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## Attitudes of Secondary School Students towards Refugee Students

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### ABSTRACT

Although the refugee problem has been on the agenda of the world for centuries, it has increased its influence gradually due to the conflicts and wars in the Middle East especially after the 2000s. In this sense, after the civil war that erupted in Syria in 2011, there has been an influx of refugees into Turkey, and today millions of Syrians are forced to emigrate to Turkey. Most of the refugees coming through migration are under the age of 18, defined as "school age". Therefore, one of the basic problems faced by the school-age refugees, who had to come to Turkey from Syria, is access to education. Thanks to immediate actualization of the efforts of the Republic of Turkey, immigrant students were placed in public schools to achieve necessary orientation. The aim of this research is to determine the attitudes of secondary school students towards refugee students. The study was attended by 5, 6, 7 and 8th grade students studying in schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in Keçiören district of Ankara, in the 2018-2019 academic year. In the research, quantitative research method was used to collect data. "Attitude Scale towards Refugee Students" developed by Kılcan, Çepni and Kılınç (2017) was used as data collection tool. Within the framework of the purpose of the research, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program was used for the necessary statistical analyses of the collected data regarding students' responds to the attitude scale. It was revealed that the attitudes of the participants towards refugee students showed a significant difference according to the variables of gender, grade, having a refugee neighbor and refugee friends. Based on these results, it is recommended to provide awareness training for students studying in the same environment with refugee students to prevent secondary school students from developing negative attitudes towards refugees. Based on the positive attitude of secondary school students who have both a refugee neighbor and a refugee friend, it is suggested that different studies, especially cultural adaptation trainings, should be conducted for the social acceptance of Syrians who are in a sense guests in our country due to immigration.

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#### Keywords:

Refugee, Secondary School Student, Syria, Attitude

### 1. Introduction

Conflicts and wars between people are almost as old as human history. Especially the start of production and the formation of property and ownership concepts in the Neolithic Age led to an increase in ambition of human beings and accelerated the conflict and thus wars. These conflicts and wars turned into "World wars" in a way that affects masses at the turn of the 20th century. In the 21st century, wars break out both due to conflicts between states and as the internal conflict in many countries- especially in the Middle East. In the case of war and conflict, refugees or asylum seekers<sup>2</sup> are inevitable. Although the concept of asylum seeker and refugee is often used in the same sentence to correspond to the same meaning, these terms have different meanings and legal consequences. From this point of view, a brief discussion of the concepts of asylum seeker and refugee will be helpful. Refugee means someone who has a well-founded fear of violence or life-threatening situation due to torture or armed conflict in their homeland and who, therefore, seeks

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<sup>2</sup>Although the concepts of asylum seekers and refugees have different meanings and status, the term "refugee" will be used in this research.

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refugee in another country (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1997). In this sense, asylum is accepted as one of the basic human right, based on the statement that everyone has the right to seek asylum in the face of the persecution as written in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Kartal & Başcı, 2014). An asylum seeker briefly means a person who has not yet obtained their refugee rights and status. The refugee has a legal status and the term is used refer to immigrants defined in international law with certain criteria (Erten Özalp, 2019).

In the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is defined as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country with a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group and who cannot or does not benefit from the protection of his original country because of the mentioned fears; or as a stateless person who resides in a different country other than his/her previous country of residence as a result of such cases mentioned above and who cannot return or does not want to return because of the fears mentioned (Geneva Convention, 1951). In other words, s/he is a person who has left his/her country of residence for different reasons and asked for asylum in another country, and whose request to live in the host country has been evaluated and accepted by the relevant country (Acer, Kaya & Gümüş, 2010; Demir & Erdal, 2012; Güroğlu Alanyalı, 2014; Bozbeyoğlu, 2015; Tunç, 2015). When the concepts of asylum seekers and refugees are examined by definition, it is understood that the refugees are different from the refugees in terms of their asylum demand and form (Aybay, 2005). The mentioned contract also aims to determine how people with this status should be treated as well as the terms asylum seekers and refugees.

Both the asylum seeker and the hosting country are affected by population mobility due to forced migration. Undoubtedly, people who migrate to another country-region from the country-regions where they previously resided as refugees or as asylum seekers have a desire to reach a more prosperous life. The desire of people who escape from civil war or war between countries to another country to have minimum living conditions, especially security, is obvious.

The "Jasmine Revolution", which first started in Tunisia after Muhammed Buazizi, a university graduate who was a peddler in Tunisia burned himself after his mobile counter was seized on 17 December 2010, turned into an internal conflict in the country in a short time. Due to reasons such as income unfairness, oppressive administrations and inequality of opportunity, this chaos environment has quickly evolved into a movement called the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East, especially in Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Libya (Sayın, Usanmaz, Aslangiri, 2016). While thousands of people lost their lives in this conflict, tens of thousands of people were injured. The inevitable growth of events has turned into a civil war in many countries in the Middle East; therefore, millions of people have had to migrate from their region or countries (Sayın, 2016). Syria is undoubtedly one of the countries where this internal turmoil is experienced. The civil war, which erupted on 15 March 2011 in Syria, still goes on at the same level of severity.

Shortly after the start of the civil war in Syria, a mandatory influx of migration has started towards Turkey (Ağır & Sezik 2015; Çetin & Uzman, 2012). The first movement that started with 252 people immigrating to Turkey from Syria on 29 April 2011 has continued at intervals (Akpınar, 2017; Erdogan, 2015). Immigration from Syria to Turkey has gained speed with "open door policy" of Turkey. As a result of its open-door policy, Turkey has accepted every Syrian who came to the country, directed them to shelter centres as early as the first arrivals, and when it ultimately turned into mass immigration, it allowed them to settle in the places they wanted in the country (Tunca & Karadağ, 2018). The status of those who came with these migrations was different because Turkey is a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention. However, the Republic of Turkey stated that refugees from the east will not be accepted as refugees with the "geographical reservation" note it has glossed on the convention (Tunca & Montenegro, 2018). Accordingly, Turkey only accepts those from European countries as refugees, while those coming from a country outside Europe are not accepted as refugees. Accordingly, those coming to Turkey with forced migration wave from Syria were accepted under "temporary protection status" (Özdemir, 2017; Şimşek, 2018).

The civil war in Syria that has continued for a long time with no sign of ending and failure to achieve peace conditions has caused refugees in Turkey to start to settle in Turkey (Kılcan, Çepni & Kilinc, 2017). The number of Syrians in Turkey under temporary protection has been registered as a total of 3 million 571 thousand 175 people as of January 24, 2020. This number increases, even more, when we include

unregistered Syrian immigrants. 1 million 652 thousand 377 (46.26%) of these people are children between the ages of 0 and 18. The total number of children and women aged between 0 and 18 is 2 million 504 thousand 199. This figure constitutes 70.1% of the total migration movement (Refugees Association, 2020).

Syrian immigration due to the civil war brought with it separate problems both for migrants and for regions migrated. The troubles caused by the need for security, health, nutrition and shelter troubled the migrants in particular and for Turkey creating the necessary financial resources, and achieving the integration of immigrants in the local area have caused long-term problems. On the other hand, attitudes of people towards Syrians migrating to Turkey and their unacceptance continue to create a big problem. One of the factors underlying the reactive approach of the local population towards the Syrian refugees is the problems stemming from different languages, cultures and lifestyles (Oytun and Gündoğar, 2015). The cultural differences of Syrians, in particular, lead local people to think that immigrants will experience difficulties in adapting to Turkish society (Ekici, 2019).

Considering the figures of those migrating and of those who have already migrated, it is seen that most of the Syrian refugees in Turkey are school-age children. From this point of view, it is seen that education is one of the problems that will be experienced and has been experienced due to migration. "The fact that the living conditions of Syrians are harsh and that they do not benefit from education provide a suitable ground for some social problems, including the increase in crime rates in the long run" (Oytun and Gündoğar, 2015). Turkey obviously takes the necessary steps to meet the educational needs of Syrians. The first concrete indicator of this was "Temporary Training Centres" (TEC). TECs aims to help immigrants to continue their education without interruption, and prevent them from falling behind in their grades when they returned to their country or when they want to continue their education in Turkey. To this end, TECs have been put into service as institutions that cover both primary and secondary education and provide education in Arabic inside or outside the camps (MEB, 2014). However, the lack of teachers and the insufficiency of schools that will particularly serve Syrians made it necessary for Syrian immigrant students to receive education in the same schools and classrooms as Turkish students. With the circular no. 2014/21 issued by the Ministry of National Education, Syrian refugees of school-age are allowed to receive education in public schools affiliated to National Education (MEB, 2014).

Education is one of the most important steps to find a remedy to social problems that are experienced or likely to be experienced. It is thought that the elimination of the education problem experienced by the Syrian refugees will help overcome the problem of adaptation and the Syrian children of school age will contribute to the national economy. Therefore, "*to transform the crisis caused by Syrian refugees into opportunities*" (Oytun & Gündoğar, 2015) education is of great importance. For this reason, Syrian refugee students are required to receive education according to the Turkish education system and the Turkish curriculum. For this reason, it is very important to eliminate problems such as language and cultural differences, insufficient physical conditions, and lack of teachers in a short time. In addition, the attitudes of the students who will receive education in the same environment as Syrian refugee students - in the classroom - towards refugee students are also of great importance. When the literature is examined, it is seen that many studies have been conducted on refugees (Ardıç-Çobaner, 2015; Başar, Akan & Çiftçi, 2018; Cengiz, 2015; Emin, 2016; Kağnıcı, 2017; Kara, Yiğit & Ağırman, 2016; İmamoğlu & Çalışkan, 2017; Erdem, 2017; Kolukıncı, 2009; Mercan-Uzun & Tüm, 2016; Palaz, Çepni & Kılcan, 2019; Şeker & Aslan, 2015; Topkaya & Akdağ, 2016; Yaşar Can, Aktulun Awake, Karacan Hamiden & Teke, 2018; Yılmaz, 2015, Yurdakul & Tok, 2018; Zaimoğlu-Öztürk, 2018). This study aimed to determine the attitudes of secondary school students who are educated in the same environment and the same school with Syrian refugee students towards refugees.

## 2. Method

In this section, information about the design of the research, study group, data collection tools and data analysis is included.

### a. Research Design

In this study, a quantitative survey model was used to determine the attitudes of secondary school students towards Syrian refugee students. Survey research is a study aimed at collecting data to determine certain

characteristics of a group (Büyüköztürk et al., 2009). According to Karasar (2010), survey models are research approaches aiming at describing a situation that exists in the past or still as it existed or exists. The descriptive-scan design provides quantitative or numerical description of trends, attitudes or views through studies on a selected sample (Creswell, 2013).

**b. Sample**

The study group of the research consists of a total of 485 secondary school students, 205 male and 280 female students studying at the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grade in 3 state secondary schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in Keçiören district of Ankara province in the spring term of 2017-2018 academic year.

**c. Instruments**

The data collection tool consists of two parts: (1) personal information and (2) attitude scale items for refugee students. While writing the questions in the personal information section, the literature was scanned and variables that could influence the attitude towards refugee students were determined. Accordingly, questions asking the participants their gender, classes, parental education level, family income status, whether they have a refugee neighbour and finally whether they have a refugee friend were included. In the second part of the scale, "Attitude Scale for Refugee Students" developed by Kılcan, Çepni and Kılınc (2017) was used. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the single factor of the scale consisting of 24 items was determined as .92. The scale has 3-point Likert type items, which include "I disagree", "I am indecisive" and "I agree" options. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha (a) coefficient was calculated as .89.

**d. Data Analysis**

In the study, the scores of secondary school students about their attitudes towards refugee students were analysed on the computer with SPSS 22 statistical package program. Frequency (f), percentage (%) distributions related to the general distribution of variable values from the personal information section, which is the first part of the scale, were examined. In the second part of the scale, while the t-test was used to test the significance between a variable and the total score obtained from the scale items aimed at determining the attitudes of secondary school students towards the refugee students, ANOVA test was used to test the significance of the values obtained between more than two variables. The degree of significance between more than two variables was analysed with the Scheffe test, which is generally preferred due to the equality of variances. For data analysis, .05 was used as the level of significance.

**3. Findings**

In this part of the research, the tables and comments of the findings obtained from the analyses of the attitudes of secondary school students towards refugee students in terms of different variables are included.

**Table 1.** Participants' Attitude towards Refugee Students t-Test Results of Total Scores According to the Gender Variable

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t	p
Male	205	48.32	8.44	483	2.095	.037
Female	280	49.88	7.81			

According to the analysis results in Table 1, it is seen that there is a significant difference in participants' total scores on the attitude towards refugee students scale in terms of gender [ $t_{(483)}=2,095$ ;  $p<.05$ ]. While the arithmetic means of the total scores of female students on the attitude scale is ( $\bar{x} = 49.88$ ), arithmetic means of total scores of male students' on the scale is ( $\bar{x} = 48.32$ ). The numerical difference between the mean scores is significant. This finding can be interpreted as the gender of the participants caused a differentiation in their attitudes towards refugee students.

**Table 2.** One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results for the Difference of Participants' Attitudes towards Refugee Students in terms of Variable of Grade Level

Variable		N	$\bar{X}$	SD			
Grade	(1) 5th grade	53	49.25	6.69			
	(2) 6th grade	172	47.53	8.13			
	(3) 7th grade	135	49.90	8.18			
	(4) 8th grade	125	50.79	8.22			
	<b>Source of Variance</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Difference</b>
	Between groups	860.452	3	286.817	4.454	.004	2-4
	Within-group	30976.942	481	64.401			
	Total	31837.394	484				

According to the analysis results in Table 2, it is seen that there is a significant difference in participants' total scores on the attitude towards refugee students scale in terms of gender [ $F_{(3-481)}= 4,454$ ;  $p<.05$ ]. To see the source of difference, the Scheffe multiple comparison test was used. As a result of multiple comparisons test, there is a significant difference between the arithmetic means of the students at grade 6 ( $\bar{X}=47,53$ ) and that of grade 8 on the attitude towards refugee children scale ( $\bar{X}=50,79$ ). This finding can be interpreted to mean that the attitude of the students studying in the 8th grade towards the refugee students is more positive than that of the 6th grade students.

**Table 3.** One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results for the Difference of Participants' Attitudes towards Refugee Students in terms of Variable of Mother Education Level

Variable		N	$\bar{X}$	SD			
Mother Education	Primary school	146	49.49	8.10			
	Secondary School	179	48.59	8.33			
	High school	126	49.60	7.96			
	University	26	48.58	6.99			
	Postgraduate Degree	8	54.38	8.43			
	<b>Source of Variance</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Difference</b>
	Between groups	323.292	4	80.823	1.231	.297	---
	Within-group	31514.102	480	65.654			
	Total	31837.394	484				

According to the analysis results in Table 3, total scores of the participants' attitude towards refugee students do not show significant difference in terms of maternal education level variable [ $F_{(4-480)}= 1.231$ ;  $p> 0.5$ ]. This finding can be interpreted to mean that the variable of mother education level does not cause a significant difference in the attitudes of the participants towards refugee students.

**Table 4.** One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results for the Difference of Participants' Attitudes towards Refugee Students in terms of Variable of Father Education Level

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD			
Primary school	66	48.51	9.06			
Secondary School	172	49.10	7.92			
High school	170	49.40	7.87			
University	62	49.53	8.16			
Postgraduate Degree	15	50.33	9.18			
Father Education Level						
<b>Source of Variance</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Between groups	65.224	4	16.306	.246	.912	----
Within-group	31772.170	480	66.192			
Total	31837.394	484				

According to the analysis results in Table 4, participants' total scores on attitude towards refugee students scale do not show significant difference in terms of father education level variable [ $F_{(4-480)} = 2.46$ ;  $p > 0.5$ ]. This finding can be interpreted to mean that the variable of father education level does not cause a significant difference in the attitudes of the participants towards refugee students.

**Table 5.** One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results for the Difference of Participants' Attitudes towards Refugee Students in terms of Variable of Income

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD			
0-2100	61	46.87	8.38			
2101-3000	173	49.40	7.69			
3001-4000	168	49.95	7.97			
4001-above	83	49.10	8.83			
Income status						
<b>Source of Variance</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Between groups	433.020	3	144.340	2.211	.086	
Within-group	31404.374	481	65.290			
Total	31837.394	484				

According to the analysis results in Table 5, participants' total scores on attitude towards refugee students scale do not show significant difference in terms of income level [ $F_{(3-481)} = 2,211$ ;  $p > .05$ ]. This finding can be interpreted to mean that the variable of income level does not cause a significant difference in the attitudes of the participants towards refugee students.

**Table 6.** t-Test Results of Total Scores of Participants' on Attitude towards Refugee Students Scale in terms of Variable of Having a Refugee Neighbour

Having a Refugee Neighbour	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t	p
Yes	93	50.99	7.88	483	2.350	.019
No	392	48.80	8.12			

According to the analysis results in Table 6, participants' total scores on attitude towards refugee students scale show significant difference in terms of the variable of having a refugee neighbour [ $t_{(483)}=2,350$ ;  $p<,05$ ]. While the arithmetic means of the total scores of students having a refugee neighbour on the attitude scale is ( $\bar{x} = 50.99$ ), arithmetic means of total scores of students' not having a refugee neighbour is ( $\bar{x} = 48.80$ ). The numerical difference between the mean scores is significant. This finding can be interpreted as the fact that the participants' having a refugee neighbour caused a differentiation in their attitudes towards refugee students.

**Table 7.** T-Test Results of Total Scores of Participants' on Attitude towards Refugee Students Scale in terms of the Variable of Having a Refugee Neighbour

Having a Refugee Friend	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t	p
Yes	82	51.17	9.36	483	2.400	.017
No	403	48.82	7,78			

According to the analysis results in Table 7, participants' total scores on attitude towards refugee students scale show significant difference in terms of the variable of having a refugee friend [ $t_{(483)}=2,400$ ;  $p<,05$ ]. While the arithmetic means of the total scores of students having a refugee friend on the attitude scale is ( $\bar{x} = 51.17$ ), arithmetic means of total scores of students' not having a refugee friend is ( $\bar{x} = 48.82$ ). The numerical difference between the mean scores is significant. This finding can be interpreted as the fact that the participants' having a refugee friend caused a differentiation in their attitudes towards refugee students.

#### 4. Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

Considering the results obtained in the research, total scores of the participants 'on the attitude towards refugee students scale differed in terms of the gender variable. Accordingly, the arithmetic mean of the total scores of the female students on attitude towards refugee students scale is higher that of male students. In the study titled "Investigation of Classroom Teachers' Attitudes towards Refugee Students in Terms of Various Variables" by Köse, Bülbül & Uluman (2019), it was concluded that female classroom teachers have higher attitude scores towards refugee students than male classroom teachers. Similarly, in the study conducted by Koçoğlu & Salur (2018), the attitudes of female teacher candidates towards economic migration and refugee issues were more positive than male teacher candidates. These results are in line with the results obtained in the current research. In the study conducted by Çifçi, Arseven, Arseven & Orhan (2019), it was concluded that the attitude towards refugees was higher in favour of male teachers in the study group. On the other hand, in a study by Kabaklı-Çimen & Ersoy-Quadır (2018), it was concluded that the gender variable did not make a significant difference in the attitude towards Syrian refugees.

Another conclusion reached in the current study is that a significant difference was observed in total scores of participants' attitude towards refugee students scale in terms of grade variable. Accordingly, it was concluded that the attitudes of the students studying in the 8th grade towards the refugee students were more positive than those of the students in the 6th grade. In the study conducted by Kabaklı-Çimen & Ersoy-Quadır (2018), it was concluded that the students in the upper classes display a more sensitive attitude towards Syrian refugees. However, their study group was composed of university students. From this point

of view, it can be assumed that as the grade level increases, a more positive attitude towards Syrian refugees is developed.

Another conclusion of the study is the education level of both the mother and father of the participants does not make a significant difference in the participants' attitudes. Accordingly, it can be said that the variable of mother or father education level does not cause a significant difference in the attitudes of the participants towards refugee students.

Total scores of the participants on the attitudes towards refugee students do not show a significant difference in terms of family income. In the study conducted by Kabaklı-Çimen & Ersoy-Quadır (2018), it was concluded that the family income status variable did not make a significant difference in the attitudes towards Syrian refugees. This result supports the conclusion reached in the current research. From this point of view, it can be said that the family income status does not affect the attitude towards refugees.

It is seen that there is a significant difference between participants' total scores on attitude towards refugee students scale differed in terms of having a refugee neighbour variable. The arithmetic mean of the total scores of students who have refugee neighbours on attitude towards refugee students scale is higher than that of students who do not have a refugee neighbour. Accordingly, it can be said that the students who have a refugee neighbour know them better and have a better understanding of their living standards, which affect their perceptions of refugees.

It is seen that there is a significant difference between participants' total scores on attitude towards refugee students scale differed in terms of having a refugee friend variable. The arithmetic mean of the total scores of students who have refugee friends on attitude towards refugee students scale is higher than that of students who do not have a refugee friend. Based on this result, it can be said that secondary school students who have refugee friends have better attitudes towards refugees and that their attitudes are higher; they get to know them more closely and develop their perspectives accordingly.

Based on these results, it is recommended to give awareness-raising training for students studying in the same environment with refugee students to prevent secondary school students from developing negative attitudes towards refugees. On the other hand, it is recommended to carry out studies that will eliminate the language problem between the refugee students and host students who share their classrooms or schools. Based on the positive attitude of secondary school students who have both a refugee neighbour and a refugee friend, it is suggested that different studies, especially cultural adaptation training, should be conducted for the social acceptance of Syrians who are in the position of guest in our country due to immigration. This study was carried out by using a quantitative research method at the secondary school level in Keçiören district of Ankara Province. It is recommended to conduct more in-depth studies with different study groups or with participants at different educational levels.

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