

# SCHOOLING CONTEXTS OF REFUGEES AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN TWO HOTSPOTS: COMPARISON OF ITALY AND TURKEY\*

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Ceyda ŞENSİN<sup>1</sup>, Dilara YILMAZ<sup>2</sup>**

\* This article is based on part of a larger study by Şensin (2019) conducted during her doctoral program.

1 Dr., MEB, Öğretmen Yetiştirme ve Geliştirme Genel Müdürlüğü, ceyda.sensin@uniroma1.it., ORCID: 0000-0002-3036-0221.

2 Arş.Gör, Kocaeli Üniversitesi, Temel Eğitim Bölümü, dilara.yilmaz@kocaeli.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-5539-8261.

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### Abstract:

This study aimed to investigate refugee pupils' schooling contexts, their social relationships with teachers and native peers in math, social studies, and native language courses at primary schools. The research is a combination of two parts that originated from the observations in Italy to highlight the refugees' schooling contexts in classrooms, then followed by the part that took place in Turkey in order to make comparisons and address the bullets to learn from each other to make improvements. The data were collected within the frame of a descriptive phenomenological research design. Results were analyzed in general and in terms of the aforementioned courses and determined the refugees' and teachers' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats known as SWOT. One of the notable results showed that respecting justice and equality, and peer support were the common strengths in Turkey and Italy. There were further results concerning focusing on the differences and familiarities between these two hotspots.

**Keywords:** Refugee, children, primary school, SWOT analysis.

# İLKOKULLARDAKİ MÜLTECİLERİN EĞİTİMSEL BAĞLAMLARI: İTALYA VE TÜRKİYE KARŞILAŞTIRMASI

**Öz:** Bu çalışma, ilköğretim okullarındaki matematik, sosyal bilgiler ve anadil derslerinde mülteci öğrencilerin okullaşma bağamlarını, öğretmenleri ve yerel akranlarıyla sosyal ilişkilerini araştırmayı amaçlamıştır. Araştırma, mültecilerin sınıflardaki okullaşma bağamlarını vurgulamak için İtalya'daki gözlemlerden yola çıkan iki bölümün ve karşılaştırmalar yapmak için Türkiye'de gerçekleşen bölümün bir birleşimidir. Veriler betimsel fenomenolojik araştırma deseni çerçevesinde toplanmıştır. Sonuçlar genel olarak ve söz konusu dersler açısından analiz edilmiş; mültecilerin ve öğretmenlerin SWOT olarak bilinen güçlü, zayıf yönleri, fırsatları ve tehditleri belirlenmiştir. Dikkate değer sonuçlardan biri, adalet ve eşitliğe saygı ve akran desteğinin Türkiye ve İtalya'daki ortak güçlü yönler olduğunun görülmesidir. Ele alınan diğer derslerdeki benzerlik ve farklılıklara ilişkin araştırma sonuçları da bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** ilkokul öğrencileri, SWOT analizi, mülteci öğrenciler

## Introduction

Migration is a powerful population movement that has social, economic, political, and cultural effects. In recent years, there have been many migrations due to war, famine, and political reasons. Refugees may have difficulties in interacting with local people in the regions they migrate to and they may feel marginalized due to different cultural structures and situations (Grech & Cheng,2010). Especially children who are exposed to migration have certain risks in terms of their social-emotional state, health, and education (Vedder & Horezcyk,2006). The ongoing conflict and violence in the Middle East and other parts of the world are causing large-scale displacement and refugees are seeking safety beyond the immediate region. The difficulty of using the legal pathways prompt refugees fleeing persecution with few choices, including many trying to reunite with family members in Europe. Refugees fled from their countries take their chances abroad to reach the Mediterranean countries, such as Turkey, Greece, and Italy due to their strategic location as gates to Europe. Some countries like France is not a frontline country. As a result, the government has received far fewer asylum petitions than these other, poorer countries. If anything, France's role is usually as a pathway for refugees to other countries, like Germany (Cockcroft & Provox, 2017).

Sweden, Germany, Netherlands and Turkey have received the highest numbers of refugees and thus also have the highest numbers of refugee children entering their

education systems (Koehler & Schneider, 2019). They tend to settle in a nation where they left as they have no chance of returning home because to the continued chaos in Syria, and they fully understand that they must start a new life where they have relocated. And refugees either register to the schools which native peers exist or receive education in seperated classrooms due to the language barrier. In practically all European countries, the right to enter compulsory education is protected by law (Europa, 2011). Students have as soon as feasible access to education.

The statistics published by The Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research [MIUR], only 3.4 million out of 7.1 million refugees of school-age were enrolled in primary or secondary education in 2018 (MIUR,2019). Besides, Italy is composed of many different linguistic, religious, ethnic, and cultural groups and is home to many civilizations due to its strategic location in Southern Europe. Young immigrants are a rapidly growing population which constitutes a structural reality of Italy, as well as an important segment of the youth population (Colombo,2007; Caponio & Schmoll,2011). As for Turkey, over 3.5 million Syrians are living in Turkey and many of them (46,26%) are children or young adults. 568,491 of these children are of school age and enrolled in a school. The number of refugee children studying in the same schools to which the Turkish children attend is approximately 100,000 and the primary education level is the highest level of enrollment with 98%. (UNICEF,2019). In light of this information, the educational experiences of primary school refugees in Turkey and Italy where high immigration occur were examined. It is expected readers to been enlighten concerning to refugees in these two countries.

Studies revealed that language problems are the most common problem faced by refugees (Şensin, 2016; Uzun & Bütün,2016; Akay et al.,2017; Şimşir & Dilmaç,2018). Languages differ not only in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, but also the different 'cultures of speaking' (Bussi & Sun, 2018). In some cases, it is known that host students have less communication with different groups and have negative thoughts about them (Spencer Rodgers & McGoven,2002). For this reason, schools are also useful if they demonstrate the essential role of social and emotional skills and implement comprehensive and coordinated programs that are relevant to reality (Elias & Weissberg,2000). Tropp and Prenovost (2008) highlighted the importance of integrated classrooms and schools where both groups were together and it's effect on communication. Thus, schools play a key role in the process of settling migrants into their new environments and it is assumed that positive and hospitable behaviors would have positive effects (Dooley,2009). Since children spend an enormous amount of their days in schools, teachers can affect their mental health (Roysircar,2009) through refugees' instructional judgments and actions (Knopp & Smith,2005). Herein, schools have missions of representing the ideal setting for refugees and immigrant students to build their cultural identities and provide them with support to address the acculturation that they are experiencing.

The actions of teaching and learning in cultures greatly vary in societies, schools, and even in classrooms. Culturally responsive teaching enhance the educational experience and academic achievement of culturally diverse students (Gay,2002). The pedagogy of culturally sensitive teaching reflects relevant cultural and experiential perspectives of culturally diverse groups of students; moreover, using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of these students make learning more relevant to and effective for them (Gay,2010). Given that the growing cultural diversity in schools, the urgency for intercultural sensitivity is raising. Intercultural sensitivity is largely understudied in education, especially among teachers who are the most important component that can bridge the gap between students with different backgrounds. Teachers should be aware of diverse cultures represented in their classrooms and incorporate culturally responsive practices into their instruction (Anderson-Pence,2013).

It is necessary to understand the complex associations of teachers' intercultural sensitivity with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, particularly refugee ones. Thus, it is essential that critical implications for teacher education programs be prepared for teachers who are interculturally sensitive before they encounter refugee students in their classrooms (Strekalova-Hughes,2017). The relationship between teachers and children has an impact on the child's behavior (Graves & Howes,2011). As the emotional support of teachers increases, children's social skills also improve (Mashburn, et al.,2008). Teachers must objectively convey attitudes and personal points of view about the classroom subject matter and their values about learning, diverse populations of students, community, and society.

Considering present research, the role of classroom teachers, and the determination of the problems experienced by them, their opinions and suggestions will contribute to the education of refugees. In this study we examined refugees' status, their relationship with the teacher, native and citizen peers in math, social studies, and native language courses. To address these, the following research questions were asked:

What are the schooling contexts of refugee pupils in mathematics, social studies, and native language courses?

How is the relationship between native and refugee pupils in those three courses?

How is the relationship between teachers and refugees in those three courses?

This study aimed to contribute to the literature including the refugee children in Turkey and Italy, making the best for children's education and improving the quality of education provided. In literature, there is so much research focused on the refugees, or determining the opinions and suggestions of classroom teachers about refugees' problems. This research is also functional with the feature of identifying the problems experienced by the classroom teachers who spend a considerable amount of time with

the refugee students. It is considered that this research is necessary and important in terms of contributing not only to the improvement of the practices of placing refugee students in education systems but also the studies to be made to bring them into society as happy and benignant individuals.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study of refugee students' educational experiences in mainstream primary schools in Turkey and Italy used a qualitative research design: descriptive phenomenology. Phenomenological studies, for their purposes, want to grasp the essence of a phenomenon and therefore focus on groups of people who have fully experienced a phenomenon which aim to achieve the basic structure and reality underlying the experiences (Yıldırım&Şimşek,2011; Merriam,2013; Silverman,2015). The aim was to examine a phenomenon as it is experienced by individuals and to directly describe it without considering its psychological genesis or causal explanations. The focus was on the subjective experience of the pupil who is a refugee when trying to obtain educational services. Phenomenology requires a new way of looking at things; it requires researchers to step out of their own experience with all of its predispositions and prejudices and to learn to see what stands before them with fresh, naive eyes. This phenomenological study provides thick, rich descriptions of refugee pupils's educational service experiences that foster an understanding of this phenomenon.

### **Participants**

In qualitative research, the selection of the sample size is based on the level of saturation and excess (Merriam,2013). The participants of the study were selected using the purposeful sampling provides an opportunity to study a situation with a rich content (Merriam,2018) and to obtain potential contributions of the participants (Balci,2015). We aimed to investigate as many occasions with refugee students in mainstream primary schools as possible during the observations; and therefore, a convenient sampling technique was used which gives researchers the chance to identify a situation that is close and easy to access (Merriam, 2018). The number of participants in each study group is determined as 2-4 refugee pupils. The identities were kept confidential and the data were used only by the researchers.

The first study group consists of 20 fourth grade students and one primary school teacher in a public school in Turkey. Four of them were Syrian refugees receiving education with their native classmates for three years. Likewise, the data were collected in Italy. The Italian sample of this study consists of five refugee students and an immigrant student in the larger study; however, in this study, the focus group is two refugee students from Pakistan and Egypt, their 19 Italian classmates at fifth grade and Italian primary school teacher. Both of the refugees have been recently transferred to

the refugee camp nearby, which means that they started attending lessons right after the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year. Table 1 demonstrates the descriptive properties of the participants.

**Table 1.** Participants in Study Groups

Study Group	Refugee Students	Classmates
Turkey	Syrian refugees(x4)	Turkish citizen and native classmates (x16)
Italy	Paki and Egyptian refugees (x6)	Italian citizen and native classmates (x19)

### Data Collection

Data were collected by the observations in which refugee students, their native and citizen classmates and teachers from different branches. The activities to address the educational issues of refugee children were observed with non-participatory observation technique that gives the observer the freedom to collect and record information without pre-observation structuring (Cerrocchi & Martini,2005). The observation form (see Appendix) requires filling information on timing of activities, some categories concerning the manner of teaching and specially to describe the educational relationship (focus-teacher and focus-pupil, between focus pupils, focus-pupil and native peers). The live description, through annotations were enriched in the reflection/re-construction phase of the activity prior to the researchers.

Researchers have not interfered with the classes and tasks in the classrooms. All note-worthy verbal expressions and behaviors of the teachers’ and students’ curricular/extra-curricular activities were written down in research diaries and recorded as video. Before observing, the researchers have met with the teachers and introduced themselves that they were the researchers to make observations without participating which was aimed to spend time in order to ensure that the focus-teachers’ behaviors were not affected by the observer. The observations took place about 12 hours for each subject, depending on the timetables. Each one of the researchers collected the data from the countries separately. The observations took place firstly in Italy, and then, to make a comparison, in Turkey in order to conclude the study to compare the two Mediterranean countries with the increasing refugee population.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data were analyzed through descriptive analysis to prevent the loss of the richness of the data by using categorical analysis within the frame of SWOT which enables evaluation of the environment with negative and positive effects. SWOT is the analysis of the current and future situation, it firstly used in business by Heinz Weihrich (1982)

then spread to other areas such as education. SWOT stands for 'strengths', and 'weaknesses' are internal; 'opportunities' and 'threats' are external factors (Thompson et al.,2007). In this study, SWOT analysis was used to examine the relationship between refugees, natives and teachers, and the situation of them within the frame. Thus, it provides insights for researchers interested in the educational stance of refugee pupils. Once it is identified the internal and external factors of their education, then new policies can be implemented both for refugee pupils and their native and citizen peers in relation to their education and social life.

While strengths indicate the emphatic, powerful sides of the situation; weaknesses, that is the challenging sides of the situation, stress the negative attitudes, feelings, behaviours and outcomes of teachers and students. Opportunities, one of the external factors of the SWOT analysis, are advantages offered not only to individuals but also to the society in general. Opportunities offer progressive occasions, new openings and chances to improve collectively for teachers and students. Lastly, threats that are mostly in the future indicate a lack of development and advance, leading to exclusion and jeopardy between teachers and students (Helms & Nixon,2010).

One part of the study that took place in Turkey followed the initial study that took place in Italy earlier that year. Each one of the researchers analyzed the data together by using the main and sub-categories that explain the codes which specified before the analyzing. The categories of expressions and behaviors were independently assigned by the researchers and then their consistency was assessed. Sample expressions related to the categories were directly transferred (Patton, 2002; Büyüköztürk et al.,2008; Miles & Huberman, 2015). The codes created as a result of the observations were also examined by three experts who were not included in this study. As a result, the final evaluation is obtained from all codes and categories. Thus, the reliability of the research was intended to be increased.

Native language, social science and mathematics courses were chosen for this study as these courses are the most time-consuming courses in the weekly course hours both in the Italian and the Turkish primary schools (MIUR,2009; MoNE 2018). The native language course is considered as the most important one since it is essential to learn a native language and communicate with others. All other courses depend on this course (Platteel et al.2008). Social science involves basic life rules and moral education. Mathematics is one of the courses that children tend to make more mistakes (Hansen, Drews, Dudgeon, Lawton & Surtees,2017); on the other hand, the international numbering system in mathematics does not require language skills and thus it is expected that mathematics can provide important insights into refugee students' points of view. From a broader perspective, the aim of this study is to have a deeper look at the refugee pupils in these three courses.

## **Results**

According to general results, strengths for native students were identified as gaining insights into different cultures through refugees, meeting students with different backgrounds, and having the motivation to participate in activities. On the other hand, the language barrier led to difficulties in socializing with peers, getting along, and acknowledging each other, which can be considered as weaknesses. Opportunities were the chance given to students to learn to live with differences, with a possibility of bilingual education. Given that threats are things that may occur in the future, they are predictable in this case since they fled from war and lost their family members in their hometowns. This study also explored the teachers as well in all aspects and which aspects they attach importance to. Being able to make teaching appropriate to the constructivist approach, determining the interests and needs of students, giving opportunities to students can be considered as strengths. Discrimination between refugees and natives, not being able to detect level differences and expecting the same success from all children, lack of specific training in PTSD, traditional stringency of the curriculum are among the examples of weaknesses. Opportunities can be exemplified as follows: introducing and embracing Italian and Turkish cultures to refugees, revealing the innovative side of students by emphasizing the distinctive features of different countries, curricular reform processes, refugees' contribution to creating school culture and teachers' crisis management. Besides, racism, discrimination, material and moral constraints and situations where negative decisions can be made, clinical and academic demands, resistance to change the knowledge given in the lessons and the skills tried to be acquired can be illustrated as the instances of threats. The SWOT results of all the courses are comparatively presented in the following Tables.

### **Results of the Native Language Course**

Table 2 indicates the SWOT results of native language course for teachers and students in two countries.



**Table 2.** SWOT Results of Native Language Course

	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
Turkey	Teacher's reachability, tidiness and predictiveness Time management Respected justice and equality Peers' supporting each other Class size	Traditional teaching methods Grammar, idioms: culture Traditional stringency of the curriculum Adaptation problems Refugees' relatives in the classroom
Italy	Teacher's reachability Teaching experience Time management Respected justice and equality Support from colleagues Efficient time spending to teach language Respected diversity Class size	Traditional teaching methods Grammar Traditional stringency of the curriculum Already existing clicks between peers Physical arrangements in the classroom
	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Turkey	Emotionally and academically ready refugee students to be successful Refugee students being accepted in the society Good communication with parents Establishment of educational opportunities	Emotionally instability of refugee students: Overreacting and aggressive behaviours Subversion of class order Verbal abuse between peers Integration
Italy	Growing networks Experience sharing between colleagues Cultural diversity in the classroom Language classes provided by school administrators	Lack of motivation Lack of parental involvement Disobedience Negative culture creation

As seen in Table 2, the results are very similar in the two countries. It is revealed that the classroom teachers' reachability, predictiveness, justice and equality, and time management were the major strengths in the one-to-one activities performed by teachers with the refugee students. Class size can be also seen as a strength in the Italian case since the Italian classroom consists of 17 native and three refugee students. It is easy to integrate the students, enable them to get along with each other and manage the classroom. Unlike Turkey, teaching experience and efficient time spending to teach language items are regarded as strengths in Italy. This finding means that the teachers in Italy are more experienced as they started teaching earlier than the teachers in Turkey (Bonazza, Pasetti & Severoni, 2012; Sensin, Benvenuto & Mérac, 2020)

It was a weakness that both of the classroom teachers were following traditional teaching methods, prioritized to keep up with the weekly schedule that was provided by the Ministries. The tendency to traditional education processes is not acceptable for effective and constructive education (Khalid & Azeem,2012). However, teachers are concerned about the time to convey the subjects. Another noteworthy weakness was that the teachers performed grammar-based education in native language education. Considering that the refugee students are foreign to this new language, it is an expected result that they will have difficulty in this course. To learn both of the languages of the host countries, it is first essential to learn the Latin alphabet. Considering that the Pakistani students speak and write in Hindi written in Devanagari based on the vocabulary from Sanskrit and Syrians and the Egyptian students speak a language written from right to left, it is a prerequisite to teach the language from the beginner level regardless of the age of the students. Further, using idioms or proverbs can be confusing due to the unfamiliarity with the host cultures. Indeed, it was observed that the refugees had difficulties in understanding Turkish idioms, which reflect the culture but may have different meanings. This was also the case for the Italian sample where the idioms were mostly about food or religion during the lessons (*noted in the research diary as "essere buono come il pane/To be as good as bread means to be a really good person" or "A chi bene crede, Dio provvede/God listens to those who have faith"*)

The presence of the relative peers of the refugee pupils in the classroom was a weakness for Turkey. Since this means that refugees can easily communicate in their native language whenever they want. This is undesirable for the process of learning a new language. It is necessary to limit the contact of students with their mother tongue so that they can adapt and learn the new one. The language barrier and its effect led to communication problems as well.

It was noted on the observation form that the Egyptian student in Italian classroom had difficulties to maintain her concentration during the lessons and was constantly staring outside of the classroom's window. The researcher's diary also reported that the researcher caught her yawning each lesson, especially the Italian language. The first thing that comes to mind is whether this was because of her lack of language and interest in participating in the activities. As it was stated in the researcher's diary, the classroom teacher shared her opinion with the researcher that the student's problem was caused by a disrupted sleep pattern due to the lack of having a room of her own in the refugee camp, and the dense population at the refugee camp. All these things should be taken into consideration as the factors affecting the psychological well-being of refugee children (Ajduković & Ajduković,1993).

Due to the presence of the relatives of the refugee students in the Turkish case, the focus students spent time together, which supports the Argument that race is a stronger barrier rather than gender barriers to clique membership (Hallinan & Smith,1989). This weakness boosted another weakness, that is, the already created cliques in the

classroom. In short, these weaknesses are labelled as the challenges of social integration and inclusion. Indeed, building a community is an important ingredient to classroom success (Goodlad,2006). In Italy, a great weakness was that the classroom teacher failed to do any physical arrangements within the class to weaken the cliques and offer the refugee pupils opportunities to socialize and integrate with their peers. The focus students were sitting at the back row, making them invisible and away from the teacher's help on their educational needs. Moreover, the Turkish students were sitting intertwined with each other. They seem to fully acknowledge each other, which may emerge as an opportunity instead of a weakness. Knowing that the seating arrangement affects the extent and nature of student interaction, creating such an environment through physical layout of the seating would support achievement of learning goals (Haghighi & Jusan,2012).

In the Turkish case, the refugee students' emotional and academic readiness to be successful and in need of being accepted in the society were deemed as opportunities. This need of acceptance is a great opportunity for pupils to build themselves according to the third step in the Maslow's hierarchy (Lonn and Dantzler,2017). The threat posed by this situation, which leads to verbal abuse within the class, should be stepped in immediately. The provision of educational opportunities and good communication with parents are also opportunities given that the refugees with deficiencies may attend language courses in the meantime and their families have the chance to be involved or support this activity.

As for Italy, growing networks and sharing experience between teachers (based on the anecdotes shared with the researcher by the focus teachers about Facebook groups, in-service teacher training activities by expert teachers etc.) and cultural diversity were richnesses in the classroom and atmosphere was also considered as an opportunity. That cultural richness refers to growing networks and may even go to solidarity in the future. These results mean that the refugee students can adapt to the new society and this makes things easier in the future. They are disposed to learn the native language to integrate into the community in their life.

Another threat in the Turkish case was that the refugees were emotionally unstable and aggressive with overreacting behaviors, disobeying class orders and verbal abusing their peers. It also affects the daily and academic life of refugees. In the Italian case, threats were lack of motivation, parental involvement, physical exclusion, clinical and academic demands. And it can be incurred that all of these are valid for other courses as well. Lack of motivation and physical exclusion can push the student to loneliness. This may make that student prone to danger in the future. For this reason, it is imperative to integrate refugees into their environment at the primary school level.

### Results of the Mathematics Course

Table 3 indicates the SWOT results of mathematics course for teachers and students in two countries.

**Table 3.** SWOT Results of the Mathematics Course

	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
Turkey	Equality Native peers' support Students' enrollment long time ago Refugees' responsibility and self improvement	Traditional teaching methods Refugees tendency to stay together Teachers' lack of technological inadequacy
Italy	Motivated classroom Problem solving skills Native peers' support Teacher's support Visual materials	Traditional teaching methods and stringency of the curriculum Already existing clicks between peers Physical arrangements in the classroom Teachers' lack of knowledge about pupils Refugees lack of language knowledge
	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Turkey	Refugees' requirement to be motivated to participate in the curricular activities Curricular reform process Provision of innovative learning	The attendance to the activities are slightly worse than other subjects Teacher's high expectations from all students Poor communication with students and parents
Italy	Refugees' readiness to participate but lack of language challenges	Resistance to change The effects of refugee camps' circumstances

As seen in Table 3, strengths were identified as students' enrollment to school a long time ago, refugees being supported by their native peers, equality, refugees' responsibility and self-improvement. The students got used to each other and grew to accept each other because they spent a long time together. This situation was reflected in the lessons as well. It was noted that the refugee students had more difficulty in mathematics compared to other courses. Thus, refugees' responsibility and self-improvement appear to be important in mathematics. However, it was also observed that the students supported each other when they had difficulties not only in mathematics-related problems but also in other tasks. Equality means that the teacher treats all students identically; it gives even the student who fails in the course a chance to express himself/herself. For instance, it was observed that when the refugee students did not understand a subject in mathematics, they did not hesitate asking the teacher

questions. In the Italian case, all pupils were eager to learn, creating a motivated classroom. In that way, peers had a way to show their support for each other when one of them fails. While the class was solving a mathematical problem, the teacher stood near the refugee students to help them and to explain the steps to follow in order to solve the problem.

Weaknesses in the mathematics course were similar to those in other courses and almost the same for the two countries. The traditional teaching methods used by the teacher were a major problem for the mathematics course, which most challenging course for the students. One another weakness was the tendency of the refugees to stay together and this can be considered either as a strength or as a weakness, depending on the situation. In this case, the tendency of the students to remain together as a group was a weakness. This can be explained as follows: when refugees face a difficult situation, they may prefer to get closer to their citizens with a sense of empathy. Further, the technological inadequacy of teachers is substantial especially for mathematics, a course requiring more attention due to the negative attitudes of students towards mathematics. Therefore, teaching mathematics with traditional teaching methods is not ideal.

Weaknesses identified for the mathematics course in Italy were very similar to those in the native language course. The existing cliques between the native peers against inclusion strategies and physical arrangements in the classroom are regarded both as weaknesses and as threats. Yet, the Italian language challenged the refugee students in a way where some numbers have pronunciations moderately similar (i.e. quattordici:14, quaranta:40, quindici:15, cinquanta:15). Even if the lack of efficient competency in Italian language is a weakness, it might be considered as an opportunity to improve also Italian language and problem-solving skills in mathematics.

The participation of the refugee students in Turkey in the activities in the curriculum, curricular reform as well as encouragement towards innovative learning were considered as opportunities. This allows for the implementation of new teaching methods and enables more pupils to participate in mathematics activities. The Mathematical Dictionary was created by Solidarity Now as part of a project supported by UNICEF and aimed to teach refugees based math rules. It is anticipated that these developments will increase the interest and knowledge of refugees in mathematics. Curricular reform process and provision of innovative learning enable math program makers for ethnomathematics, which contains cultural effects on math. And that is an opportunity for progress in an international way.

The participation in math activities was slightly lower compared to other subjects; the high expectations of the teacher regarding all students and her poor communication with the students and parents were regarded as threats. In the Italian case, the refugees were ready to participate but the language barrier prevented them. Other

threats included the unwillingness of the refugees to change and the effect of the circumstances in the refugee camps on the students. The effect of these circumstances on the students can occur under any circumstances but they manifest themselves more especially in challenging situations such as math courses or any other subjects. Thus, teachers have a great responsibility to engage the student in the courses.

**Results in the Social Sciences Course**

Table 4 indicates the SWOT results of Social Sciences course for teachers and students in two countries.

**Table 4.** SWOT Results of the Social Sciences Course

	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
Turkey	Students’ willingness to attend Teachers’s preparation Using smartboard Homework check Acknowledgement by peers	Lack of language/ nomenclature Lack of culturel knowledge
Italy	Students’ willingness to attend Effective using of virtual materials Teaching experience Extra effort on designing materials for refugee students	Cultural difference Already existing clicks between peers
	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Turkey	Material using Openness to pupils own lives Creating intercultural balance Good communication with parents	Nationalism between peers Adaptation problem Meaningless examples and explanations Conflicts about values
Italy	Bilingual education Cultural difference led to curiosity Family support	Already existing clicks between peers Lack of parental involvement More students with special needs require also effort

As evident in Table 4, the results are slightly different relative to other courses. It is surprising that there were more strengths in this course in Turkey. The students were more willing to attend the lesson and accept the culture by way of this course, acknowledged by school stakeholders and peers. Besides, the teacher was more prepared and interested, reviewing the homework from the previous lessons, and willing to use the smartboard during the lessons. There were some weaknesses as well, including the lack of culture and language knowledge.

In Italy, the effective use of virtual materials and the experience of the teacher were distinctive compared to the case in Turkey. It was observed that the teacher was prepared for the lesson and explained at the beginning of the course what the pupils would have learned by the end of the lesson. While every Italian student had their own materials, the teacher gave the copies of the materials to the refugee students. Prior to the lesson, the teacher reminded what was covered in the previous lesson. Then, she provided the Italian students clear instructions about the book and the page number and provided the same materials to the refugees. She gave the first blind map to the refugees and asked key questions to guide each student to find out the answer by themselves. She not only stood near the refugee pupils to explain what to do for the activity and also took her time while describing the steps of the activity. It was also noted that the teacher tried to encourage the students in the classroom to use the terminology firstly in English and sometimes in their own mother tongues and this created multilingual education. In general, it was observed that when the teacher or a peer paid attention to a refugee student, that refugee student with a lack of concentration on the course attended the lesson. The difference in the findings in Italy is that the participation of the students in this course was not enabled by the closeness of the cultures, but by the competence of the teacher. Also, the teacher focused on visual materials, bridging the gap and spending extra time for the refugees.

In Turkey, the teacher's openness, material using, the intercultural balance created by the teacher and the good communication established with the parents of the students were the most notable opportunities. In general, the involvement of the parents and their relationship with the educators were much more explicit in this course as it involved similar culture and real-life practices. With the support of the parents, the Turkish teacher integrated the lesson to real life more easily and enabled the refugees to succeed. In the Italian case, the teacher's approach to emphasize bilingual education and cultural difference led to curiosity (that is, it was noted in the researcher's diary that the refugee students were asked to translate some of the terminology learned at the lesson in their native languages and this created a classroom atmosphere that allows for understanding the origins of the words where every pupil was brainstorming) but the cultural difference was regarded as a weakness (there was an anecdote describing that the native students' with their parents had a past experiences like vacation together in a North African country, which ended up being a stigma and blocked some other classmates to learn more about these new cultures). Therefore, it is a must to emphasize multiculturalism and interculturality in classrooms.

The adaptation problem is one of the most common problems of the refugees and a threat from a cultural perspective based on the case in Turkey. Conflicts about values and the complicated descriptions of these values were considered as threats because the lesson aims to explore social values and needs expected by people. The Social Science Programme presents many learning outcomes associated with values. It was

observed that when the teacher mentioned the culturally important rules and explained it is rude to speak loudly, the refugees shut their ears to the teacher. It was noted in the researcher's diary that the refugee students kept speaking loudly, thinking that there was nothing wrong about it. As for Italy, the cliques between the native peers against inclusion strategies provided by teachers were a weakness and also the lack of parental involvement and the presence of a higher number of students with special needs required more effort.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

Various studies on the education of refugees have been conducted in the literature. This study investigated the educational status of the refugee students, their relationships with teachers, their native and citizen peers in mathematics, social sciences, and native language courses in Turkey and Italy. These two countries have been home to a large scale of immigrants and lately for refugees on their territory throughout history that foreign people have been settled temporarily or permanently. The notable results of this study can be summarized as follows: Respected justice and equality, and peer support were the common strengths in both. The effective use of materials is an important strength in all of the three courses in Italy. A prominent finding is that the students were willing to attend the course and the teacher was prepared for the social science course in Turkey. Some research in the literature has focused on the cultural differences between refugees and natives (Arabacı et al.,2014; Uzun & Bütün, 2016). The long-term stay and acceptance of refugees in the society may not be a problem for the teacher personally, but this is certainly a problem for the social sciences course which focuses on social norms as well as moral and values. The reason for the engagement of the refugees with this course and the Turkish culture in general may be the cultures of similar nature and the common religion shared by Syrians and Turkish people.

Traditional teaching methods, traditional stringency of the curriculum, and language refugees' obstacles were the common weaknesses for almost all courses in Turkey and Italy. Emin (2016) and Arabacı et al.,(2014) emphasized the incompatibility of curricula and material deficiencies in teaching Turkish lessons to primary school students. Uzun & Bütün(2016) and Yiğit(2015) determined that refugee students are failing due to cultural adaptation problems and their incompetencies regarding the Turkish language. Textbooks of the courses exist in all the national languages, though harder to access in the smaller minority language groups (Bussi & Sun, 2018). And it provides great convenience to the refugees. It is also known that refugee students had problems due to their lack of knowledge regarding the language spoken in the country they migrated to (Deveci & Gürbüz,2012; Bozan,2014; Er & Bayındır,2015). These findings are largely congruent with the results of this study. Furthermore, the technological inadequacy of the teachers in Turkey as well as the lack of knowledge of the teachers about the pupils and the already existing cliques between the native peers against inclusion strategies in Italy are the major findings of this study. Teachers are expected



to have knowledge and to effectively deal with the psychological status of refugees. Otherwise, it would be quite difficult for the teacher to enable refugees to adopt a new culture through a new language (Taurino et al.,2012).

Opportunities identified in the Turkish case are the social acceptance of the refugee students and good communication with their parents. But for the mathematics course, the communication with the parents was more poor and the attendance in the activities was slightly lower compared to other subjects, which can be considered as threats since mathematics is more difficult than other courses. This course, in particular, entails an effective lecture within a structured program. Failing that may demotivate students and decrease their interest in the course. Even if mathematics is considered the universal language, the language of doing mathematics within the classroom was far from universal. Students must learn to associate mathematical symbols with concepts and the language used to express those concepts (Caniglia,2018). While creating intercultural balance can be considered as an opportunity in the social sciences course, adaptation problems and aggressive behaviors appear to be threats since the social sciences course involves the social rules and ethics. For that reason, the refugees are confused about the social values. It is known that refugee students may have disciplinary and behavioural problems (Bozan,2014). The lack of parental involvement and negative culture creation are threats while cultural diversity richness in the classroom is an opportunity for Italy. The lack of encouragement from the parents can cause lack of motivation to learn (Szente, et. al.,2006). Additionally, the teacher in Italy needed to pay extra attention to the native pupils with special needs (Anderson, et. al.,2012; Busbt, et. al. 2012). Teaching is seen not only as delivering knowledge to students but also as acting as multicultural agents by helping students from different ethnic groups work together. Since children tend to bring their experiences of structural inequities around race, class, culture, abilities and language into the classroom; teachers are responsible for helping pupils with diverse cultural backgrounds find a middle way between home and school (Maasum et. al.,2014). All these results mean that refugee students can get used to the new society they are in, making things easier for them in the future. Zannoni and Sirotti (2019) conducted a study in Italy where 14% of the students were migrated. They found the students in their study enjoyed discussing other cultures, other countries, and different ways of thinking. Another study that was conducted to address the educational needs of unaccompanied minors in Sicily found out that integration could lead Italy to have a greater cultural and linguistic heritage in the coming future (Di Rosa, et al.,2019). These findings are in line with the results of this study.

### **Suggestions**

As the education received by refugees cannot be considered independent from the whole of the host country's education system, the study concludes with suggestions. Because of the integrability of school, differences can be seen as sources of wealth

in that school and in this way it is possible to support positive views and attitudes towards differences. Therefore, it is important to implement multicultural education in schools. In such an educational setting, the presence of various languages, religions, races, classes, and genders in the classroom acclimatizes students (Acar Çiftçi & Aydın,2014). An education system that recognizes the diversity of the students represents a progressive curriculum where the future society can gain an understanding of the social and cultural issues in inclusive and multicultural lifelong learning programmes (Race, 2015). Curricula and educational materials should be designed to promote multiculturalism, respect for diversity, gender equality, freedom of thought, and ideas of equality. It is useful to examine the education systems of these countries to improve the education policies applied to all children, especially disadvantaged groups such as refugees.

Considering the continuous immigration to Italy and Turkey, a comprehensive and systematic education policy should be established for the education of foreign students. Firstly, compulsory additional language courses in two countries should be provided prior to the start of the school year or during the school year considering the age of the child. In Turkey, a project named PICTES was carried out to promote the integration of Syrian kids into the Turkish education system. The project aimed to support the access of Syrian citizens into education services in Turkey for a period of two years. Such projects should be prioritized and implemented considering the needs of children. Not only the children's linguistic needs but also other learning and emotional needs should be taken into consideration (PICTES,2018).

It is essential for the children, who are future adults, to be more sensitive towards "those who are different from them" and to make prosocial skills a way of life (Güdük & Yılmaz,2019). Therefore, it is believed that teachers, families, school administrations, and other collaborators should address this issue in a more effective way. Teachers in particular should not ignore students' past life experiences and make students feel that they are important. It is known that adaptation problems are one of the biggest problems for refugees (Yiğit, 2015; Uzun & Bütün,2016) and language problems can be overcome (Matthews & Ewen,2006; Kardeş & Akman,2018). To achieve this, children need to receive pre-school and primary education. The good upbringing of students depends on the quality of education provided by teachers. It is often hard to communicate with refugees, and teachers know little about these children. One of the major problems of teachers working with refugee students is that there is usually no plan or curriculum to guide them in a way that the students can understand culturally (Feuerherm,2013). Teachers may not be sufficient to educate refugee children and they need to be supported (Wagner,2013; Bacakova,2011). They have a significant role to support the social-emotional development and other areas of development of refugee children in school (Pumariega, Rothe & Pumariega,2005; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White & Salovey,2012). The in-service training should seek to improve non-verbal communication

skills, ensure that teachers know the proper way to approach a refugee student with mental health issues and learn about the history of the Middle Eastern countries. This training should be periodically conducted from kindergarten to higher levels. At this point, researchers and teachers need to solve some questions. What kind of intervention we should take into account so that native students and refugees integrated each one of the courses? What tools we can use to reveal the refugees difficulties else? How can we foster the students adaptation for school and courses? Although this study has started to grapple with these questions, we are still a long way away from resolving these tensions and finding satisfying solutions. We hope other researchers can build on our efforts and continue to seek solutions.

### Notes

Refugees and immigrants have different meanings. We accordingly used refugee term in this study since a majority of children are refugees rather than immigrant. There were some immigrants in Italy only, but we disuse this term since to get compatibility for the whole article.

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**Appendix: Observation Form**

Date:	Course:	Observer:
Hour:		Activity code:
Objective observations:		
Personal notes:		