

## Education for All: Teachers' and School Counselors' Experiences Educating Syrian Refugee Students in Turkish Public Schools

Herkes için Eğitim: Türkiye'deki Devlet Okullarında Suriyeli Mülteci Öğrencilerin  
Eğitimine Yönelik Öğretmenlerin ve Rehber Öğretmenlerin Deneyimleri

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### Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine teachers' and school counselors' experiences educating Syrian refugee students in Turkish public middle schools. Accordingly, this investigation has explored the opinions of 20 teachers and nine school counselors in Istanbul. The data were collected in 2019 using the semi-structured interview method. The research findings have revealed Syrian students in Turkish schools to experience the following common hardships: language barrier, curriculum, cultural differences, lack of prior education, socio-economic factors, behavioral problems, community pressure, and parental indifference. Supporting a multicultural school climate with high expectations for all has become a central point in educating students with different backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Syrian refugee students, refugee education, middle schools, teachers' experiences, Turkish public schools.

### Öz

Bu nitel araştırmanın amacı, Türkiye'deki devlet ortaokullarında Suriyeli mülteci öğrencilere eğitim veren öğretmenlerin ve rehber öğretmenlerinin deneyimlerini incelemektir. Buna göre, bu araştırma İstanbul'daki 20 öğretmen ve dokuz rehber öğretmenin görüşlerini araştırmıştır. Veriler, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yöntemi kullanılarak 2019 yılında toplanmıştır. Araştırma bulguları, Türk okullarındaki Suriyeli öğrencilerin şu ortak zorlukları yaşadıklarını ortaya koymuştur: dil engeli, müfredat, kültürel farklılıklar, önceki eğitim eksikliği, sosyo-ekonomik faktörler, davranış sorunları,

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toplum baskısı ve ebeveyn ilgisizliği. Herkes için yüksek beklentileri olan çok kültürlü bir okul iklimini desteklemek, farklı geçmişlere sahip öğrencilerin yetiştirilmesinde merkezi bir nokta haline geldi.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Suriyeli mülteci öğrenciler, mülteci eğitimi, ortaokullar, öğretmenlerin deneyimleri, Türk devlet okulları.

## Geniş Özet

### Giriş

Suriye Arap Cumhuriyeti'ndeki savaşın 2011'de başlamasından bu yana Türkiye, Suriye'ye komşu bir ülke olarak büyük bir Suriyeli mülteci akını ile karşı karşıya kaldı. 2011 yılında, önemli sayıda Suriyeli mülteci Türkiye'nin güneydoğusuna yerleştirildi. Ancak, bu sadece başlangıçtı, çünkü milyonlarca mülteci daha sonra Türkiye'nin mültecilere yönelik politikasının bir sonucu olarak Türkiye'ye göç etti. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü'nün göç istatistiklerine göre 23 Mayıs 2019 itibarıyla Türkiye'deki Suriyeli sayısı 3.600.000 olarak tahmin edilmiştir. İstanbul'da yarım milyondan fazla Suriyeli mülteci bulunmaktadır.

Türk eğitim sistemi, eğitime ihtiyacı olan okul çağındaki Suriyeli mülteci çocukların büyük bir yüzdesiyle ilgilenmek zorunluluğu ile karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Türkiye halihazırda 5-18 yaş arası bir milyondan fazla okul çağındaki Suriyeli çocuğa ve 0-4 yaş arası 572.544 Suriyeli'ye ev sahipliği yapmaktadır (Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2019). Kamplarda yaşayan mülteci çocuklara yönelik eğitim, kamp dışında yaşayanlara göre daha yüksek bir kayıt oranında gerçekleşmektedir. Nitekim kamplarda yaşayan Suriyeli çocukların %90'dan fazlası eğitim almaktadır (Taşkın ve Erdemli, 2017). Kampların dışında, Nisan 2019'da örgün eğitim alan kayıtlı Suriyeli öğrenci sayısı 643.058'dir (%61.39).

2011 yılından bu yana Suriyeli öğrencilerin Türkiye'de örgün eğitimini sürdürmek için iki seçeneği bulunmasına rağmen, Türkiye şu anda yalnızca devlet okullarında mülteci çocukları kabul etmektedir (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2018). Ayrıca MEB, Suriyeli çocuklar için okul öncesi öğretimin ve ilkokulun zorunlu olduğunu duyurmuştur. Türkiye'deki ilkokullar en fazla mülteci çocuğa sahip iken, ortaokullar en düşük oranda mülteci çocuğa sahiptir. Ancak MEB, UNICEF ile işbirliği içinde yeni gelen mülteci öğrencilerin eğitim kalitesini artırmak için çeşitli etkinlikler düzenlemektedir.

Özellikle belirtmek gerekir ki, çok sayıda mülteci çocuğun çeşitli nedenlerle okula gidememesinin önüne geçmek için eğitime erişimin daha kolay sağlanması üzerinde çalışılması gerekmektedir. Türk eğitim sisteminde, lise eğitimi alınabilmesi için ortaokullar özel önem arz etmektedir. İstatistiklere göre lise çağındaki mülteci çocukların sadece %26,77'si eğitim almaktadır. Bu makale, ortaokullarda eğitimin daha iyi anlaşılmasına ve sistematik olarak ele alınması gereken olası eksikliklere katkıda bulunacaktır.

## Yöntem

Bu çalışma, okullarda mülteci öğrencilerle çalışan öğretmen ve rehber öğretmenlerin bireysel tutumlarını inceleyerek sorunun özüne ulaşılmasını sağlamak için yöntem olarak temel yorumlayıcı nitel deseni benimsemiştir. Çalışma, veri toplamak için araştırma yöntemi olarak yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler kullanmaktadır. Bu araştırmanın katılımcı grubunu İstanbul'da bulunan devlet ortaokullarında görev yapan öğretmen ve rehber öğretmenler oluşturmaktadır. İstanbul'un Küçükçekmece, Bağcılar ve Esenyurt ilçeleri, ilçelerdeki mülteci nüfusun büyüklüğüne göre çok sayıda mülteciye ev sahipliği yaptığı için araştırma için seçilmiştir (Erdoğan, 2017). MEB'den belirli bölgelerdeki okullara giriş izni alınmıştır. İlçe Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü'nün [İlçe Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü] web sitesinden 10 ortaokul seçilmiştir. Bu okullar, okula kayıtlı çok sayıda Suriyeli çocuk nedeniyle seçilmiştir. Seçilen her okulun müdürü, görüşmeye katılmak isteyen o okuldan bir rehber öğretmen ve iki öğretmen seçmiştir. Sahada toplam 20 öğretmen ve dokuz rehber öğretmen ile görüşülmüştür. Araştırma verileri bahar döneminde toplanmıştır. Görüşmeler 26 Şubat-21 Mart 2019 tarihleri arasında ilgili okullarda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma verileri betimsel ve içerik analizleri kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir.

## Bulgular ve Tartışma

Suriyeli mülteci çocukların Türkiye'deki devlet okullarında eğitim görmeleri konusunda öğretmenler ve rehber öğretmenleri ile yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerde şu temel zorluklar not edilmiştir: dil engeli, müfredat, kültürel farklılıklar, önceden eğitim eksikliği, sosyoekonomik faktör, toplum baskısı, davranışsal sorunlar ve ebeveyn ilgisizliği.

Öğretmenlerin ve rehber öğretmenlerinin mülteci çocuklara ilişkin vurguladıkları önemli bir sorun da Türkçe bilmemeleridir. Mülteci çocuklar, Türk okullarında derslere herhangi bir hazırlık ya da temel Türkçe bilgisi olmadan devam etmektedir. Böyle bir durum başka birçok soruna yol açmaktadır. Mesela, bu çocuklar anlamadıkları derslere ilgi göstermezler ve genellikle sınıf etkinliklerine katılmazlar.

Okulların çok sayıda öğrenciye sahip olması, öğrencilerin sosyal ve duygusal ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak zorunda olan bir rehber öğretmen için kesinlikle büyük bir zorluk teşkil etmektedir. Tüm öğrencilerin ihtiyaç duyduğu rehberlik hizmetinin sağlanamaması, mülteci öğrencilerin okullara gelmeye başlamasıyla daha da belirgin hale gelmiştir. Bu da okullarda rehber öğretmenin Türk eğitim sisteminde göz ardı edilmemesinin önemini ve gerekliliğini göstermektedir. Türk eğitim sistemi, mülteci çocuklar için özel bir müfredat hazırlamamıştır. Buna rağmen, onları mevcut müfredata dahil etmişlerdir. Öğretmenlerle yapılan görüşmelerde, kültürel farklılıkları mülteci çocukların Türk okullarına sosyal entegrasyonlarının önünde büyük bir engel olarak gördükleri belirtilmiştir. Bu nedenle, kültürel farklılıkların olumlu içermelerinin önündeki engellerden biri olarak yaşanması, yerel öğrencilerin ve toplumun diğer geleneklere ve farklılıklara alışık olmadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Çok sayıda mülteci çocuk, seyahat edip farklı yerlere taşındıkları için uygun eğitimden yoksun ve birkaç yıl geride kaldılar. Türk okullarına uyum da dil sorunlarının yanı sıra bilgi eksikliği ve

düzensiz eğitim de diğer engeller arasında yer almaktadır. Yerinden edilmenin ardından yaşanan ekonomik zorluklar, mülteci çocukların ruh sağlığını da etkileyebilmektedir. Ayrıca Türkiye'de devlet okullarına kayıtlı belli sayıda mülteci öğrenci de devamsızlık yapmaktadır. Öğretmenler, çocuk işçiliğinin devamsızlığı etkileyen bir sorun olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Bununla birlikte evde çok sayıda kardeşe sahip olmak, okul çağındaki çocukları ebeveynleri isteyken kardeşlerine bakmak zorunda bırakmaktadır. Rehber öğretmenler, Suriyeli mülteci öğrencilerde gözlenen davranış sorunlarından bazılarını şiddet davranışı, tükenmişlik ve intikam duygusu olarak belirtmişlerdir. Bazı mülteci öğrenciler asosyal olup çevreleriyle zar zor bağlantı kurarken, bazıları öğrenci ve öğretmenlerle iletişim kurarken saldırganlık göstermektedir. Öğretmenler, şiddet içeren davranışların ortaya çıkmasının, muhtemelen savaşta ve medyada şiddete tanık olmalarının bir sonucu olduğunu düşünmektedirler. Böylece Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler toplumda bazı istenmeyen olayların mağduru olmuş ve bunun sonucunda da hem öğretmenlerin hem de Türk öğrencilerin okulda onlara yönelik davranışlarını etkilemiştir.

Çoğu rehber öğretmen ve diğer öğretmenler, özellikle dil engeli nedeniyle, mülteci ebeveynlerle olan etkileşimlerin çok kritik olduğunu ifade etmektedirler. Bu velilerin çoğu henüz okula gelmemekle birlikte; çocuklarının akademik başarısına hiç ilgi göstermemektedirler. Böyle bir ortamda eğitime önem vermeyen çocuk okula gitme isteğini de kaybetmeye başlamaktadır. Daha aktif olan ve çocuklarının Türkiye'deki eğitimlerini başarıyla tamamlamasını isteyen ebeveynler ise, onları Türkçe'yi daha iyi öğrenmeleri için motive etmekte ve Türk toplumuna uyum sağlamalarına yardımcı olmaktadır.

Yerli ve yabancı öğrenciler arasındaki ön yargıları ortadan kaldırmak için ne gibi etkinlikler düzenledikleri sorulduğunda öğretmenler, eşitlikten, dostluktan, yardımdan ve farklılıklara sahip olmanın değerinden bahsederek çocuklarda empati kurmanın öneminden bahsetmektedirler. Ayrıca grup çalışmalarıyla çocuklar arasındaki ilişkileri güçlendirmeye ve iş aracılığıyla onları birbirleriyle doğrudan ilişkiye sokmaya çalışılmaktadır. Bazı öğretmenler durumlarını öğrenmek ve yardım etmek için mülteci çocuklarla özel olarak görüştiklerini iddia ederken, diğerleri bu konuda özel bir şey yapmadıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

Sonuç olarak, mülteci öğrenciler dünyanın her yerinde olduğu gibi Türkiye'de de geçmişte ve günümüzde bazı sosyokültürel ve eğitim sorunları yaşamaktadırlar; eğitim, onları yeni bir ülkeye ve kültüre nasıl adapte olmaları ve ev sahibi topluluklar içinde nasıl uyumlu sosyal ilişkiler kuracakları konusunda rehberlik etmede kesinlikle önem arz etmektedir.

## Introduction

Since the war in the Syrian Arab Republic started in 2011, Turkey has faced a large influx of Syrian refugees as a country bordering Syria. With its favorable policy and open-door approach concerning the status of refugees as temporary guests, Turkey has provided domestic legal status to refugees, granting them the legal right to remain in the country. Thus, asylum seekers have not only been offered protection from punishment for illegal entry or presence, but also protection from *refoulement* (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019).

In 2011, a significant number of Syrian refugees (260) were housed in the Hatay area in south-eastern Turkey. However, this was only the beginning, as millions of refugees moved to Turkey later ones a result of Turkey's welcoming policy toward refugees. According to migration statistics from the Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, the number of Syrians in Turkey as of May 23, 2019 was estimated as 3,600,000. In addition, the number of refugees who'd settled in camps was 116,989, with 3,491,060 having settled outside of camps. More than a half million Syrian refugees reside in Istanbul Province. After which, Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, and Hatay Provinces host the largest number of refugees in Turkey (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2019). Up until early 2013, Syrian refugees had preferred to stay in camps, where they had been provided with basic necessities. However, after some time, most refugees decided to leave the camps and start living in the towns and cities of Turkey. Due to the strict discipline in the camps and especially due to male unemployment, they've preferred to move to the urban areas of the country (Erdoğan, 2015).

Because refugees depend exclusively on themselves or family members after leaving camp, their ability to survive in major cities is greatly at risk. Many urban refugees face the problem of getting a work permit. For this reason, they are often illegally employed for low wages and struggle to find an acceptable abode (İçduygu, 2015). Insecure jobs, low salaries, increased apartment rental costs, and incessant social discrimination have turned refugees' lives into a struggle for survival. Moreover, racism, media, and intercultural contact have had various impacts on their sense of belonging, participation, and inclusion as a part of social cohesion (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2015).

According to UNHCR (2017) statistics, those under 18 years of age constitute around 51% of the global refugee population. In fact, the percentage of children within the refugee population between 2003 and 2016 was quite high, varying between 41%-51%. In Turkey, 1,721,717 Syrian refugees under temporary protection are under 18 years of age.

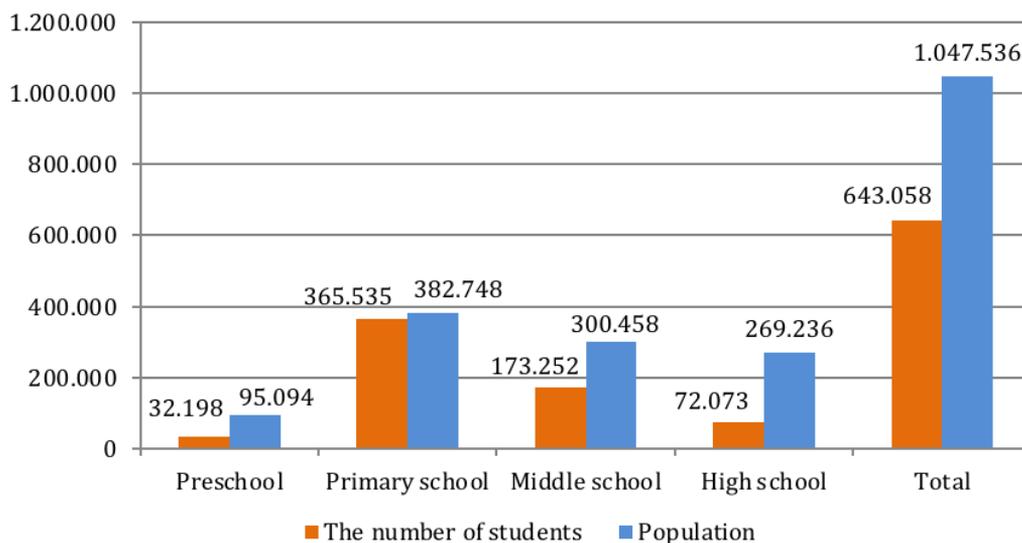
Therefore, in addition to the importance of providing basic conditions for the lives of refugee children, Turkey as a host country must reflect equal importance on the continuity of their education and adaptation to the Turkish educational system.

### *Educating Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey*

Turkey matched the profile of a host country for refugees from Syria; however, it has been transformed into a destination country. As a result, the Turkish education system has faced the pressure of having to accommodate a high percentage of school-age Syrian refugee children in need of education. Turkey currently hosts more than a million school-age Syrian children between the ages of 5-18 and 572,544 Syrians between the age of 0-4 (General Directorate of Migration Management, 2019). Educating for refugee children who live in camps occurs at a higher enrollment rate than for those living outside of camps. In fact, more than 90% of the Syrian children living in camps receive education (Taskin & Erdemli, 2017). All these camps have education centers offering education from primary school through high school (Dillioglu, 2015). Outside of the camps, the total number of Syrian students enrolled in formal education in April 2019 was 643,058 (61.39 %).

While two main options have been found for maintaining Syrian students' formal education in Turkey since 2011 Turkey is currently only accepting refugee children in public schools. Non-formal education centers also exist in some areas. The Turkish government announced the plan to systematically close all Temporary Education Centers in the near future and to integrate all Syrian children in Turkish public schools (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2018). Moreover, MoNE has declared both preschool and primary school to be mandatory for Syrian children. At the moment, the number of Syrian students registered in public schools is 478,221, while 90,512 Syrian students are enrolled in the temporary education centers (MoNE, 2019).

Figure 1 presents the enrollment rates for Syrian refugee students attending public schools and Turkish Education Centers (TECs) in terms of grade level versus population; 33.86% of preschool-aged children are enrolled, as well as 96.50% of primary school-aged children, 57.76% of middle school-aged children, and 26.77% of high school-aged children.



*Figure 1.* Enrollment rates for Syrian children in terms of grade level and population (MoNE, 2019).

Turkey's primary schools host the greatest number of refugee children, while secondary schools host the lowest.

The Turkish education system has already been in a disadvantaged position in terms of the quality of education (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Thus, the influx of Syrian children into public schools has become another strain on teachers and school staff in Turkish public schools. However, the MoNE in cooperation with UNICEF has organized various activities in order to improve the quality of education for newcomers. MoNE has trained 500 Syrian teachers working in the temporary education centers, as well as 611 school counselors; MoNE has also published a handbook for teachers with foreign students in their class, as well as performing many other works to overcome the hardships in integration (MoNE, 2017; Öztürk et al., 2017).

This study examines the views and opinions of teachers and counselors on the educational challenges and possible solutions regarding educating Syrian refugee children in public schools.

### *Education as an Indicator of Refugee Children's Social Inclusion*

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNHCR, 1989) should also be considered alongside the aim of understanding the phenomenon of children's social exclusion and inclusion. The articles of this convention advocate for children's rights, and their main goals are thus to promote children's social, spiritual, and moral development; to support their interests; and to protect their right to a dignified life, education, play, and free expression. Failure to comply with these rights can lead to children being socially excluded from society (Klasen, 1999).

According to the European Union's framework, education is a general indicator of social inclusion. From the EU's perspective, low educational attainment affects children's risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion later on (Akinson et al., 2002).

Educating refugee children plays a vital role in including children and parents in a host community (Ager & Strang, 2008). The school a refugee child attends may be the only contact the child's family has with the host society; thus, it represents a useful source of information. Education can provide psychosocial support for children who have experienced trauma and encourages social cohesion and peacebuilding in the long run (MoNE, 2019).

However, minority status has long been seen to be related to unequal educational opportunities and a high level of school failure (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). In most European countries, migrant or refugee students have lower educational performance than native-born students. Moreover, students whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction experience more bullying at school and have a lower sense of belonging in primary and middle schools (Crosier & Kocanova, 2019). An effective way to improve social communication and eliminate discrimination within schools is to create an integrative school culture where peers, school staff, and other stakeholders are considered equal. Realizing this aim can occur by maintaining a high level of student communication through different pedagogical practices (Vislie, 2003; Sakız, 2016). Intercultural education can create an environment where all students with different backgrounds are able to participate and interact equally, show respect to one another, and build a peaceful living space.

In particular, due to the above data where large number of refugee children are seen to be absent from school for various reasons, providing easier access to education needs to be worked on. The Turkish education system should pay special attention to middle schools, as the turning point for continuing high school education. According to statistics, only 26.77% of high school-aged refugee children are enrolled in school. This paper will contribute to a better understanding of education in middle schools and the possible shortcomings that should be systematically addressed.

Accordingly, this paper examines the following questions:

1. What are the practices and policies of Turkish public middle schools on educating refugee children?

2. What are the opinions of teachers who are in direct contact with refugee children regarding these children's social inclusion?
3. What conclusions have school counselors reached about refugee children and their integration with school?
4. How do all these practices reflect on refugee students' education?

## Method

The purpose of this study is to identify the experiences of teachers and school counselors regarding the educational process of Syrian refugee children in Turkish public schools. This study has adopted a basic interpretive qualitative design as its method. Qualitative research pertains to understanding people through their own set of criteria and values and experiencing reality as they do (Corbin & Strauss 2008; Taylor et al. 2015). Thus, a qualitative approach for this type of research would enable the study to reach the essence of the problem by examining the individual attitudes of teachers and school counselors working with refugee students. Their responses can provide an overview of refugee students' adaptation process. Thus, the study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews as the research method for collecting the data. A semi-structured interview is where the exact wording and sequence of questions in the interview are determined in advance. All interviewees are asked the same basic questions in the same order. The questions are worded in an open-ended format (Patton, 2015).

### *Participants*

The participant group of this research consist of teachers and counselors working at public middle schools in Istanbul. The sample for this study was selected using the purposeful sample method, in which participants are selected or sought after according to pre-selected criteria based on the research question. Thus, individuals are selected intentionally in order to learn about and understand a certain phenomenon (Marshall, 1996). The most important criterion is the number of Syrian refugees in schools. Based on the size of the refugee population in districts, Istanbul's Küçükçekmece, Bağcılar, and Esenyurt Districts have been selected for the research as these districts host a large number of refugees (Erdoğan, 2017). Permission for entering the schools in certain areas was received from the MoNE. Ten middle schools were selected from the District Education Directorate's [*İlçe Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü*] website. These schools were selected because of the large number of Syrian children enrolled in the school. The principal of each selected school chose one counselor and two teachers from that school who were interested to attend the interview.

In total, 20 teachers and nine school counselors were interviewed in the field. Research data was collected in Spring semester. The interviews were conducted in the respective schools between February 26 and March 21, 2019.

**Table 1.**

*Demographics of the Participating Schools (The School Names Are Codenames)*

Middle School	Municipality	Total # of Students	# of Foreign Students	School Staff
Apple	Küçükçekmece	760	15	Turkish staff
Orange	Küçükçekmece	998	23	Turkish staff
Pear	Küçükçekmece	3,314	600	Turkish counselor for Syrians
Grape	Küçükçekmece	1,467	80	Syrian counselor
Mango	Küçükçekmece	1,495	23	Turkish staff
Cherry	Bağcılar	1,125	50	Syrian counselor
Strawberry	Bağcılar	1,680	73	Turkish staff
Raspberry	Bağcılar	1,718	29	Turkish staff
Peach	Esenyurt	2,197	54	three school counselors
Watermelon	Esenyurt	1,535	90	Turkish staff

As seen in Table 1, the 10 schools included in the survey have integrated at least 15 and as many as 600 refugee children into their respective educational system. Four schools hired counselors for refugee children to help them overcome the difficulties they face in the new environment more easily.

**Table 2.**

*Frequency Values of Teachers' Branches and Gender*

Variable	Type	F
Branch	Social science	5
	Turkish language and literature	4
	Mathematics	3
	English language	3
	Science	2
	Turkish language course	2
	Arts	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>
Gender	Female	11
	Male	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 2 shows the interviewed teachers to teach in various branches, with five teaching social sciences, four teaching Turkish language, three teaching mathematics, three teaching English language, two teaching Science and Turkish language courses, and one teaching arts. Having equal representation in terms of gender is also important; as such 11 of the interviewed teachers are female and nine are male.

**Table 3.**

*Frequency Values for School Counselors' Gender*

Variable	Type	F
Gender	Female	11
	Male	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 3 shows eight of the interviewed school counselors to be female and one to be male. As most counselors in schools were female, equal gender representation was not possible.

The answers of teachers and school counselors are marked with the letter T= teacher (1-20) and C= school counselor (1-9) in the quotations.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The semi-structured interviews were done by applying them individually with the school counselors and teachers in each school. The interviews with the teachers and counselors lasted for one to two hours, and the researcher took field notes during each interview in order to capture the school climate and any important movements, gestures, body language, or information the interviewees expressed. In order to make the interview questions appropriate for the respondents, the opinions of three experts were obtained, which benefitted the process greatly. Therefore, two professors from Marmara University's Departments of Sociology and Education and a PhD student in the field of education reviewed the interview questions and influenced their construction. The problem of the study, its framework, and research questions arose from the researcher's review of the relevant literature, previous observations, and immediate experience with refugee children in different organizations in Istanbul. As a result, two types of interview guides were developed. The interview guide for teachers included 17 questions falling under four topics: a) the factors affecting new refugees' adaptation, b) teachers' experiences working with refugee children, c) the challenges and barriers in supporting new refugees, and d) expectations for policies such as suggestions to the local municipalities and the state.

The interview guide for school counselors was structured to comprise of 14 questions falling under three topics: a) challenges in the process of including refugee children in the Turkish education system, b) the school counselor's relationship with refugee children, and c) recommendations for further work regarding guidance services at the schools.

The research data were analyzed using descriptive and content analyses. Content analysis can reveal the concepts and relationships that are important in obtaining the solution to a social problem. Descriptive analysis evaluates analyzes data in detail more superficially than content analysis. The basis of content analysis lies in collecting, organizing, and interpreting the collected data under common specific themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). As a result of studying the textual responses, the teachers' and counselors' answers have been classified according to the themes determined within the framework of the research questions. Codes have been generated from these themes. Some of the teachers' and counselors' opinions have been quoted directly in order to have a high level of validity

## **Findings**

This research is based on the qualitative content analysis of the responses from teachers and school counselors with whom the research topic was discussed. The schools are mostly located in disadvantaged regions with large numbers of students. According to our survey, the average number of students in the classrooms is approximately 40. Each class has around two foreign students. The

researcher observed a certain number of refugee students enrolled in Turkish state schools to be absent from the classes. The teachers stated child labor to be a problem affecting refugee students' regular attendance. Additionally, having a large number of siblings at home obliges school-age children to take care of them while parents are at work.

### *Communication Barriers Between the Teaching Staff and Refugee Students*

One major problem teachers and school counselors have highlighted in including refugee children is the lack of knowing Turkish. Refugee children attend classes in Turkish schools without any preparation or basic knowledge of the Turkish language. Such a situation leads to many other problems. For one thing, these children do not show interest in lessons they don't understand and usually do not engage in class activities. As a result, these children are mainly introverts sitting at the back of the classroom. However, teachers are also unable to communicate with them and often give up trying to engage them. According to personal observations, Syrian children who spend their free time on the street with Turkish peers have developed the ability to speak Turkish. However, writing and reading are a stumbling block. Refugee children's participation in schools is based on their physical presence without many expectations regarding their achievements. The teachers stated the following in this regard:

*"I cannot communicate with them, no way. They just come to class to sit and go home. They don't know how to write or read. We're dealing with laughing, nothing else. (T9)*

*"Because they lack basic literacy, they do not participate. If there are three and more Syrian students in the classroom, they talk with each other. I think they cannot fuse with others because they have different structures... Some of our Syrian students speak Turkish very well, so I ask myself is this student really a Syrian? Yet, there is still an incompatibility. (T12)*

In order to most effectively solve the language barrier, Turkish language courses have been opened in schools specifically designed for Syrian children. Courses are held after classes or during classes, and the language is taught by Turkish teachers. Two interviews were conducted with Turkish language course teachers. They said that, in addition to the 15-day seminar MoNE organized, they had received no other preparations for working with refugee children.

Furthermore, the children were observed to often avoid attending this course because they do not want to stay longer in school, or their families do not allow them to attend. One teacher said:

*We had one teacher last year, she started an after-school literacy course for Syrians on her own. But they didn't want it. They have no interest in learning. One student told me, "Let it finish so we can go back to our country." Some of them really love Turkey, but when I ask them what they prefer, they say their homeland. I think they are right. But we're holding out our hand and they don't reach out to hold it. (T12)*

The teachers declared that children who have mastered the Turkish language whose parents attach great importance to education and are therefore concerned about their success show far better results in regard to both academic success and social adjustment.

In addition, school counselors can play a vital role in preventing mental problems in refugee school children (Esquivel & Keitel, 1990). Intercultural counseling would help children overcome the stress of acculturation and succeed in socializing among their peers. Furthermore, the importance of prevention and intervention programs for themes such as enculturation and acculturation, ethnic identity confusion, and behavioral difficulties is highlighted as key to their optimal development. During the present research, the school counselors working in the visited schools were noted to significantly avoid personal interactions with students. Mostly, each school has two counselors. For example, one counselor works two days one week while the other works the remaining three days. The efficiency of constantly changing school counselors for students who need to establish a secure and confidential relationship with the school staff is uncertain. Most counselors have their own office at school, while a guide working with Syrian children stays in front of the deputy director's office and has no office of their own. Having a large number of students per school certainly pose a great challenge for a counselor who has to address students' social and emotional needs. The failure in providing a guidance service all students need has become much more perceivable when the refugee students began arriving at schools. This indicates the importance and necessity of counseling in schools to be quite disregarded in the Turkish education system. Only one of the visited schools had three counselors who successfully performed their work, according to personal observations. They actively participated in the expected collaborations with children, organizing psychodramas, group activities, and the like. However, this school must be said to have a slightly better economic situation and to have considerably fewer refugee children, 15 to be precise.

School counselors as well as teachers have confirmed language to be a fundamental barrier regarding Syrian refugees' social inclusion in school. In their relationships and interactions with refugee students, the problem of language is especially evident. The inability to communicate does not allow children to express themselves or their problems, demands, and experiences. Furthermore, it does not allow counselors to provide children with proper psychosocial support. Most of the teachers and counselors declared having little or no face-to-face dialogue with either Turkish children or Syrian refugee students. One of the counselors said:

*I do not have individual interviews with Syrian students on a regular basis. The guidance service at school moves forward based on problems, not development. We have 1,300 students at school, so I cannot really have a weekly interview with each student. We talk only when they have a problem. The school has about 50 Syrian students, mostly in the 5th grade. We try to solve their problems regarding school achievement and absenteeism. It would be a lie to say I keep track weekly. (C6)*

In order to establish any initial contact, counselors usually ask for help from those Syrian students who've mastered Turkish so they can translate for the other children. Counselors said that this created a restriction in the child's ability to self-express while the third child was present. Therefore, communications between a refugee student and counselor remain at a basic level. One counselor claimed:

*There's a language barrier. I often use sign language and draw pictures. Something with a paper and pen. Or if it is not a private topic, I call one foreign student who speaks Turkish and Arabic well, and we try to translate and have dialogue. (C2)*

### *Curriculum*

The Turkish education system did not immediately design a special curriculum for refugee children. Despite this, they did include them in existing protocol. As one teacher affirmed:

*We didn't have a special program for refugee students, so we maintained the same curriculum in class. (T20)*

Teachers following the formal curriculum do not have more time to devote to the refugees. Most often, their communication is reduced to evaluation; they also do not initiate other discussions such as explaining or analyzing lesson topics. As a result, poor contact among them leads to refugee students being alienated from the class. Some of the teachers claimed:

*The system is wrong. I wish we could have more time for them. Unfortunately, we're already overcrowded. (T13)*

*I don't think they can connect with us because they are the minority. For example, 39 students are in the class, and the Syrian, being one student, gets left behind. He falls into the minority status. Foreign students do not socialize with ours during the break either. They meet directly with their friends from other classes. (T10)*

*If there are few foreign students in the class we do not have any problems, but if there are 4-5 refugee students in the same class, they make their own groups and we have a problem with communication. (T7)*

Some of the refugee children who are unable to quickly adapt to the Turkish education system leave school. Therefore, the number of dropouts raised once they enrolled in Turkish public schools after temporary education centers were closed. One teacher added:

*At first, 64 Syrian students arrived, but we lost 34 because we couldn't communicate and they were forced to go. (T6)*

### *Cultural Differences*

For the successful inclusion of students with minority and immigrant backgrounds the school climate needs to be imbued with multicultural values. Multiculturalism is a policy that every school where children of diverse backgrounds are found must nurture in modern society.

In the interviews with the teachers, they were noted to see cultural differences as a major obstacle to the social integration of refugee children in Turkish schools. Teachers considered the different types of clothing, food traditions, language, ways of communication, and many other distinctions as inappropriate behavior. Therefore, cultural differences were experienced as one of the hurdles to positive inclusion, revealing that local students and society are not accustomed to other traditions and differences.

The teachers mentioned:

*People no longer have a sense of curiosity and respect for other international cultures. Everyone is impatient. For example, we are Muslims in Turkey, and it is same in Syria, but we do not respect it. Nobody likes anyone anymore. (T11)*

*Syrian society has Arabs, Kurds, and Turkmen. In our school, Turkmen and Kurds are a little more fused. But the Arabs are a little more restrained. Their conversation and way of talking are different. The others are already calling themselves Turks. (T5)*

As can be noticed from this last quote, the teacher expressed a positive image of those children who'd managed to integrate themselves into Turkish society without imposing their own identity and culture. During the interviews with the teachers, the probing questions was asked regarding what they think about introducing either Arabic as a foreign language in schools or organizing special days in Arab culture where refugee children could show their way of life and feel accepted in society. A small number of teachers ( $n = 2$ ) regarded this probe as a positive way of communication. Most considered that highlighting other minorities and their cultures to be able to lead to various problems later on. One teacher said:

*This is my third year here and I still have no adapted students in class. I haven't seen a student who's adapted fully because the child feels bad and has many difficulties. "Why are you trying to make me Turkish," they say. They want to learn Arabic as well, but it is not included in the curriculum. (T5)*

### ***Lack of Prior Education***

One issue identified as being a particularly significant obstacle in all the schools being visited is the lack of refugee children's prior education. A large number of refugee children lacked proper education and lagged several years behind, due to having traveled and moved to different places. The Turkish school system decided to place them in classes based on their age at the time of registration. As an example, decisions like this caused children who'd only completed first grade in Syria to get enrolled in the 6th grade in Turkey based on their age but with no preparation for it. In addition to linguistic problems, lack of knowledge and having an irregular education are also other obstacles in adapting to Turkish schools. One of the teachers said:

*They have no basic education. They've received no prior good education or been educated for some time. That is why the 5th-7th graders are actually at the 2<sup>nd</sup> - or 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade level. Most started school here but are enrolled in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. (T2)*

### ***The Socioeconomic Factor***

The socioeconomic factor plays a very important role in the refugee children's social inclusion. The relationship between social class and educational inequality has been discussed in many types of studies (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Marks, 2005; Hobbs, 2016). Children from working-class families have been shown to often fail in education and drop out of school earlier (Çelik, 2016). Extreme material conditions cause harsh living circumstances for refugee families. Consequently, refugees mostly live in disadvantaged areas in old apartments and basements. Lack of material goods and poverty lead to child labor, malnutrition, hygiene negligence, and more. One teacher stated:

*These families generally have a poor educational as well as financial status, in addition to the cultural differences and large number of siblings. We always have the same kind of refugee students, many siblings, unemployed families, uneducated parents, social differences. (T4)*

Teachers stated some refugee students do not have enough money to buy school uniforms or meet other school needs. One teacher even added:

*Because of their socioeconomic status, some students are filthy; they don't care about their outward appearance. (T3)*

Moreover, these parents having a limited educational background also strongly affects their children's educational performance.

### ***Behavioral Problems***

Excessively violent behavior, violent type of games with peers, and cursing are problematic behaviors that teachers have complained about in regard to refugee students. They consider the refugee students' behaviors to have been induced by war and the testimonies of everyday violence during their time spent in Syria. In addition to these causes, children's behaviors also appear to have been influenced by inappropriate programs in the media. One teacher said refugee children have two types of behavior:

*They can't adapt. Either they're too aggressive, probably from the negative impact of being far from their country, or they are asocial. They have no moderate behaviors. Either they talk with no one or they surround themselves. (T4)*

*In the beginning, they felt like strangers, but now their relations with our students are better. Now they see themselves ahead of the others. At first, a shy student, doesn't talk much, but now they do. Grouping together breaks the alienation. (T6)*

Contrary to the aggressive behavior noticed in certain students, teachers consider a significant number of Syrian children to be asocial and to hardly communicate with other children. Due to the lack of language and the new environment, they are mostly isolated and mocked by Turkish children. As two teachers claimed:

*They are introverted and passive. Children at this age are also a bit brutal. They make fun of language mistakes. Turkish is not their mother tongue, that is why they can't speak properly. They sit in the back of the classroom and wait for the end of the lesson. (T15)*

*Being an introvert and feeling lonely may affect their school success. They may feel unpleasant in the school environment. Think about it, if a student is unwanted in a group of friends and they continuously exclude him, will eventually seclude himself. (T12)*

While the teachers predominately have negative attitudes toward the refugee crisis in Turkey, only one teacher pointed out a positive and encouraging commentary describing the Syrian children:

*I'm quite satisfied with all of them... They keep their surroundings clean. For example, some Syrian students switch off the light when they leave the class last, some of them arrange the desks, close the window, and then leave the classroom. (T14)*

When talking about refugee students' behavioral problems, the school counselors mentioned violent behavior, burnout, and a sense of revenge:

*While they have no one else in class who can understand them, they express themselves with other reactions. They can be furious, very stressed, anxious. In general, foreign students communicate better with other foreign students. (C2)*

*They use violence because they don't understand the language. Swearing, hand gestures, slang. They try to solve conflict with violence. Or pushing, they don't know how to make contact with each other. They have violent physical reactions because they have no verbal communication. We've had difficult getting them to adapt to the rules. (C4)*

*The Syrian children have burnout, displacement, and forced migration. They haven't had the chance to heal yet. Thus, they view the other children as, "Why did we have to leave our country, why not you?" They have a sense of revenge. (C9)*

### ***Pressure from the Community***

The marginalization of Syrian refugees in Turkey can be heard every day on the street. Media reports often create a negative picture of the influx of Syrian people into Turkey. Theft, rapes, pay cuts, rent increases, and other negative situations are considered to be directly related to refugees nowadays. Thus, Syrians in Turkey have become victims of certain undesirable events in society, and as a result, this has affected the behaviors of both teachers and Turkish students toward them at school:

*Neighborhood pressure exists and those around them don't accept them. No one wants Syrians as their neighbors. They don't want to hear about their children having a Syrian friend in class or at school. The perspective is a bit distressed because we still don't accept them. If you do a survey now in Turkey, 95% of Turkish people will say they want Syrians to leave. (T5)*

*The biggest obstacle is the point of view. The perspective everyone, teachers, , principals toward Syrians is a bit problematic. (T5)*

Some of the most common prejudices among children that teachers have noticed are:

*All places are full of Syrians! There are too many Syrian grocers here! Arabic language is everywhere! He is Syrian, let's not let him in the group! You should stay in your country and fight for it, what are you doing here? If there was a war in Turkey, they would not accept us in their land! Our soldiers die in Syria, and they are here doing nothing! You live for free here! They are dirty! The country is helping them but not helping us! (T4,T14, T15).*

### ***Parental Indifference***

Aside from the essential roles local parents have, the role of refugee parents is also a crucial factor for the successful inclusion of refugee children. Most school counselors and teachers claim the interactions with refugee parents to be very critical, especially due to the language barrier. Most of these parents have yet to come to school; they show no interest in their children's academic success. In such an environment, a child who doesn't attach importance to education also begins to lose the will to attend school. Parents who are more active and want their children to successfully complete their education in Turkey motivate them to learn Turkish better and help them adapt to Turkish society. A small number of parents is really progressive in relation to school. School counselors mentioned:

*The parents also have a language barrier. The children translate for them. They don't come easily to school, of course. They are not interested in their children's success or failure. We have to call them all the time. (C6)*

*We can't meet frequently. They also have a certain perspective about us. Their expectation from us generally involves economic aid. Always money. Educational guidance is not their aim, instead, they see us as an economic resource. (C4)*

Even though the Turkish government and international and non-governmental organizations in Turkey support refugees' livelihood, Syrians commonly encounter insecure positions, deportation, and xenophobia among the host community. This causes refugee families to perceive this country as a temporary solution and also affects students' opinions and effort toward school. One of the teachers from the Turkish language course stated:

*Some refugee families think about leaving Turkey and going to Germany. Students from those families are unable to bond with our schools. They think, "I'm going to go anyway." They do not give importance to the lessons. This issue varies for each student. (T4)*

### ***Support Activities***

When asked what activities they set up to remove prejudices between local and foreign students, teachers mentioned the importance of cultivating empathy in children by talking about equality, friendship, help, and the value of having differences. Moreover, with the help of group activities, they try to strengthen relations among the children and put them in direct contact with each other through work. Some teachers claim to talk privately with refugee children in order to find out their situation and help, while others stated doing nothing specific about this issue.

*I speak with them privately, asking where they live, do they have a father, how is their financial situation? First of all, I'm trying to introduce myself. I believe that I can do something after they start to trust me. 6-7 girls come to me constantly; we talk; they are happy to speak Arabic. I am trying to break prejudices in class. (T11)*

*I gave a lot of talks in classes where they are guests, and tell everyone they should respect them. If there is a problem, I try to have the same approach and not discriminate about this issue. And these kids will not leave. It's a huge thing to live here for five years. The more we try to normalize the situation, the better it becomes. (T12)*

Teachers also claimed the most equitable behavior to be remaining calming class and not traumatizing refugee children by mentioning the war or asking about life in Syria:

*I feel like I need to talk more, and to try and behave in such a way that those students won't be injured. (T4)*

Teachers and counselors suggested that refugee students should take an intermediate-level Turkish language course before enrolling in formal education. Furthermore, Turkish and refugee children should participate in extracurricular activities together to meet each other outside of the

class atmosphere. In addition, they also recommended school picnics, trips, theater, and other social activities that can ease prejudices toward newcomers:

*For example, Turkish and Syrian children are currently doing handouts together for International Women's Day, and they enjoy it a lot. Normally, they don't have many friends, the refugees. When they have these activities, they run immediately and work together. Production and collaboration is the key. (C3)*

However, one of the teachers said the Syrian children should go to separate schools because he believes that they will not remain in Turkey after the war end in Syria. This topic is still very current among the Turkish population and creates tensions. Teachers are confused and don't know whether to set short-term or long-term goals when interacting with refugee children:

*Local and refugee children should not be in the same class, they must be in separate classes and need to be educated in their mother tongue, because many students just come to school to sit. They don't do anything because they have language problems. These children won't stay here permanently. As far as I know, they could go back tomorrow or the next day. They could go back to Syria after the war. I am not for educating Turkish and Syrian children together. (T7)*

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The main aim of this study has been to examine the experiences of teachers and school counselors with regard to educating Syrian refugee children in Istanbul's public middle schools. With Turkey having become a host country for millions of Syrian refugees over the last eight years, the education system has had to improve its standards and environment for these newcomers. The process of adapting Syrian children to the Turkish education system and schools' efforts toward social inclusion have been quite challenging. Thus, this study has attempted to research the way in which Turkish public schools have responded to the challenge of educating Syrian refugees.

The following main difficulties have been noted during the semi-structured interviews with the teachers and school counselors regarding educating Syrian refugee children in Turkish public schools: language barrier, curriculum, cultural differences, lack of prior education, the socioeconomic factor, community pressure, behavioral problems, and parental indifference.

According to the Human Rights Watch Survey in 2015, economic hardships, the language barrier, and difficulties with social integration were observed as the barriers preventing Syrian children from attending schools. Similarly, the findings from the studies by Levent and Çayak (2017) and Kardeş and Akman (2018) have affirmed that Syrian refugees face not only language barriers but also adaptation problems. Furthermore, gaps in the refugee registration system, lack of identification documents, and lack of prior education in terms of grade level were mentioned as some of the problems with integrating Syrian children into school (Levent & Çayak, 2017). Many refugee students entered schools in host communities with limited literacy in their mother tongue and poor skills in the language of instruction. Apart from Syrian Turkmen whose mother tongue is Turkish, language barriers are one of the biggest hurdles in Syrian refugees' social inclusion into Turkish schools. In

other studies, performed in Turkey, many teachers who've had direct contact with refugee students expressed that those who'd not received any formal training on learning Turkish struggle in Turkish schools; they seem to not comprehend most of the content given in class and have serious problems with self-expression (Şeker & Sirkeci, 2015; Tösten, Toprak, & Kayan, 2017; Aydın & Kaya, 2017; Kardeş & Akman, 2018).

No long-term solution for refugee children's education was planned in Turkey at the start of the huge refugee influx into the country. Thus, refugee children were educated in temporary education centers; with a small number being temporarily enrolled in public schools until their return to Syria. However, because the political situation in Syria has gotten even worse over the years, many refugee families have chosen to settle in Turkey. Consequently, the Turkish education system has had to work on improving both the curriculum and the school environment for these newcomers.

One of the first steps was to introduce Turkish language courses in public schools where Syrian children were enrolled. Refugee children have continued to attend regular lessons and therefore have started to take the Turkish language course after school or during certain classes (Taştan & Çelik, 2017). Although the language course has helped refugee children in terms of literacy skills, their poor academic achievement was still noticeable. In addition, Syrian students were also determined to have lower academic success compared to their peers, primarily due to the language barrier (Aydın & Kaya, 2017).

In addition to the language barrier, cultural differences have also been highlighted as one of the factors holding back Syrian children's successful inclusion into Turkish public schools. With the arrival of students from another country with their own diverse cultural values and habits, Turkish teachers and students have faced the challenge of a sudden multicultural environment. In our survey, the teachers and school counselors mostly expressed the fear of imposing new cultural values in Turkish society and had negative views in particular regarding the emphasis of new cultures in schools. Only two of the 29 participants expressed positive attitudes toward multicultural education. Moreover, the participants mostly believe that these newly come refugees must embrace the values of the indigenous population. Other studies in Turkey have also shown teachers to have negative attitudes toward Syrian refugees (Topkaya & Akdağ, 2016), thus Syrian children adapting to school may become even more difficult in the coming years (Başaran, 2020).

However, schools have an essential role in providing direct contact between the host community and refugee children. Thus, nurturing an inclusive climate and making opportunities for social interaction between the local and refugee students can be a push toward the child-centered framework of resettlement for fostering these refugee children's resiliency (Xu, 2007). As the first person in communication with students, teachers face the most difficult obstacles including new children from different sociocultural backgrounds into class. How teachers behave and prioritize inclusivity among students and staff influences the general school climate as well as local students' behaviors toward these newcomers (Olagookun & White, 2017; Miller, Ziaian & Esterman, 2018). Because Turkish schools are facing an increase in the cultural diversity of students, teachers should also be prepared and receive more training in order to create a welcoming and positive classroom environment.

Lack of prior education was a major problem for students who lost years of education due to war, escape, and travel. Refugee students who are unable to show proof of their previous education level, get tested through interviews and written assessments before entering class. Most commonly, they were placed in a grade based on their age. This, however, has produced anxiety and frustration for the newcomers who were usually far behind their peers in academic achievements. In spite of these circumstances, some foreign students had greater academic success compared to their local Turkish-speaking peers.

Teachers claimed some refugee students' success in class to mostly be related to their parents' support and interest in their academic achievement.

On the other hand, the socio-economic factor has caused certain difficulties in terms of refugee children's social inclusion. Economic difficulties after displacement have been able to affect refugee children's mental health. What is more, a certain number of refugee students enrolled in Turkish state schools are absent from class. The teachers stated child labor to be an issue affecting their regular attendance. Additionally, having a large number of siblings at home obliges school-age children to take care of them while their parents are at work.

Apart from these issues, malnutrition and poor personal hygiene have also been observed as common problems among refugee students. Students who've experienced the war may manifest diverse symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) such as depression, withdrawal, hyperactivity, aggression, and intense anxiety when exposed to traumatic situations similar to what they've previously witnessed (Genesee & Richards, 1994). School counselors have mentioned violent behavior, burnout, and a sense of revenge as some of the observed behavioral problems in Syrian refugee students. While some refugee students are asocial and hardly connect with their surroundings, some show aggression when communicating with students and teachers. The teachers considered the appearance of violent behavior to possibly be the result of witnessing violence in war and the media. They also explained this as their way of getting attention. However, Ergen & Şahin's (2019) study saw Turkish teachers claim one of the hardships they've faced to be the violent behavior of Syrian refugee children, especially the older children.

Media reporting has also created a negative picture of the influx of Syrian people into Turkey. Some studies have reported how Turkish citizens mostly have negative attitudes toward Syrians in Turkey. This resulting has affected the behaviors of teachers and Turkish students toward Syrians in schools. Sakiz's (2016) research findings showed that school administrators supported segregated environments instead of having refugee children in public schools. In our interviews, the teachers said that media had mostly had a negative influence on the Turkish population in terms of Syrians in Turkey.

International studies have shown student achievement and development to be strongly connected with parental engagement. Some of the positive influences that parental engagement has on students' education are higher grades, lower drop-out rates, and a greater tendency to continue on to higher education (Emerson et al. 2012). However, the partnership between schools and refugee families appears limited and is one of the barriers to Syrian refugee children's successful social inclusion.

Refugee families often lack proficiency in Turkish, and the know-how and courage to take an active role in a new school environment and culture (Emerson et.al. 2012). Refugee parents in the visited schools were mostly isolated from the school due to their work, occupation, and the language barrier. Interactions between schools and refugee parents are considered poor and insufficient. Syrian refugee parents usually do not attend parent meetings organized by school and rarely even come to school at all. Additionally, uncertainty about the future and the possibility of moving to a European country negatively affect children and their attachment to school, as they perceive their stay as transitory.

When asked what should be done in order to improve refugee education in schools, the teachers stated the following: empathy should be cultivated about equality, friendship, and valuing differences; group activities should be promoted to strengthen relations between the local and the refugee children; and talking about their lives, experiences, and traumas that would evoke memories of war should be avoided. Moreover, some also proposed extracurricular activities, trips, and common schoolwork. However, many teachers are still confused about what goals they should set for refugee students, how they should include them, and how to integrate them into public schools.

In conclusion, refugee students are experiencing certain sociocultural and educational problems in Turkey similar to anywhere else in the world past or present; education surely is the critical option in guiding them on how to adapt to a new country and culture and how to establish cohesive social relations within their host communities.

## Ethics Committee Approval

This research was carried out with the approval obtained from the ethics committee of Marmara University Institute of Educational Sciences. The ethical approval obtained on the 31/01 /2019 and the Decision No is 1988542.

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