performance (Yurdakul & Tok, 2018).

Lastly, refugee children face school-related problems, such as multigrade classes, poor physical conditions, inadequate transportation, understaffing, and the lack of educational materials and prep programs. According to Madziva and Thondhlana (2017), schools that want to provide quality education to refugee students should have enough teachers, use inclusive education models, recognise and meet the emotional and mental needs of special groups, promote peer interaction, and build a good relationship with families. Schools should also inform families about their rights and responsibilities and enforce policies against peer-bullying and racism (Rubinstein-Avila, 2017; Small, Kim, Praetorius & Mitschke, 2016).

Berry, defines four types of acculturation strategies: assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. An important reason for social segregation is prejudice, exclusion, isolation, and discrimination. Almost all participants stated that Turkish students are prejudiced against Syrian students. Refugees are subject to discrimination, exclusion, and racism (Topaloğlu & Özdemir, 2020; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017). According to our participants, Turkish people should be educated to reduce discrimination and stigma surrounding Syrian refugees because Turkish students learn them from their parents.

For long-term psychological well-being, refugee children should be able to speak their mother tongue and maintain their familial and cultural ties (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017). Our results show that refugee families want to keep in touch with their cultural and historical roots because they fear that, otherwise, their children are in danger of being alienated from them. In connection with this, Syrian parents prefer to send their children to TECs that teach in their native language and curriculum (Emin, 2016). Our participants also pointed out that Syrian students become happier and more confident when they feel that their culture is respected. For example, Ö.T. stated that "Syrian students are happy when they hear me use an Arabic word." "...I learned a couple of Arabic words to win their hearts and show that I empathize with them." H.T. also noted that "You are done away with all negative perceptions when you draw a Syrian flag on the board right next to the Turkish flag." Children who forget their native language will likely suffer from disrupted family relations and poor communication and academic performance (Rubinstein-Avila, 2017).

Moreover, alienation can lead to depression (Martens, 2007). On the other hand, refugee students encouraged by their teachers to keep their cultural values alive and use their native language are more likely to adapt to school and have high academic performance. There is a positive relationship between academic achievement and self-confidence and acculturation (Brown & Lee, 2012; Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016), while a closed school culture and a language barrier lead to exclusion (Thomas, 2016). We can state that multicultural education is of paramount importance to allow minority groups or subgroups to enjoy their culture while receiving a high-quality education. Therefore, teachers should be encouraged to implement multicultural education.

Children who identify and take pride in their own culture and that of the host culture are more likely to turn into resilient, tolerant, and competent individuals who feel comfortable in both cultures (Costa, 2016). Teachers working with refugee students should consider their culture and experiences and introduce them to their classmates as individuals with equal rights. Teachers should respect all students, irrespective of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Mcbrien, 2017). Poureslami et al. (2013) maintain that early childhood education programs should be multicultural and respect different values, beliefs, and languages. According to Hek (2005), refugee children should be encouraged to be in touch with their culture to overcome the feeling of exclusion and build self-confidence. Our results show that teachers are aware that multicultural education that respects cultural differences can significantly contribute to the education of refugee students. However, they feel incompetent about it. For example, E. T. stated that "I have never been trained in multicultural education. The Turkish education system does little to none about it, so I did my best to learn about it." AR. T. also stated that "I don't think I'm competent enough, because we should have learned about it before starting our professional life." Teachers, in general, are incompetent in implementing multicultural education (Hurley et al., 2011) and teaching refugee students because they have difficulty understanding other cultures. Ferfolja (2009) states that teachers should be supported to provide a rich, egalitarian, and multicultural classroom environment that meets students' needs. The better the teacher-student relationship, the better the school adaptation (Nur et al., 2018). Overall, these studies indicate that teachers should be qualified to ensure that education programs targeting refugee students yield positive learning outcomes. In-class interventions can help teachers prevent prejudice and racism against refugee children (Şeker & Sirkeci, 2015).

5. Recommendations

The following are some recommendations based on the results:

- Syrian children should complete an orientation and preparatory program before enrolling in schools in Turkey.
- Seminars should be held for Turkish people to help them develop empathy for refugees and understand what they go through.
- Teachers should be trained in multicultural education.
- Schools should be provided with materials to promote multicultural education.

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