

Research Article

Teachers' Views on Parent Involvement for Refugee Children's Education

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Abstract

Wars, with their exhaustively long effects, cause people leave their countries and become refugees. Children are those who are affected most due to this situation. Undoubtedly, education is one of the basic rights of refugee children. Active and efficient family involvement is crucial to achieve the sufficient level in education. In this context, the aim of this study is to determine the level of parent involvement of refugee children. The study is designed as a phenomenological research. To this end, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with classroom teachers selected from those who have at least one refugee student in her/his classroom in Mersin, a metropolitan area and a city center in the southern region of Turkey. With its multi-cultural context, Mersin hosts around 200.000 refugees according to the statistics provided by Mersin governorate. Maximum variation sampling method has been used to determine the participants. According to the findings parent involvement is at low level for refugee students. Besides, it is determined that the parents of refugee students do not attend the parent-teacher meetings, they do not contact with teachers, and they do not support their children at home about their academic development. Parents' inability to speak Turkish (the native language of the teachers), their perception of their status in Turkey as temporary, the fact that they care physiological needs more than the education are found as major reasons of low parent involvement for refugee students.



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Introduction

Education is the unique determinant in improving individual's and society's level of welfare. When it comes to refugees, the role of the education is much more critical. As a matter of fact it is accepted by the majority of social scientists that education given to refugee children has a central role in adapting them to social life. Education is a period in which refugee children can adapt the hosting country's cultural values at the highest level (Emin, 2019). Refugee children are integrated into society by the help of schools (Rousseau & Guzder, 2008). It is significant that refugee children can be integrated into Turkish education system by accessing to well-qualified education. During

the children's process of adaptation to schools and the education system, the collaboration between school and parents have a significant role. The quality of education is based on active and efficient teacher-parent collaboration. To carry out the collaboration efficiently, both teachers and parents must establish open communication by understanding the importance of the children. Education involves several elements such as teacher, student, school, society and parents. The character and education of a child is primarily shaped by the family which is the kernel unit of the society. For this reason, family has a special role in child's educational life (Çayak, 2013). Considering the fact that parents are the first teachers of their children, parent involvement is crucial to integrate the education at home with the one given at school (Şahin & Ünver, 2005).

There are numerous advantages of collaboration between parents and schools related to a child's education. When education is carried out with family, it paves the way to find a common ground. Additionally, they try to understand each other in a respectful way and they try to reach an agreement on possible controversial issues. The collaborative approach affects child's education positively. Family and school act as teaching and training institutions for students. Under these circumstances, it is compulsory that both institutions collaborate with one another (Kaya, 2012). According to the relevant studies, parent involvement in children's education has many several positive results such as increasing the academic achievement (Kaya, 2012), making final behavioral change more permanent (Kandır, 2001), developing the children's sense of responsibility (Ünlü, 2005), and shaping the children's approaches to school (Celep, 2008).

Yüzgeç (2008) indicates that parents who involve in their children's education become part of the school and know school culture, so they can lead their students in a better way by creating an atmosphere of mutual trust with the school. Therefore, in this study, the level of parent involvement of refugee children studying at elementary school is analyzed.

Purpose of Research

This research aims at seeking answers for the following research questions:

- 1) What do parents think about the level of parent involvement in their children's education?
- 2) What are the factors which prevent parents from involving in their children's education?
- 3) What are the problems related to students whose parents don't involve in their education?
- 4) What can be done to increase the level of parent involvement of refugee children?

Methodology

Research Model

The research is designed as a qualitative one to determine the level of parent involvement of refugees in their children's education. The most essential feature of a qualitative research is that it tries to investigate an event, phenomenon, norm and value from the viewpoint of people who form the participants of the study. In the course of this analysis, the most important research strategies are focusing and understanding the special language, meanings, notions used by people on whom the study is conducted and finding out what do all those mean for these people (Ekiz, 2013). The research design of this study is phenomenology. Phenomenologic designs focus on phenomena which are observed superficially but can not be defined in detail; phenomenologic designs are used to explore these familiar phenomena in detail (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). In this study, the phenomenon pattern was used since it was aimed to reveal in depth the views and experiences of the refugee families about their children's participation in the educational process.

The Participants

The participants of the current research consist of 10 classroom teachers who have at least one refugee student in their classrooms in the city center of Mersin in Turkey a multi-cultural metropolitan area. Mersin hosts around 200.000 refugees according to the statistics provided by Mersin governorate (<https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-korumamiz-altindaki-suriyeliler>). The number of refugees in Mersin composes around %10 of the city's total population. To present the causes of problems in a detailed way, homogeneous sampling which is one of the purposeful sampling techniques is chosen, and participants who are working at schools that have high, middle, and low socio-economic classes are preferred according to maximum variation research technique. In this research, choosing participants who have different genders, professional seniority and education levels is preferred. There are more refugee students at the schools with students from low socio-economic class; thus more participants are chosen from these schools.

Data Collection Tool

The data of the study are obtained by using a semi-structured interview. In this technique, the researcher prepares the interview questions beforehand. Yet, the questions are open to be reformulated or reformed by the interviewer or the interviewee during the

interview. In such an interview, participants also have control over research (Ekiz, 2013). The semi-structured interview form is designed by researchers. In the process of designing the form, researchers has conferred on three academicians for the consistency and reliability of the questions (educational sciences, language, and assessment- evaluation expert). Some minor modifications are conducted on the interview form after taking experts' opinions. In that way, the final version of the form is composed. The questions on the form are related to the level of parent involvement of refugee parents, factors which barrier parent involvement in education, problems which are faced by children whose parents don't involve in education, and possible suggestions to increase the level of parent involvement in education.

Data Analysis

At the stage of analyzing the interview protocols conducted with classroom teachers working at elementary schools, firstly, the semi-structured interview forms are numbered as T1, T2... and the answers which are given for each questions are also listed below the titles of questions by using the same codes T1, T2, T3... . Then, the descriptive analysis is done and content analysis is used to analyze the data in detail. The most essential purpose of content analysis is to find out notions and relationships which can explain the collected data. The data, which is summarized and interpreted in the descriptive analysis, has been analyzed in a detailed way in content analysis to determine the themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). Then, the coded statements for each theme have been explored. Each code's frequency is also shown on tables. The data is supported and verified by excerpts from the interviews.

Findings

Findings related to the level of refugee parents involvement in their children's education

Table 1. Teacher opinions related to the level of refugee parents involvement in their children's education

Theme	Coded Statements	f
	Low level of involvement	10
The level of refugees'parent involvement in the education process	The fact that they don't know Turkish is a barrier to communication	4
	Parents don't participate in parent-teacher meetings	4
	Parents don't help their children with their homework	2
	They don't communicate with teachers related to their children's academic achievement and adaption to school.	4

As can be seen in Table 1, teachers state that the level of parent involvement in the education process is at low level. Some of the teachers who are asked for their opinions state that parents don't participate in parent-teacher meetings, they don't care about their children's academic achievement levels and their adaptation to school, and they don't help their children with their homework. Some of the teachers state their opinions on these issues as follow:

The level of parent involvement in the education process is at a low level. The reason of it is the fact that they don't know Turkish. Because they don't know the language, they can't have knowledge about the content of lessons, exams, and homework (T2).

There aren't any parents who participate in parent-teacher meetings and ask something about their children's academic achievement (T1).

The fact that children know how to read and write is enough for parents. They don't participate in parent-teacher meetings and they don't ask something about their children's academic achievement and school adaptation. If we call them to visit us persistently or the other children harm their child then they come to visit us. (T4)

I think refugee families don't involve in education because they don't care about their children's education level and the process related to the benefits of education. In my opinion, they think that they won't stay here permanently (T5).

Findings related to the factors which are barriers for refugee parents to involve in education

Table 2. Teacher opinions on the factors which are barriers for refugee parents to involve in education

Theme	Coded Statements	f
Status of the factors which are barriers for refugee parents to involve in education	They can not speak Turkish, they have no literacy in Turkish	9
	Low socio-economic level/Economic concerns	5
	The fact that they think they won't stay in Turkey permanently	3

According to Table 2, the most important factor that affects parent involvement in education is that refugee parents do not speak Turkish and they do not have communication skills in Turkish. Some of the teachers who express their opinions declare that economic concerns are preliminary for the families and they think that receiving education in Turkey is not necessary as they want to return their country. Some of the teachers state their opinions on this issues as follow:

I don't think that education is not in the first rank in their life, physiological needs are more important for them. They mostly care about the cost of living. Concerns related to

where to live is more preliminary. The education levels of the parents whom I encounter is not very high. Problems related to language is also a significant barrier (T1).

The biggest barrier is that they can't speak, read and understand Turkish. Because they haven't got enough amount of savings in terms of their socio-economic conditions, living on an amount of Money is more important for them. (T2).

Although problems related to language is the main issue, the most important barrier is that they think that they won't stay in Turkey permanently (T5).

Findings related to the problems which are faced by children whose parents don't involve in education

Table 3.Teacher opinions on the problems which are faced by children whose parents don't involve in education

Theme	Coded Statements	f
The status of the problems which are faced by children whose parents don't involve in education	Low academic achievement	6
	Undesirable student behaviour	6
	The fact that students see the school as a playground	2
	Problems related to integration	7
	Lack of motivation/ unwillingness towards lessons	3
	Participating lessons without preparing for the school	5

As it is shown in Table 3, the most common problem when parents don't participate in education is the low academic achievement. Additionally, the other teachers who share their opinions state that refugee students have adaptational and behavioural problems. As they make friendship only with refugee children, they isolate themselves or they display undesired behaviours, they are excluded by their friends. Other problems can be stated as; they have a high level of absenteeism and they don't bring even the most basic material with themselves. Some of the teachers state their opinions on this issues as follow:

Children don't put something on the things which they learn at school. Learning is a whole and it is unbroken. It can be forgotten if it is not repeated. Because of that reason, they learn more slowly or they forget without learning when it is compared with their peers. It causes loss of self-confidence. To have a well-qualified education school, family, student, and teacher must involve in the process (T2).

Children are rambling, they don't show interest in their lessons. They are not motivated because they haven't got any communication with their families. Their academic achievement is low, they have inharmonious friendship, and their willingness to come to school is very low. It causes distribution in the class or the class casts them off. As a result, both of them create problems (T1).

Children isolate themselves from the class and they have friendship only with refugee children. Because of those reasons, they can't learn language. They get behind academically.

They are not model students in terms of behaviors. They are insensible to us. They don't respect us as their teachers (T3)

There aren't any adaptation and behavioral problems in my class. They recognize the numbers. They can't handle all of the four operations. There isn't any support in the home. They don't repeat anything. They lose the books which are given to them, they don't do their homework properly. Their absence rate is very high (T4).

Their training materials are always missing. They don't bring pieces of equipment and mostly they don't bring most essential needs such as pencil (T5).

Children are not motivated related to the importance of education at home. They have refugee friends like themselves and socialize with them. It causes adaptation problems to adapt to their Turkish friends. They perceive the school as a playground (T9).

Findings related to suggestions to increase the level of refugee parent involvement in education

Table 4. Teacher opinions on suggestions to increase the level of refugee parent involvement in education

Theme	Coded Statements	f
The status of suggestions to increase the level of refugee parent involvement in education	Visiting parents' home	2
	Teaching Turkish to parents (for communication)	10
	Orientation programs with Turkish parents	4
	Activities to increase the sense of belonging	2
	Activities, courses, seminars to show the importance of education	5

According to Table 4, teachers state that the level of parent involvement in education will be increased if refugee parents learn Turkish for a better communication. Additionally, conducting seminars to make parents understand the importance of education, giving them some responsibilities related to activities in schools which make them feel like a part of the school, visiting their house with Syrian counselors to increase their sense of belonging are also emphasized by teachers. Some of the teachers state their opinions on these issues as follow:

Firstly, parenting education must be provided. The number of Turkish literacy courses must be raised to make them know the language. Orientation activities that make refugee parents meet with Turkish parents must be conducted. Some responsibilities must be given to them at different school events. Their houses should be visited. It necessary to make them participate in activities to increase the sense of belongings and maket hem feel like a part of the school (T2).

Firstly, parents must be taught language, reading, and writing. Without thinking about finding something to eat, they should be supported to give more importance to school for their children's future. All the things can be different if they are aware that they should come to school on the purpose of education instead of gifts or donations (T3).

As the other countries, the first thing to do is conducting adaptation seminars for Turkish families, refugee families, and their children. The fact that Syrian families and children don't join in society directly can be seen as injustice for both sides of it.

Discussion and Recommendation

The present study aims to determine the level of parent involvement of refugees, barriers that prevent them from involving in the process of education and to suggest solutions to these problems. It is found that the level of parent involvement is low and the most essential problem which is one of the barriers to parent involvement is refugees' language proficiency. Additionally, the other findings are listed as follow: the parents don't participate in parent-teacher meetings, they don't help their children with homework, they don't communicate with teachers to learn about their children's academic and social status, they don't care about education because they want to return their country.

Previous studies on refugees living in Turkey have similar results. They also claim that the stance of Syrian parents to education are problematic and they don't take an efficient and active role in the process (Aykırı, 2017; Gözübüyük-Tamer, 2017). Yet, there are some studies which claim that parents are collaborative and they care about education (Balkar, Şahin & Babahan, 2016).

In the relevant literature, it is stated that the major problem for refugees is language proficiency (Aykırı, 2017; Başar, Akan & Çiftçi, 2017; Çoça, 2015; Gözübüyük Tamer, 2017; Güngör, 2015; Hawes & Plourde 2005; Nar, 2008; Polat, 2012; Roxas, 2011; Sağlam & Kanbur, 2017).

In the present research, the following reasons are determined as the barriers that prevent refugee parents from involving in education: they don't know Turkish; physiological needs and economic concerns are seen more important than education; they consider that they stay in Turkey temporarily. Several studies have pointed out that having low socio-economic conditions make parents unwilling to involve in education process (Güngör, 2015).

Low academic achievement is the biggest problem faced by the children whose parents don't involve in the education process. Also, it is found that they display unwanted behaviors. Another result of the study is that they isolate themselves from Turkish students and they have poor relationships with their friends which makes them undesirable person. Being academically successful and adapting to their own classes are closely related to strong

relationship between refugee parents and the schools (Sağlam & Kanbur, 2017). In the research conducted by Aykırı (2017), it is found that teachers have negative communication with the parents of refugee children because those parents aren't interested in their children's education and also it is found that those children have low academic achievement. The low levels of academic success are one of the most commonly observed problems of children whose parents are not interested to the education process of their own children (Güngör, 2015).

Hindering the education process, having negative communication with teachers and friends, having a high rate of absence can be listed as unwanted behaviors. When students display such behaviors, teachers must collaborate with parents to overcome these problems. Studies reveal that collaboration between parents and school decreases the unwanted behaviors which are displayed by students (Çayak, 2013; Çayak & Ergi, 2015).

The findings related to suggestions to increase the level of refugee parent involvement in education can be listed as; organizing seminars to raise the awareness of refugees related to the importance of involving in education; setting some training activities to teach refugees language skills such as reading and writing; conducting orientation activities in which they participate with Turkish parents; organizing teachers to visit refugee families at home; giving responsibilities to refugee families to make them involved in education process to enable them understand the importance of education and gain sense of responsibility; organizing family and parent meetings with Syrian and Turkish parents.

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Authorship Contribution Statement

Mevsim ZENGİN: *Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Formal Analysis, Data Curation, Writing-original draft.*

Öznur ATAŞ AKDEMİR: *Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Supervision, Writing – review & editing*

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