

REFUGEE STUDENTS IN OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THROUGH THE EYES OF TURKISH TEACHERS

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Received: 14/07/2022 **Accepted:** 21/09/2022

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to identify the problems faced by refugee students during Covid-19 pandemic in open and distance learning and the best examples of practices put into effect to cope with these problems and solutions recommended to eliminate these problems, in Turkiye. In the study, the phenomenological research design, which is one of a qualitative research method, was used. By using the criterion sampling technique, a total of 14 teachers who had refugee students were selected as the research participants. Interviews were held with the volunteer participants. The research data were collected by using a semi-structured interview form. The descriptive analysis method was used in the analysis of the research data. According to the study findings, the refugee students who did not have the necessary educational technology facilities in open and distance learning process and could not get sufficient family support felt more deeply the language problems which is experienced also by them in face-to-face education. In order to help refugee students with these problems, some school administrations provided the refugee students with tablet and computer support within the bounds of their means. In order to alleviate the effects of the problems faced by refugee students, it is recommended to provide refugee students with educational technology support, making up education and psychological support.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, open and distance learning, refugee students, education technologies, parental support.

INTRODUCTION

The school makes the largest contribution to the social, cultural, and academic development of the refugee students just as in the case of other students. The school is significant leverage that enables refugee students to interact with their peers, ensures that their personalities are shaped, tempts them to seek new opportunities, and secures that the obstacles encountered by them are removed (Suarez-Orozco & Gaytan, 2010; Wal-Pastoor, 2016). It is known that these students who were faced extensively with the language barrier, did not have adequate levels of preparedness, were not psychologically healthy, were sometimes confronted with biases and discriminatory situations, and as a consequence, they experienced problems in education activities (Arzubiaga et al., 2009; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Kollender & Nimer, 2020). In recent years, especially as a result of conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, the education of refugee children has become an important problem area for many countries, especially for developed countries (Fagerholm & Verheul,

2016; Hogue, 2018; Kollender & Nimer, 2020; Naslund-Hadley et al., 2020; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). This problem became even more obvious especially along with the migration of approximately 6.6 million people who escaped from the conflicts in Syria (UNHCR, 2021) to neighbouring countries, in particular, Türkiye, and the European countries (Fagerholm & Verheul, 2016; Kollender & Nimer, 2020; Uyan-Semerci & Erdogan, 2018). By drawing attention to the refugee students' education activities in the period of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye that traditionally does not have adequate experience in dealing with refugees but is confronted with a sudden inflow of refugees, this research brings the existing problems up for discussion as well as the approaches that will likely meet these students' needs. It is known that the refugee students perform below their real potentials and lag behind their peers in terms of accessing education and receiving a good quality education service (Darmody et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2017; Meunier et al., 2013). Open and distance learning (ODL) teaching is still in effect given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which leads to the need to discuss the related problems experienced by the refugee students further.

When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that some studies (Popyk, 2021; Primdahl et al., 2021) examining the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic on refugee students have been conducted. These studies, which were carried out in European countries such as Poland and Denmark, were carried out on the social life and social communication of refugee students from different origins during the pandemic period. In the national context, the study conducted by Celik and Kardas-Isler (2020) examined the school experiences of refugee students in ODL process. This current research differs from the relevant literature by virtue of reflecting the views of teachers who undertake critical roles in ODL process for the refugee students sharing the same ethnic origin and accordingly having similar cultural attributes. Additionally, it should be noted that, as per the laws in effect in Türkiye, the Temporary Protection Status was granted to the refugees who were the topic of this research. On the other hand, as the concept of the refugee is widely used in the relevant literature and ensures the conceptual consensus on the topic, it is considered that using the concept of refugee that was also commonly preferred by the Turkish people would be a more proper approach in the research. It is known that 4 million refugees, 3.7 million of whom were Syrians, lived in Türkiye as of 2020. Around a million of these refugees were school-age children (UNICEF, 2019). These children attend the schools where Turkish citizens can be enrolled. In this context, it is believed that this research will contribute to the relevant literature in national and foreign contexts as it is a step taken to explore the refugee students' educational lives in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic in Türkiye confronted with an intense flow of migration on grounds of conflicts occurring in Syria in recent years. Furthermore, the research is also significant because of being conducted in Sanliurfa that is among the provinces hosting the largest school-age refugee population in Türkiye (UNICEF, 2019).

Following the suspension of face-to-face educational activities and the urgent launch of ODL activities in numerous countries due to the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020 (Bozkurt, 2020; Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Chang & Satako, 2020; Engzell, Frey & Verhagen, 2020; Gupta & Goplani, 2020), the refugee children were confronted even more with the shortcomings that influenced their development negatively. Therefore, it can be asserted that more support and cooperation are needed for the education of refugee students (Kollender & Nimer, 2020; Popyk, 2021; Primdahl et al., 2021; You et al., 2020).

ODL has become more widespread along with the suspension of face-to-face education activities in several countries particularly in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Daniel, 2020; Engzell et al., 2020). Therefore, children will have good quality education, ensuring that everyone has the necessary facilities in ODL activities is a non-negligible obligation (Saavedra, 2020). Regardless of whether the education activities are carried out face-to-face or via ODL, it should be secured that all students have access to educational activities, students' needs are met, and education activities are structured in a way to support student learning, are comprehensive, and promote the equality of opportunities (Bozkurt, 2020; Chang & Satako, 2020; Giannini & Lewis, 2020). However several research studies demonstrated that the refugee students did not have the necessary education facilities and were exposed to a variety of inequalities also in ODL activities carried out in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic (Adams, 2018; Anderson, 2020b; Aswathi & Haneefa, 2015; Bozkurt, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; Van-Lancker & Parolin, 2020).

Considering the factors such as the cultural capital, socioeconomic features, parental support, teacher support, state reforms and supports, attitude toward information technologies, motivation, informatics literacy, gender, geographical differences, usage autonomy, and experience (Aswathi & Haneefa, 2015), it

is evident that the refugee students will be affected by most of these factors in ODL process. For refugee students confronted with even more challenging conditions in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, not the emergence of new inequalities but the deepening of the pre-existing ones is in effect. In ODL process, communicating with these students became harder sometimes for technical reasons and sometimes due to language problems (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Kollender & Nimer, 2020; Primdahl et al., 2021). The social communication channels that were in place especially for teachers to interact with refugee students and their parents at least in a restricted sense started to be gradually blocked off. Thus, the teachers who have refugee students experience difficulties and cannot appeal to these students (Kollender & Nimer, 2020; Primdahl et al., 2021). This was because the solutions that were suited to the students in general but not to the refugee students' specific needs were presented in ODL activities in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is known that the refugee students failed to have educational technologies such as the internet and computers that were essential to their education as the refugee families mostly had a low socioeconomic status (Adams, 2018; Kollender & Nimer, 2020). It is often put forward that, beyond technological infrastructure, the refugee students were deprived of a suitable setting where they could perform their educational activities (Kollender & Nimer, 2020) and were bereft of support from family due to their parents' economic, social, and cultural characteristics (Anderson, 2020b; Garcia & Weiss, 2020). From this point of view, the current research aims to explore the problems faced by the refugee students in ODL process in Türkiye and the best practices and recommended solutions for eliminating these problems.

METHOD

In this study, the phenomenological research design is which one of a qualitative research method was used. The phenomenology pattern aims to collect in-depth data about the phenomena that we are aware of but do not have a deep understanding of (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016). Phenomenological studies refer to the common meaning of a few people's experiences about a phenomenon or a concept (Creswell, 2016). In the phenomenological design, it is aimed to gain an in-depth understanding by focusing on how participants understand the phenomenon, how they describe it, and how they feel about the phenomenon. This design focuses on how people describe a phenomenon they have experienced (Patton, 2014). While focusing on people's real experiences about a certain phenomenon, prejudice and hypothetical evaluations are avoided as much as possible (Van Manen, 2007). This research tries to identify the experiences of teachers regarding the problems experienced by refugee students in participating ODL activities during the pandemic process.

Participants

As the purpose of qualitative research is to choose cases that are rich in information and experiences, small sample groups that are generally designated with a purpose are selected as the participants (Patton, 2014). As having rich experiences about the phenomenon that is the research topic is a significant criterion for the participants as per the criterion sampling technique that is one of the purposive sampling techniques (Creswell, 2016), the criterion sampling was used as the sampling technique also in this research. In this regard, the participants to be included in the research sample were required to satisfy the criterion of teaching lessons to refugee students in ODL activities performed in the academic year of 2020-2021. In this respect, teachers who had refugee students in elementary, middle, and high schools in Sanliurfa were selected as the research participants. Hence, 14 teachers who worked at different school levels, satisfied the designated criteria, and agreed to contribute to the research were selected as the participants in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected by using the interview method that was used commonly in qualitative research and the semi-structured interview form that was developed by the researchers who carried out the study. Based on the review of the relevant literature and the professional experience, the interview form comprised of two open-ended questions was prepared. The first version of the interview form contained two open-ended questions, "What do you think about the problems encountered by the refugee students in ODL process?" and "To alleviate the negative effects of the ODL process, what can be done about the education of refugee

students?”. A pilot study, in which interviews were held with two volunteer participants on the basis of the first version of the interview form, was performed. As per the pilot study, the question, “What are the practices developed to solve the problems encountered by the refugee students in ODL process, and how do you evaluate these practices?”, was added to the interview form based on the participant teachers’ practical experiences. Hence, after the final version of the interview form was prepared, the interviews were performed.

The teachers to be interviewed within the context of the research were informed about the research topic before the interview. In this respect, the teachers were told that the research received the ethical endorsement, the utmost attention would be paid to the protection of the privacy of their personal data, and the research data would be used solely for scientific purposes. The interviews were held with the teachers who agreed to contribute to the research through scheduled online meetings. The participant were given code names as P1 (Participant 1), P2, P3, and so on. Then interviews were transcribed.

In this research, the descriptive analysis method was used for data analysis. In the descriptive analysis, just as the data can be organized as per the previously identified themes, a general framework for data analysis can also be created on the basis of the interview questions. According to this general framework to be created, the data are organized. Later, these organized data are first defined and then supported with direct citations, and the obtained findings are interpreted. In this study, firstly, interviews were transcribed, and then, the files for each interview were produced. These interview files were transferred to the qualitative analysis software. In addition to the research questions, the framework themes were created for data analysis. Subsequently, interview files were read a few times and the codes about the framework themes were designated. The themes, which were created so that the designated codes would produce meaningful patterns in common with each other, were organized as word clouds. Based on the organized data, the findings and their interpretations were addressed. Finally, the findings obtained along with data analysis were supported with direct references to the participant teachers’ views. All stages of data analysis were conducted by using the qualitative data analysis software.

Validity and Reliability Study

The most effective way of ensuring the validity and reliability of the data in qualitative studies is to enhance the diversity of data (Noble &Smith, 2015; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin, 2009; Tobin & Begley, 2004). The analysis of the data by different researchers is accepted as one of the main ways of data diversification (Patton, 2014; Creswell & Miller, 2000). The frequent use of detailed descriptions and direct references in data analysis (Creswell &Miller, 2000) can also contribute to the enhancement of the reliability of the qualitative data. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data in this study, the data were analyzed by the two authors of this study, and also, direct references were made for the verification of the findings that were identified as the common patterns of the analyses made by the two authors. The findings were verified also with participant teachers’ confirmations.

Limitations

All of the refugees mentioned in this study came from Syria. In other words, they have similar cultures and backgrounds. Comparisons can be made by conducting research studies in different regions and with different refugee groups.

FINDINGS

The findings were obtained by analyzing the participant teachers’ views about the interview questions that were prepared in line with the research aim. The findings and their interpretations are as below:

Problems Encountered by Refugee Students in Open and Distance Learning

In the research, firstly, the question, “*What do you think about the problems encountered by the refugee students in ODL process?*”, was pointed to the participant teachers. The participant teachers’ views about this question were analyzed and the obtained themes and codes were exhibited in Figure 1 below.

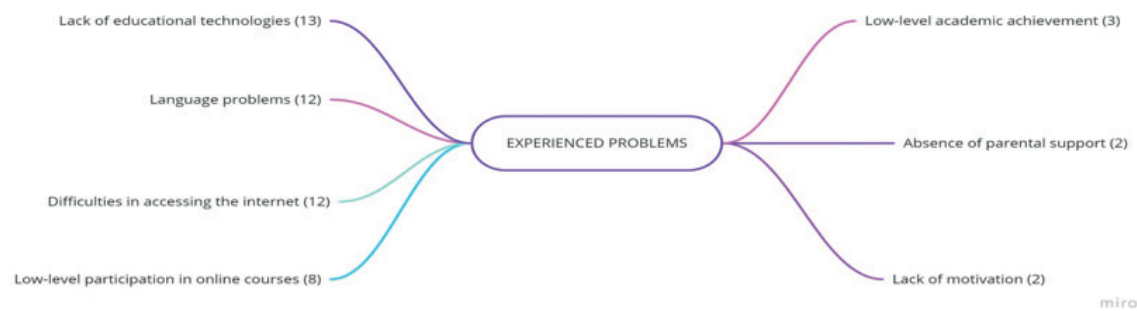


Figure 1. Findings about the problems faced by refugee students' in ODL

As viewed in Figure 1, the theme of Experienced Problems was created analyzing the participant teachers' views about the problems encountered by the refugee students in ODL. It is discerned that the codes such as 'lack of educational technologies', 'language problems', 'difficulties in accessing the internet', 'low-level participation in online courses', 'low-level academic achievement', 'absence of parental support', and 'lack of motivation' were consecutively clustered under this theme. According to the participant teachers, 'lack of educational technologies', 'language problems', 'difficulties in accessing the internet', and 'low-level participation in online courses' come at the top of the problems experienced by the refugee students in the period of ODL. The P10 who worked as a Turkish language teacher at an elementary school that had a large number of refugee students draws attention to the problems encountered by the refugee students in this framework by stating, "... in this process, the difficulty in accessing the internet and the limited number or the absence of technological devices come at the top of the problems faced by the refugee students in ODL. In certain houses, the availability of just one phone, the absence of a computer, and the presence of a TV sometimes working or sometimes not working gave rise to problems in accessing education...". Moreover, the P2 who had refugee students at a middle school and said, "... particularly the inability of a highly large part of the refugee students living in certain regions (the region where our students resided) to participate in courses because of the unavailability of internet connection or computers, tablet PCs, and so on", draws attention to the fact that the lack of educational technologies and the troubles in accessing the internet had gravely negative effects on the participation of the refugee students in online courses. As per the participant teachers' views, it is ascertained that the problems faced by refugee students in participating in online courses as a natural consequence of the difficulties in accessing educational technologies and the troubles in having internet connectivity came at the top of the challenges experienced by refugee students in the period of ODL.

According to the participant teachers, one of the key problems experienced by the refugee students in ODL process is the language barrier. The language barrier that was essentially a crucial problem faced by the refugee students also in face-to-face education was more intensely perceived as a problem in ODL period. For example, P13 says that one of the refugee students' most important problems in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic was the language barrier by stating, "... during the pandemic, our most important problem has been the communication. Not speaking the same language prevented us from understanding them...". Likewise, the P4 directs attention to the language problem experienced in lecturing to the refugee students in ODL period by telling, "... as the refugee students who already suffered from the language problem in face-to-face courses were more passive in ODL, and the effect of this negative situation increased even further. Shortly, the language problem got worse in ODL process...". As it was discerned, the language barrier that was already among the refugee students' most important problems came forward as an even more serious challenge in the period when ODL was offered. It can be asserted that the language barrier that was tackled to a certain extent with peer support, interpreter's assistance, and body language in the classroom setting under normal circumstances turned to be a serious problem for both teachers and students in online courses.

As well as the above problems, the problems such as low-level academic achievement, absence of parental support, and lack of motivation are also observed. According to the participant teachers, the refugee

students suffer from a lack of motivation and have low-level academic achievements as a natural result of the lack of educational technologies, difficulties in accessing the internet, language problems, and low-level participation in online courses. For instance, the P9 brings this situation to the fore by saying that “... together with the pandemic, their self-confidence and academic achievement levels decreased...”. Also, the absence of adequate and essential parental support was deemed as one of the key problems in the context of the lack of motivation and low-level academic achievements in refugee students. The P10 draws attention to the absence of parental support with views suggesting, “... it was observed that a large majority of the refugee families could not support their children about their courses as they did not know Turkish, and this situation, in turn, led to the fall of motivation in refugee students...”. It can be said that the refugee students’ parents failed to provide their children with necessary educational support due to economic challenges, lack of educational qualifications, and language problems.

Best Examples of Practices Put into Effect as the Solution of Problems Encountered in Open and Distance Learning

In the research, secondly, the question, “What are the practices developed to solve the problems encountered by the refugee students in ODL process, and how do you evaluate these practices?”, was asked to the participant teachers. The participant teachers’ views about this question were examined and the obtained themes and codes were indicated in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2. Best practices put into effect as the solution of problems encountered by refugee students in ODL

For the solution of the problems experienced by the refugee students in ODL process, the theme of Examples of the Best Practices was produced upon the analysis of the participant teachers’ views about the practices developed by the schools. It is ascertained that the codes such as ‘Education Informatics Network (EIN) support point’, ‘language support’, ‘communication & collaboration’, and ‘educational technologies & materials support’ were successively clustered under this theme. For instance, the P10 who worked as a Turkish language teacher referred to the best practices developed at the school to solve the problems experienced by the refugee students in ODL with views proposing, “... the constant communication of the school administration with the refugee student, teacher, and the parents and the easy access to the school administration itself facilitated this process. At our school, the school administration created EIN support points for children that had no internet access or asked for support. Our students benefited from these support points. Materials that would be useful to the students were offered to them. Our school administration followed up with our students on every topic in collaboration with students’ parents. In this process, with our guidance service, psychological support was extended to our students and their parents...”. Another participant teacher, the P3, highlights that a variety of practices such as the educational technology support aimed at the refugee students and the EIN support points for internet access were developed at the school by stating, “... our school distributed tablet PCs to some refugee students within the bounds of its means and resources. Of the students who obtained tablet PCs, those with an internet connection could join the live courses while those without it utilized the internet service at the school when they could come to school. Of course, these facilities are not sufficient because there is a large number of refugee students who cannot participate in educational activities as they still cannot have access to technological facilities...”.

Moreover, the P4 stated that the practices developed at the school were aimed at solving the problems experienced by the refugee students in ODL by telling, "... as I just said, the infrastructure and language problem came at the top of the challenges faced most by the refugee students during the pandemic. In an effort to solve problems on the topic of infrastructure, the EIN support point was established in our school to facilitate the access of our students to ODL. Moreover, to solve the language problem, the Turkish language teacher offers Turkish language courses outside the school hours again via ODL...".

Upon the review of the participant teachers' views, it was identified that various examples of the best practices were developed at certain schools for the solution of problems experienced by refugee students in the period of ODL. Furthermore, it was found that the examples of the best practices were, in particular, to provide the support of educational technologies such as computers and tablet PCs that were indispensable for participation in online courses, to establish EIN support points that would offer internet connection and technology support, to be in constant communication and collaboration with students and their parents, and to provide material support.

Solutions Recommended to The Problems Faced by The Refugee Students in Open and Distance Learning

In the research, lastly, the question, "To alleviate the negative effects of the ODL process, what can be done about the education of refugee students?", was directed to the participant teachers. The participant teachers' views about this question were analyzed, and the obtained themes and codes were exhibited in Figure 3 below.



Figure 3. Solutions recommended to the problems faced by the refugee students in ODL

As observed in Figure 3, the theme of Recommended Solutions was created by analyzing the participant teachers' views about the alleviation of negative effects of the ODL activities on refugee students during the pandemic. It is discerned that the codes such as 'communication & collaboration', 'educational technologies & internet support', 'language support', 'organization of remedial education in the post-pandemic period', 'face-to-face education', 'arrangement of social activities in the post-pandemic period', and 'course materials support' were respectively clustered under this theme. Figure 3 demonstrates that various recommendations were developed by the participant teachers to alleviate the negative effects of the pandemic on refugee students. 'Communication & collaboration', 'educational technologies & internet support', and 'language support' come at the top of the recommendations proposed to alleviate the negative effects of the pandemic on refugee students. For example, the P1 emphasizes the necessity of having communication and collaboration with refugee students' parents to alleviate the negative effects of the pandemic on refugee students by telling, "... by being in communication with the students' parents and informing them in advance about the setbacks to be created by this process, we can raise awareness...". The P10 states that the school staff should be in collaboration with refugee students' parents by communicating with them via interpreters during the pandemic by saying, "... student's self-belief should be increased. By preparing course programs for students, it should be ensured that especially the children from crowded families would study on a regular basis. Constant communication with student parents should be put in place to have communication with students' parents with the help of an interpreter and to explain properly what the students should do in this

process, the importance of the process, and the duties assigned to the parents...”. It can be asserted another participant teacher, the P14, who states, “... learning the expectations and needs of refugee students and their families about the school through surveys to be applied via ODL to the refugee students for identifying their needs, efforts can be made in this direction...”, points to the importance of the communication and collaboration to be established between the school and refugee students’ parents also for learning the expectations of both the students and their parents. Besides, via the communication and collaboration to be established with refugee students and their parents, psychological support can also be offered for a variety of problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the P11 calls attention to this situation by saying, “... the instructors speaking the same language as the refugee students can provide psychological support ...”.

According to the participant teachers, providing educational technologies and internet connection support is of great importance for the alleviation of the negative effects of the pandemic on refugee students. For instance, the P2 refers to the importance of providing educational technologies and internet connection support by telling, “... first of all, material problems should be overcome and it should be borne in mind that a very large part of the refugee students who could not participate in ODL failed to attend these courses due to circumstances such as the lack of computers, tablet PCs, and internet connectivity. It is obligatory to provide refugee students with technological materials...”. Likewise, by saying, “... in this process, of course, providing internet connection, tablet PCs, and TVs is the most important support...”, the P9 sets forth that providing educational technologies and internet support such as computers, tablet PCs, and TVs would be important to the alleviation of the negative effects of the pandemic on refugee students.

One of the participant teachers’ recommendations to alleviate the negative effects of the pandemic on refugee students is to provide the refugee students with language support. For example, the P4 stresses the importance of providing language support by telling, “... the problem most frequently encountered by the refugee students outside the period of the pandemic was the language barrier. As the students were away from the classroom setting, the process of learning the language was hampered even more for them. To make up for this situation, offering face-to-face supportive Turkish language courses to these students will be more in line with the realities and more beneficial...”. Likewise, while the P14 underlines the importance of language support by saying, “... educational materials likely to help refugee students learn the Turkish language can be offered to the students through the channels of ODL...”, the P8 points to the necessity of providing additional Turkish language courses in the sense of language support by telling, “... extra Turkish language courses for refugee students should be offered at least via ODL...”.

It was identified that other recommended solutions developed by the participant teachers were to organize remedial education in the post-pandemic period, to offer streamed face-to-face education for refugee students, to arrange social activities in the post-pandemic period, and to provide refugee students with course materials support. For instance, the P11 states his/her views by saying, “... when face-to-face education starts again, remedial education programs can be planned to eliminate refugee students’ academic shortcomings...”. Similarly, it can be asserted that the P8 referred to the importance of planning remedial education programs in the post-pandemic period to overcome learning shortcomings by telling, “... when face-to-face education starts again, firstly, the additional courses should be held to overcome the learning shortcomings...”.

In the research, the participants were asked about the problems experienced by refugee students during the ODL process, examples of good practices used in solving these problems, and their suggestions for solving the problems experienced. To sum up, the main problems that refugee students experience in ODL process are the lack of educational technologies, language problems, internet access difficulties, low participation, low academic achievement, lack of parent support and lack of motivation. Examples of good practices applied in solving these problems are the EBA (Educational Information Network) support point, language support, efforts to improve communication and cooperation, educational technologies and material support. It has been determined that participant suggestions about the solution of the problems encountered by refugee students are increasing communication and cooperation, educational technologies and internet support, language support, organizing post-pandemic remedial trainings, face-to-face training, organizing post-pandemic social events and course material support.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The economic inequalities across the world have repercussions on the digital world and give rise to serious gaps in terms of accessing communication technology. While some people struggle with poverty, some others benefit from the advantages offered by communication technologies. These differences have implications also on educational activities and those capable of accessing the sources of information and communication gain advantages whereas those failing to do so lag behind (Tiene, 2002). ODL activities performed during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic assumes that the refugee students like all other students can have access to internet networks, digital devices, and communication platforms. However, this is not necessarily the case for refugees and refugee students most of the time (Primdahl et al., 2021). The refugee students who are faced with difficulties in educational processes even in normal times are likely to be confronted with more challenges in ODL activities. Considering the nature of ODL, technological infrastructure needs such as computers, tablet PCs, and internet connectivity come to the fore as issues influencing student participation in ODL (Edmonds & Flahault, 2021). Therefore, as well as educational activities performed online via digital platforms by taking into consideration the families' circumstances, the radio & TV contents, reading materials, approaches with a lower technology content including homework assignments, and the development of more flexible ODL methods can help to eliminate learning setbacks and motivate students (Adam, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; Giannini & Albrechtsen, 2020; Giannini & Lewis, 2020; Saavedra, 2020). In this situation, the support to be extended to the refugee students who do not have educational materials particularly due to the economic shortcomings is valuable. At this point, some countries take certain measures. For instance, China gives computers and mobile internet to students from low-income families while France lends devices to students who do not have access to the internet or computers. Besides, Portugal supplies such students with study sheets by mail (Chang & Satako, 2020). In this sense, the delivery of 500 thousand tablet PCs to the students having difficulties in terms of accessing ODL activities during the pandemic in Turkiye (Ministry of National Education of Turkiye, 2020) can be perceived as a significant contribution. Increasing and expanding such sorts of support are deemed important. Additionally, efforts can be made to ensure the more active use of the EIN support points established at schools for students, who cannot access the EIN platform, such as refugee students (Ministry of National Education of Turkiye, 2020). Moreover, digital education contents such as videos, audio records, animations, enriched e-books, and educational games are offered to the students via the EIN platform. Activity books, test books, and study sheets designed for students were prepared and made available to all students in digital format on this platform (Ministry of National Education of Turkiye, 2020).

Low-level participation in ODL activities as a consequence of the shortcomings related to education technologies and internet connectivity takes attention. In several studies (Basar et al., 2018; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Garcia & Weiss, 2020), it is put forward that the refugee students had higher school dropout and absenteeism rates than other students also in the period of face-to-face education. Particularly the refugee students' tendency to break away from the school are likely to go up during the pandemic. In this case, through the establishment of communication with the families of students who do not join ODL activities, focusing on students' excuses for not attending ODL activities and the things that can be done on this issue can make a difference. At this point, it cannot be ignored that establishing communication with a group of people such as the refugees that speak different mother tongues and have problems relevant to daily life is hard. This is the case because refugee students' families are more likely to struggle with health problems, heavy workloads, and economic hardships. Thus, the children of these families can be confronted with more difficulties as they are deprived of family support in an educational sense (Anderson, 2020b; Bruckauf, 2016; Bruckauf et al., 2016; Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Previous research demonstrates that the support given by the migrant and refugee parents to their children's educational lives was limited as the migrant and refugee parents were not familiar with the local education system and had low-level language proficiency most of the time (Anderson, 2020a; Darmody et al., 2014; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Saavedra, 2020). Additionally, whether the parents are well-equipped to make interventions to fill in the gaps likely to be experienced in education activities in ODL process makes an effect. In this context, it can be said that the support to be given by the refugee families, which most of the time lag socially and culturally behind the host society, to the education process of their children will be limited in scope (Edmonds & Flahault, 2021; Garbe et al., 2020). Despite this limited support, the positive implications of the strong communication between parents, teachers, and school administrators are valuable as the educational support given by the parents to

refugee students can make significant differences as in the case of local students, and hence, strengthening this communication network should be encouraged (Peterson & Ladky, 2007). As well as the social isolation and limited communication in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the inability to perform daily life routines along with the closure of schools that are the socialization places especially for refugee and migrant students can bring about certain risks such as dropping out of school (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Popyk, 2021; Primdahl et al., 2021; You et al., 2020). At this point, the individualized programs to be designed for refugee children, consultancy to be offered for coping with social isolation and exclusion, and the satisfaction of certain needs such as understanding the education system in the host country can be of use.

It is widely acknowledged that the refugee or migrant children learn the basics of the mother tongue of the host country first, and only after learning these basics, they join the standard classes at the school. If the children learn the basics of the language of the host country and are exposed to their peers' effects, then the acquisition of a language by them can be accelerated (Koehler & Schneider, 2019). The inadequacy of refugee students' language skills can negatively affect their academic performance as well (Bruckauf, 2016; Edmonds & Flahault, 2021). In research studies, it is often noted that the refugee or migrant students often had low-level academic performance (Darmody et al., 2014; Entorf 2015; Orozco et al., 2009; Simsir & Dilmac, 2018). Considering that the ODL activities are not, by nature, in line with the variations in refugee students' existing language proficiency levels (Primdahl et al., 2021), it can be asserted that the language problems experienced in face-to-face education activities will have deeper impacts on ODL activities.

The emotional, psychological, and behavioral states of the students who were closely engaged with ODL at home for a long time during the pandemic might have been affected negatively (Awasthi, 2020). To support the establishment of close relations and strong ties between parents and children, protect their psychological resilience, and enhance their mental well-being, educational sets and guidelines were prepared and published in Turkiye by the Ministry of National Education (Ministry of National Education of Turkiye, 2020). Numerous countries such as China, Japan, Spain, and the USA try to provide such sorts of support by establishing various channels (Armitage & Nellums, 2020; Giannini & Albrechtsen, 2020; Chang & Satako, 2020). To provide better and more effective solutions in ODL process, cooperation can be made with different stakeholders (psychologists, sociologists, therapists, and so on). It should be kept in mind that the students would recall not only the contents of the educational activities but also the psychological states that they had in these hard times (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Considering that the children who stayed at home for months were distant to the socialization channels away from their friends and teachers (Giannini & Albrechtsen, 2020; Chang & Satako, 2020), it is important that the education institutions support students and their parents by communicating with them frequently in this process (Daniel, 2020). Besides, placing the guidance services in the first place, the need felt for psychological support to be offered particularly to refugee students at the school level during the pandemic and in its immediate aftermath should not be neglected.

Recommendations

The inability of all students to benefit from face-to-face education opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic period brings along various problems. It can be considered as a general result of this research that refugee students are among those most affected by these problems due to the Covid -19 outbreak. It should not be overlooked that refugee students are faced with disadvantageous situations such as not being able to have technological opportunities at a time when these facilities are indispensable, not being able to receive adequate family support in a critical period when they need family support, and as a result, experiencing even greater difficulties, the language problems. It is essential to develop effective policies to compensate for the educational disruptions that refugee students are exposed to during the ODL process. In this context, it may be recommended to start remedial courses first in order to fill the academic gaps that deepened after the start of the pandemic. Developing policies by policy makers that take into account the specific problems faced by refugee students such as technological deprivation, language problems, lack of motivation and low participation can be effective in closing this gap. In addition, it may be beneficial to initiate studies to produce measures for the absenteeism and dropout tendencies that refugee students may develop in the post-pandemic period. On the other hand, when it comes to suggestions for researchers, this study was conducted according to the views of teachers. Different studies can be carried out on the basis of the opinions of refugee students and their parents.

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