

Access to Education of Syrian Refugees Living in Türkiye

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Abstract

After the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, millions of people had to flee for their lives. The continued waves of migration have created many problems. One of these problems is the education of refugee children – one of the most affected groups by the war. Most of these refugees made their way to Turkey, which is one of the countries that was most affected by this humanitarian crisis. While some of the Syrian refugee children live in the camps, some of them live in different cities outside the camps. The present study compares the situation of Syrian refugee children who live outside the camps and those who live inside. I also examine the views of different authors who have addressed this issue. Children's access to education is inevitable in terms of both international law and domestic law. However, these refugee children who live outside the camps have some basic responsibilities such as providing for their families since life outside is more challenging. Life inside the camp is relatively easier as the Turkish state provides assistance and training opportunities. This research demonstrates that the integration into the education system for children who live outside the camps is more difficult. On the other hand, access to social and educational opportunities is easier and faster for those who live in state-sponsored camps.

Keywords: Access to education, Syrian, refugees, Turkey.

Türkiye'de Yaşayan Suriyeli Mültecilerin Eğitime Erişimi

Öz

2011 yılında Suriye iç savaşının başlamasından sonra milyonlarca insan canını kurtarmak için kaçmak zorunda kaldı. Devam eden göç dalgaları birçok sorun yarattı. Bu sorunlardan biri de savaştan en çok etkilenen gruplardan biri olan mülteci çocukların eğitimidir. Bu mültecilerin çoğu, bu insani krizden en çok etkilenen ülkelerden biri olan Türkiye'ye gitti. Suriyeli mülteci çocukların bir kısmı kamplarda yaşarken bir kısmı kamp dışında farklı şehirlerde yaşıyor. Bu çalışma, kamp dışında yaşayan Suriyeli mülteci çocukların durumu ile kamp içinde yaşayanların durumunu karşılaştırmaktadır. Çalışmada bu konuyu ele alan farklı yazarların görüşlerini ortaya koymak da hedeflenmektedir. Çocukların eğitime erişimi hem

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uluslararası hukuk hem de iç hukuk açısından kaçınılmazdır. Ancak kamp dışında yaşayan bu mülteci çocukların, dışarıdaki yaşamları daha zor olduğu için ailelerinin geçimini sağlamak gibi bazı temel sorumlulukları bulunmaktadır. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti yardım ve eğitim olanakları sağladığı için kampta yaşam nispeten daha kolay olduğu düşünülmektedir. Bu araştırma, kamp dışında yaşayan çocukların eğitim sistemine entegrasyonunun daha zor olduğunu göstermektedir. Öte yandan, devlet destekli kamplarda yaşayanlar için sosyal ve eğitim olanaklarına erişim daha kolay ve hızlıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Eğitime erişim, Suriye, mülteciler, Türkiye.*

Introduction

Forced migration has been a rising dilemma in the last decade. It has had inevitable impacts on higher education in the world and European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in particular. The Syrian crisis, which has been identified as “the biggest migration wave in recent history” by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR Website, 2016), began with the demonstrations and protests in Syria, but then turned into a serious conflict and later into a civil war (Erdoğan & Erdoğan, 2018).

However, the experience of Turkey, in the context of this crisis, sets an example for the international community. With the open-door policy it follows, Turkey has received the lion’s share of Syrian refugees. According to official figures, Turkey has welcomed about 3.763.652 Syrians (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2022). 730,000 of the 1,124,000 school-age children have access to education. In other words, 35% of Syrian school-age children who came to Turkey cannot receive any education (DW Turkish website, 2022). According to international and Turkish laws, these children have the right to receive formal education.

“Education is one of the most important factors in social inclusion, especially when students are faced with the risk of becoming a lost generation distanced from educational opportunities. When it comes to children who live inside the camp, about 90 percent of school-age Syrian children go to school. However, these children represent only 13 percent of the total school-age Syrian children. The vast majority of Syrian children in Turkey live outside of refugee camps in towns and cities, where enrollment rates are much lower. For instance, in 2014-2015, only 25 percent went to school” (Coşkun & Emin, 2016).

Education for refugee children has become a priority for the Turkish state, especially with the increasing number of Syrian refugees in the last decade. Turkey has not comprehensively identified the educational needs of refugee children yet, but the government started to concentrate on the matter at the end of 2013 (Bircan & Sunata 2015; Aydin & Kaya 2017). Therefore, this study focuses on the current education assessment of Syrian children in Turkey. As the Syrian crisis entered its 11th year, the government of Turkey announced its plans to ensure that, over time, all Syrian refugee children would be integrated into the national education system. The

goal of the Turkish government is to integrate children living outside the camp into the education system.

This plan sought to ensure a sustainable response that meets standards for educational quality and offers official certification of learning. The execution of this policy meant that about one million children would need to integrate into the national education system. In addition, the government had to deal with issues such as school infrastructure and hiring new teachers who can work effectively with students with varied educational experiences and low levels of proficiency in Turkish. All Syrian students who attend private schools are set to be integrated into the public education system gradually. This research sheds light on Turkey's efforts to integrate Syrian children into its education system and examines the obstacles that keep some children away from school. I assume that it is difficult for refugee children living outside the camp to integrate into the existing Turkish education system. This study aims to compare the situation of Syrian refugee children in terms of living inside and outside the camps based on the literature. Depending on this purpose, it is also aimed to seek answers to the following sub-problems:

- 1- What is the current educational status of Syrian children in Turkey?
- 2- What are the advantages and problems regarding the education of Syrian children in the camps in Turkey?

Literature Review

This literature review examines the current situation of refugees and the advantages of receiving education in camps. Children who live in camps can benefit from all aid, especially food, health, and education, much more often than refugees who live outside the camps. For example, 83% of children living in the camps are able to continue their education between the ages of 6 and 11, while this rate is only 14% for children of the same age group living outside the camps (Aydın & Kaya, 2017). Education is critical to helping refugees stand on their feet and build a better future for themselves.

As noted earlier, the majority of Syrian children live outside camps and have no access to basic education. This puts them at a disadvantage as they miss the opportunity of integrating into the host community. Bircan and Sunata (2015) demonstrate that asylum-seekers access to education, both formal and through temporary education centers, is increasing. However, children who live outside the camp have limited access to schools. Most of those who live in the camp have access to schools that teach the Syrian curriculum in Arabic (Alpaydın, 2017). Outside the camp, only those who have residence permits can enroll in public schools. Due to the limited number of residence permit holders and language difficulties, many still have limited access to education (Human Right Watch, 2015).

Taskın and Erdemli (2018) claim that economic issues remain the main obstacles that hinder many children from joining the school. During the interviews with unschooled children, many of them expressed that they would like to go to school but are unable to do so because they are obliged to work and provide for their families. As a response to this growing problem, the Disaster and Emergency Administration (AFAD) established a total of 26 camps/temporary accommodation centers in 10 provinces (General Directorate of Immigration Administration, 2016). All the camps have education centers offering education from primary school through high school (Taştan & Çelik 2017).

One can say that Turkey has taken several steps to meet its obligations toward refugees by lifting many legal barriers that made access to education possible. For example, in 2014 the government lifted restrictions requiring Syrians to obtain a Turkish residence permit to enroll in public schools. All children with a government-issued identity card can have access to public schools as their Turkish peers. Regardless of all these efforts, there are many Syrian children, especially those who live outside the camp, who still face some difficulties to access public schools (Aydın & Kaya, 2017).

Method

Research Design

In this study, "Document Analysis Method" was used. This method includes the analysis of written and oral materials containing information about the topics planned to be investigated. This study, which is carried out with the document review method, is carried out by examining the written materials containing information about the subjects planned to be investigated. Although document analysis is a method used by linguists in history and anthropology, they also use document analysis seriously in fields such as psychology and sociology (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

Data Analysis

While descriptive analysis is used to process data that does not require in-depth analysis, content analysis requires a closer examination of the obtained data and requires reaching the concepts and themes that describe the data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008: 89). The relevant literature on the educational status of Syrian refugee children was scanned by document analysis technique. The data obtained are divided into categories under the headings of the advantages of refugee children in and out of the camps, educational opportunities, problems and practices in the education process.

Validity and Reliability

Within the scope of the research, the thematic content analysis approach explained by Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008) was used. Within the scope of this approach, in the first step of data analysis, all data sources were read and notes

were taken on the data. In the process of collecting the data and analyzing it according to the determined categories, an educational scientist took part in the process together with the researcher. The findings of the two evaluators on the obtained documents were compared and the findings were formed by providing a consensus.

Results

One can argue that Turkey has made a great contribution to the education of Syrian children who came through forced migration. It opened schools for those who live in refugee camps and facilitated the measures for those who live outside. However, interesting numbers emerge as the strategies developed for the camps are more successful.

According to Aydın and Kaya's (2017) research, 83% of refugee children aged 6-11 living in camps had access to education. Table 1 shows that only 14% of refugee children of the same age living outside the camps have access to education.

Table 1.

Access to Education of Refugee Children (6-11 Ages)

In camps	83 %
Outside camps	14 %

A report on the educational evaluation of refugee children in Turkey by Bircan and Sunata (2014) provided a summary of the current educational status of Syrian refugees using data and information from related reports prepared by AFAD (2014) and UNICEF (2014). According to AFAD (2014), inequality between children who live inside the camp and others who live outside remains one noticeable aspect. This stems from the fact that the vast majority of refugee children in Turkey live outside the camps (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Table 2 shows that between 2014 and 2015, the rate of access to education for refugee children living outside the camps was 25%.

Table 2.

Access to The Education of Refugee Children Living Outside Camps

School attendance rate of refugee children between 2014 and 2015	25 %
Proportion of refugee children who cannot start school due to compelling reasons	75 %

The situation regarding the orientation of Syrian refugee children to formal and non-formal education opportunities is also important. According to UNICEF's (2020) report, according to the Syria Crisis report, a significant portion of children in refugee status are educated in formal and non-formal education institutions. According to this report, 3361 students attended formal, 222 non-formal and 5159 out-of-school

education opportunities. According to AFAD 2015, 2017 and 2018 reports, the following situation emerges. This distribution is shown in Table 3:

Tablo 3.

Participation Rates of Refugee Children in Formal and Non-Formal Education

	2015 (AFAD)	2017 (AFAD)	2018 (AFAD)
Formal	76.107	350,493	381,593
Non-Formal		8,597	9,620
Out-of-School		170,267	138,387

According to AFAD reports, the number of refugee students benefiting from formal, non-formal and school learning opportunities has increased continuously. In the AFAD 2018 report, the distribution of refugee children attending formal education by grade levels is as follows:

Tablo 4.

Grade Levels of Refugee Students

Pre-School	Primary School	Secondary School	High School etc.
33,397	378,304	141,278	59,867

In addition, Turkish Language Courses (TLC) are also organized to improve the quality of social life and communication. In Bircan and Sunata's (2015) study, the distribution of Syrian refugee children attending formal education across school levels is as follows:

According to the UNICEF report, participation rates in Turkish Language Courses are visualized in Table 5:

Table 5.

Participation in Turkish Language Courses

Turkish Language Courses	1676
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Based on the 2020 UNICEF report, 1676 of the Syrian refugee children attended Turkish language courses.

Discussion

This research focused on the main problems of access to education for Syrian refugees. "The main problem is children's integration living outside the camp into the Turkish education system. According to the data, one can clearly see that the number

of refugee children living in camps have better access to education. The school enrollment rate in the camps is much higher than outside the camps. Syrian children and young people outside the camp can attend private schools and schools run by the Ministry of National Education (MONE), which accepts Syrians through temporary training centers run or supported by principalities, municipalities, and NGOs. However, due to limited language skills and accommodation documents, access to Turkish schools is restricted and very difficult. There are also private schools opened by the Syrians themselves as part of a protocol signed with MONE. However, the high tuition fees of these schools is another reason for the low enrollment rate (Alpaydin, 2017).”

The number of students in Temporary Education Centers outside the camps is lower. At first glance, this might appear to be an advantage but the lack of infrastructure and the low educational standards are striking. For these reasons, the training centers in the camps are better equipped and of higher quality than those outside the camps. Another reason that children in the camps get a better education is that classes are offered in Arabic by volunteering Syrian teachers according to the Syrian curriculum. However, as we see in a different finding, Syrian children’s access to education in Turkish schools takes place in a warm and safe environment, especially in Istanbul (Aydın & Kaya 2017). One might attribute that to the openness of the city as a metropolitan hub and the solid infrastructure it has. According to the Directorate General of Migration Management (2022), Istanbul accommodates more than half a million Syrian refugees.

Refugee children in the camps are more comfortable as they can receive education in their mother tongue without difficulty. These volunteer Syrian teachers play a key role in reinstating hope in these children. Such volunteers have sufficient expertise since their main occupation has been teaching. Children who have been traumatized by the war and violence can continue their education more easily without having to learn another language. On the other hand, those who choose to stay outside the camp and attend public Turkish schools have a language barrier. Some families that have no financial difficulties choose to send their children to private schools that offer education in Arabic. As mentioned above, the rate of enrollment in these schools remains low. Many of these children find themselves forced to work to support their families. Child labor is rampant among Syrian refugees who often cannot secure work permits. Many families depend on their children’s income as parents are often offered low wages and not protected by labor laws. Many of the interviewed children stated that they are willing to return to school if financial aid was provided to their families. Therefore, the economic aspect remains one of the main obstacles that hinder children from joining schools. Many of these children’s fathers were killed in the conflict and others are either imprisoned or stuck in the war zone.

According to the Deputy Minister of Family and Social Policies Mehmet Ersoy (2017), every Syrian refugee receives 100 Turkish Lira (TL) per month. However,

this amount is not sufficient to cover the basic expenses as the minimum wage is/was 2825 TL per month. For such reasons, refugee children are forced to work and disrupt their education (Anadolu Agency, 2021). Another neglected aspect is the mental and necessary psychological support for children who fled the war. Our results show that Syrian students are constantly in a state of depression and trauma due to war and migration. They often express their homesickness, their fear of loud noises, their pains, and lack of self-confidence. Many of those who live in the camp receive this kind of support. This professional support helps the children to re-establish themselves better in social life later on. The children who live outside the camps are left with little resources that can support them mentally and psychologically.

Due to the increasing number of refugee children living outside the camp, the question of how these children can be integrated into the education system has gained more credence. The state's efforts seem more effective inside the camp than outside. State's intervention inside the camp is easier and faster. From the state's point of view, the situation is a little more difficult outside the camp. It is not easy to coordinate the children living scattered in the provinces. Some have to go to school and work at night. Some refugee children have to work both during the day and at night.

Conclusion

One can conclude that Syrian refugee children who live inside the camp are better off than those who live outside. Children who live in the camp have a more rigorous system and direct contact with state institutions. Children who live outside the camp have more responsibilities and obligations towards their families such as contributing to their sustenance. On top of the psychological and mental issues that resulted from the war, they are now struggling with economic conditions. There is less sense of solidarity and cooperation outside the camp. Children who lost their fathers in the war are obliged to meet the basic needs of their homes. Above that, they have to learn Turkish in order to adapt to the outside world quickly.

One should emphasize the value of volunteering Turkish teachers who provide education in students' mother tongue. Services such as counseling and mental support are also available in the camp. There is no pressure to learn Turkish quickly inside the camp as that is done slowly and gradually. This is important because children will maintain their connection with their mother tongue but at the same time learn a new language that will make their life easier.

When one examines both groups in detail, one can conclude that integration for those who live outside the camp is more challenging. Different state institutions and NGOs can easily locate refugees who live inside the camp and thus provide the necessary social and educational services. The integration inside the camp into the education system is easier and more efficient.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The paper is complied with research and publication ethics.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Zorunlu göç, son on yılda yükselen bir ikilem olmuştur. Dünyada yükseköğretim ve özellikle Avrupa Yükseköğretim Alanı üzerinde kaçınılmaz etkileri olmuştur. 2011 yılında Suriye iç savaşının başlamasından sonra milyonlarca insan canını kurtarmak için kaçmak zorunda kaldı. Devam eden göç dalgaları birçok sorun yaratmıştır. Türkiye Cumhuriyeti yardım ve eğitim olanakları sağladığı için kampta yaşam nispeten daha kolay olduğu düşünülmektedir. Mültecilerin çoğu, bu insani krizden en çok etkilenen ülkelerden biri olan Türkiye'ye gitti. Suriyeli mülteci çocukların bir kısmı kamplarda yaşarken bir kısmı kamp dışında farklı şehirlerde yaşıyor. Konuyla ilgili sorunlardan biri de savaştan en çok etkilenen gruplardan biri olan mülteci çocukların eğitimidir. Çocukların eğitime erişimi hem uluslararası hukuk hem de iç hukuk açısından kaçınılmazdır. Ancak kamp dışında yaşayan bu mülteci çocukların, dışarıdaki yaşamları daha zor olduğu için ailelerinin geçimini sağlamak gibi bazı temel sorumlulukları bulunmaktadır. Bu araştırma da Suriyeli mültecilerin eğitime erişiminin temel sorunlarına odaklanmıştır. Alpaydın'a (2017) göre “Asıl sorun kamp dışında yaşayan çocukların Türk eğitim sistemine entegrasyonu. Verilere göre kamplarda yaşayan mülteci çocukların sayısının eğitime erişimlerinin daha iyi olduğu açıkça görülmektedir. Kamplardaki okula kayıt oranı kamp dışındakilere göre çok

daha yüksektir. Kamp dışındaki Suriyeli çocuklar ve gençler, beylikler, belediyeler ve STK'lar tarafından yürütülen veya desteklenen geçici eğitim merkezleri aracılığıyla Suriyelileri kabul eden Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı'na bağlı özel okullara ve okullara gidebilirler. Ancak, sınırlı dil becerileri ve barınma belgeleri nedeniyle Türk okullarına erişim kısıtlı ve çok zor. Ayrıca MEB ile imzalanan protokol kapsamında Suriyelilerin kendileri tarafından açılan özel okullar da bulunmaktadır. Ancak bu okulların öğrenim ücretlerinin yüksek olması, okullaşma oranının düşük olmasının bir başka nedenidir”.

Bu çalışma, literatüre dayalı olarak Suriyeli mülteci çocukların kamp içinde ve dışında yaşama durumlarını karşılaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmada doküman analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu yöntem, araştırılması planlanan konular hakkında bilgi içeren yazılı ve sözlü materyallerin analizini içerir. Doküman incelemesi yöntemiyle yürütülen bu çalışma, araştırılması planlanan konulara ilişkin bilgileri içeren yazılı materyaller incelenerek gerçekleştirilmiştir. Suriyeli mülteci çocukların eğitim durumları ile ilgili literatür doküman analizi tekniği ile taranmıştır. Elde edilen veriler ikiye ayrılır Araştırma verilerinin analizinde tematik içerik analizi kullanılmıştır. Bu yaklaşım kapsamında veri analizinin ilk adımında tüm veri kaynakları okunmuş ve veriler üzerinde notlar alınmıştır.

Araştırma sonucunda ilgili literatürden taranmış elde edilen veriler üzerinde mülteci çocukların kamp içinde ve dışında yaşama durumlarına dair şu sonuçlara ulaşılmıştır. Kamp dışında yaşayan mülteci çocukların sayısının artması nedeniyle, bu çocukların eğitim sistemine nasıl entegre edilebileceği sorusu daha fazla inandırıcılık kazanmıştır. Devletin çabaları kampın içinde dışarıdan daha etkili görünmektedir. Kamp dışında aynı durum söz konusu değildir. Mülteci çocukların bazıları okula gitmek ve geceleri çalışmak zorundadır. Bu bulgudan kamp içinde yaşayan Suriyeli mülteci çocukların, dışarıda yaşayanlara göre daha iyi durumda oldukları sonucu çıkarılabilir. Yine ulaşılan bulgulardan hareketle, kamplardaki mülteci çocuklar, ana dillerinde zorlanmadan eğitim alabildikleri için daha rahat oldukları söylenebilir. Bu gönüllü Suriyeli öğretmenler, bu çocuklara umudun yeniden kazandırılmasında kilit rol oynamaktadır. Bu tür gönüllüler, asıl meslekleri öğretmenlik olduğu için yeterli uzmanlığa sahiptir. Savaş ve şiddet travması yaşayan çocuklar, başka bir dil öğrenmek zorunda kalmadan eğitimlerine daha kolay devam edebilmektedir. Öte yandan, kamp dışında kalmayı ve devlet Türk okullarına gitmeyi tercih edenlerin dil engeli vardır. Maddi sıkıntısı olmayan bazı aileler, çocuklarını Arapça eğitim veren özel okullara göndermeyi tercih ediyor. Yukarıda belirtildiği gibi, bu okullara kayıt oranı düşük kalmaktadır. Bu çocukların çoğu kendilerini ailelerini desteklemek için çalışmak zorunda buluyor. Genellikle çalışma izni alamayan Suriyeli mülteciler arasında çocuk işçiliği çok yaygın. Ebeveynlere genellikle düşük ücret teklif edildiğinden ve iş kanunları tarafından korunmadığından, birçok aile çocuklarının gelirine bağımlıdır. Görüşülen çocukların çoğu, ailelerine maddi yardım yapılması halinde okula geri dönmeye istekli olduklarını belirtmiştir. Bu nedenle ekonomik durum, çocukların okula gitmesini engelleyen temel engellerden biri olmaya devam etmektedir. Bu çocukların babalarının çoğu çatışmada öldürülmüştür ve diğerleri ya hapsedilmiş ya da savaş bölgesinde mahsur kalmıştır. Kampta yaşayan çocuklar daha sıkı bir sisteme

sahip ve devlet kurumlarıyla doğrudan temas halindedirler. Kamp dışında yaşayan çocukların, geçimlerine katkıda bulunmak gibi ailelerine karşı daha fazla sorumlulukları ve yükümlülükleri vardır. Savaştan kaynaklanan psikolojik ve zihinsel sorunların yanı sıra artık ekonomik koşullarla da boğuşmaktadır. Kamp dışında daha az dayanışma ve iş birliği duygusu vardır. Savaşta babalarını kaybeden çocuklar evlerinin temel ihtiyaçlarını karşılamakla yükümlüdürler. Bunun da ötesinde dış dünyaya hızla uyum sağlayabilmeleri için Türkçe öğrenmeleri gerekmektedir. Öğrencilerin ana dilinde eğitim veren gönüllü Türkçe öğretmenlerinin değeri vurgulanmalıdır. Kampta danışmanlık ve zihinsel destek gibi hizmetler de mevcuttur. Yavaş ve kademeli olarak yapıldığından, kamp içinde Türkçeyi hızlı bir şekilde öğrenme baskısı yoktur. Bu önemlidir çünkü çocuklar ana dilleriyle bağlarını sürdürürken aynı zamanda hayatlarını kolaylaştıracak yeni bir dil öğreneceklerdir.

Sonuç olarak, her iki grup da ayrıntılı olarak incelendiğinde, kamp dışında yaşayanlar için entegrasyonun daha zor olduğu sonucuna varılabilir. Farklı devlet kurumları ve STK'lar kamp içinde yaşayan mültecileri kolaylıkla bulabilmekte ve bu sayede gerekli sosyal ve eğitim hizmetlerini sağlayabilmektedir. Kamp içinde bulunan mülteci çocukların eğitim sistemine entegrasyonunun daha kolay ve verimli olduğu görülmektedir.