

## Quality in Education: Integration of Refugee Students into the Turkish Education System Mülteci Öğrencilerin Türk Eğitim Sistemine Uyumunda Eğitimde Kalite Olgusunun İncelenmesi

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**Abstract:** This study was designed as basic interpretive qualitative study and aimed to uncover the opinions of teachers about the impact of the integration of refugee students in primary, secondary, and high school schools in Rize into the Turkish education system on the quality of education. 17 teachers and 4 school principals selected according to the convenience sampling method participated in the study. The findings revealed that the teachers consider the lack of language skills as the biggest problem that refugee students faced in the education. It was indicated that the lack of language skills negatively affected academic achievement, and the students isolated themselves from the classroom, which also caused problems in social cohesion. It is possible to say that students who did not have language problems stood out in class participation and established good friendships with Turkish students. Teachers emphasized having difficulty with parents and the main reason for this problem was shown as language deficiencies. The teachers stated that language-learning of families would increase the success of students and that language-learning courses could be provided for families.

**Keywords:** Refugee students, integration, immigration and education, educational policies, quality in education

**Öz:** Temel yorumlayıcı nitel araştırma olarak tasarlanan bu çalışmada Rize ilinde bulunan ilkököl, ortaokul ve lise düzeyindeki okullarda öğrenim gören mülteci öğrencilerin Türk eğitim sistemine uyumu ve bu sürecin eğitim kalitesine etkisi ile ilgili öğretmenlerin görüşlerinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Çalışmaya uygun örnekleme yöntemine göre seçilen 17 öğretmen ve 4 okul yöneticisi katılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre öğretmenler mülteci öğrencilerin eğitim sürecinde karşılaştığı en büyük problemin dil eksikliği olduğunu belirtmiştir. Dil eksikliğinin akademik başarıyı olumsuz etkilemesinin yanında öğrencinin kendini sınıftan soyutladığını ve bu durumun sosyal uyum konusunda da sorunlara yol açtığı ifade edilmiştir. Dil problemi yaşamayan öğrencilerin ders katılımında öne çıktığını ve Türk öğrenciler ile iyi arkadaşlıklar kurduğunu söylemek mümkündür. Öğretmenler zaman zaman velilerle ilişkilerinde sorun yaşadıklarını ve bu sorunun temel sebebinin de yine dil eksikliğinden kaynaklandığını vurgulamışlardır. Öğretmenler, ailelerin dil öğrenmesinin öğrencilerin başarısını artıracığını belirterek ailelere yönelik dil eğitiminin sağlanması gerektiğini belirtmişlerdir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mülteci öğrenciler, uyum, göç ve eğitim, eğitim politikaları, eğitimde kalite

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### Introduction

Education, one of the basic human rights, is the most important key to development in terms of providing opportunities. It leads to the development of desirable qualities in humans (Barrett, Chawla-Duggan, Lowe, Nickel, & Ukpo, 2006). Education is an important guide to adapting to developments without any obstacles (Doğan, 1999). It develops the skills of searching for and applying valid arguments in a scientific context (Osborne, Erduran, Simon, & Monk, 2001). A modern political community is established through common education (Waters & Leblanc, 2005). It is necessary to increase the welfare and happiness of society and to support social and cultural development. While giving direction to social change, education is also affected by social change (Şenel, 1982). Political, economic, technological, and social developments and educational institutions need to restructure over time (Karaca, 2008). Schools, which are the cornerstone of education in society, make an effort to adapt to this development (Nayir, 2013). The development of human resources through a planned education brings developments in the field of production and service (Kayadibi, 2001). Therefore, investing in human resources brings various responsibilities such as investing in the right time to the right person in accordance with resource management principles. The education culture of the society is formed over time. Education, which should be sensitive to culture, is always in

development (Karaçelik & Ata, 2020). The culture, which varies from society to society, affects even the parenting styles of families (Akgün & Baş, 2020). For this reason, the methods developed in the field of child education should be put forward by considering cultural differences and new problems should be avoided (Güneş, 2014). A teacher who is sensitive to culture and considers personal differences can establish quality relationships with students (Karaçelik & Ata, 2020). However, there are some innate characteristics and personal differences (Genç, 2016). Considering the innate characteristics of people and the values of the society they live in; individual differences can be stated as one of the concepts that forms social identity. Regardless of their social identity, every student has the right to receive equal education while adopting the rules and values of the culture in educational institutions, which is important for socialization (Ada & Küçükali, 2016). Efforts should be made to raise a physically and mentally healthy young generation that looks to the future with confidence and to reach the future of historical and cultural heritage (Genç, 2016).

### Immigration and Quality in Education

As a society, the intention of education should be agreed and an education system that aims to develop people holistically should be established. Quality in education is the response of educated people to the expectations of society with certain knowledge, skills, and behaviors (Balkul & Ersoy, 2018).

Education quality shapes student behavior and attitudes, paves the way for dramatic economic gains, and affects the job market (Hanushek, 2005). Graduates who cannot reach academic proficiency may cause financial problems, while also causing society to face poor quality products and services (Yıldız & Ardiç, 1999). Human capital is needed for the realization of economic growth in a country (Afşar, 2009). Development of knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals is enabled with education, which is necessary for economic growth (Doğrul, 2009). For this reason, it is possible to reduce unemployment and poverty in countries by raising the level of education (Çalışkan, Karabacak, & Meçik, 2013).

Tolerance and understanding of peace, which are very important in terms of socialization, are also crucial for a peaceful and healthy country (Tosun, Yorulmaz, Tekin, & Yıldız, 2018). People who migrate to different regions or countries by leaving their lands of birth due to economic, political, or social problems encounter different cultures, traditions, and customs. According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, member states should provide refugee children with the educational opportunities they apply to their citizens (Barkın, 2004). Education is used as a tool to ensure the social adaptation of refugee students. Therefore, countries should plan for the educational needs necessary for the education of refugee children within the education system (Börü & Boyacı, 2016). Co-education is essential for the establishment of a modern political community and schools play a key role (Waters & Leblanc, 2005). The level of education in the migrated region affects both the refugee children and the children in the migrated region (Ereş, 2015).

Education is critical for refugee children who have difficulties in our country (Gencer, 2017). The problems experienced by these children who are exposed to migration while adapting to the new situation are also reflected in their education (Nar & Gündüz, 2008). For the education of Syrian children in our country, the 'Project of Supporting the Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System' has been initiated (Çak, Bayrakdar, & Akiş, 2021). The most important aspect of this project is to teach Turkish language (Üstün & Alimcan, 2021). The difficulties experienced in understanding the language of the country they settled in, establishing social relations, and adapting to the school are observed by the teachers and efforts are made to solve the problems (Tosun, Yorulmaz, Tekin, & Yıldız, 2018). In this direction, it is thought that well-equipped teachers working in public schools and providing support to teachers will contribute to education. Otherwise, refugee children may be misled (Şahin, 2020). Preventing refugee students from being misled should be considered as an opportunity to overcome social and cultural crises that may be encountered in the future. The present study aimed to examine the quality of education in terms of various dimensions in the integration of refugee students to the Turkish education system. The perspectives of teachers and school administrators on policy and practices regarding refugee students in schools and dealing with the difficulties experienced in educational process with their reasons were also addressed through the lens of teachers.

## Method

### Research Design

Due to integration of refugee students into the Turkish education system was investigated within the scope of quality in education, qualitative research method was preferred in this

study. Basically, as an interpretive qualitative study, the study focused on teachers' perspectives on the academic, social, and cultural states of and difficulties encountered by refugee students. Merriam (2002) poses that basic interpretive qualitative study has several characteristics such as striving to understand participants' understandings, perspectives or views about a situation or a phenomenon, having an inductive nature in terms of data analysis emphasizing common patterns, embracing rich descriptions since the focus is on how participants make meaning out of a situation or phenomenon rather than the structure and essence of inner experiences as it is the case in the phenomenological inquiry. The researcher is the primary instrument in mediating the meaning in basic interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002). The primary goal of the present study was to reveal the perspectives of the participants about integration process of the refugee students rather than their experiences, and to uncover common themes about this process.

### Study Group

Convenience sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods was employed to determine the participants actively working at the time of the research. The reason for preferring convenience sampling method is that the researchers worked in province where the research was conducted and were able to contact with teachers for face-to-face interviews. Participants consisted of 17 teachers and 4 school administrators teaching at primary and secondary schools in Rize during the 2022-2023 academic year. The demographic characteristics of the study group are given in Table 1.

21 participants (14 females and 7 males) took part in the study. In terms of ages, three were between the ages of 25-35, 10 were between the ages of 36-45 and eight were between the ages of 46-55. Three of the participants have master's level education and 18 have undergraduate level education. Six of the participants work in primary schools, six work in secondary schools, and nine work in high schools. While 17 of the participants work as teachers, four of them have administrative duties. Five participants have 5-10 years of experience, seven participants have 11-20 years of experience, and nine participants have 21-30 years of experience. When examined by field of study, six of the participants are primary school teachers, one is a science teacher, one is an it teacher, one is a guidance counselor, two are religious culture and moral knowledge teachers, one is a Turkish language teacher, three are Arabic teachers, three of them are language teachers, three are literature teachers, one is history teacher, one is English language teacher and one is vocational high school teacher.

### Data Collection Tool

In the study, semi-structured interview questions were prepared to collect data. The interview questions were prepared by writing down the draft questions after reviewing the relevant literature and consulting two experts working in education administration and Turkish language teaching fields. Piloting the interview form applied to a participant contributed to reshaping the draft questions. As a result of the pilot interview two probes were added and one question was reorganized to clarify. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to examine the views of the participants on the situation and phenomenon in question. Participants were asked for demographic information such as gender, age, education level, school type, title, seniority, and field of study. Participants' views on the phenomenon of migration and refugee education under the title of quality in education were obtained through the interview questions. Interviews with the participants were conducted on a voluntary basis. Voices were recorded during the interviews, the data was stored, and the recorded data were converted into text to prepare the data for analysis.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the study group

	Gender	Age	Education level	School type	Title	Seniority	Field of study
1	Female	36-45	Ba*	Primary school	Teacher	11-20	Primary school teacher
2	Female	36-45	Ba	Primary school	Teacher	11-20	Primary school teacher
3	Male	46-55	Ba	Middle school	Teacher	21-30	Science teacher
4	Male	36-45	Ba	Middle school	Vice principal	11-20	IT teacher
5	Female	36-45	Ba	Primary school	Teacher	11-20	Primary school teacher
6	Female	46-55	Ba	Middle school	Vice principal	21-30	Guidance counselor
7	Male	36-45	Ba	Primary school	Teacher	11-20	Primary school teacher
8	Male	46-55	Ma**	Middle school	Principal	21-30	Religious culture and moral knowledge teacher
9	Female	36-45	Ba	Middle school	Teacher	11-20	Turkish language teacher
10	Female	36-45	Ba	High school	Teacher	5-10	Arabic language teacher
11	Male	46-55	Ma	Primary school	Principal	21-30	Primary school teacher
12	Female	25-35	Ma	High school	Teacher	5-10	Literature teacher
13	Female	25-35	Ba	Middle school	Teacher	5-10	Religious culture and moral knowledge teacher
14	Female	46-55	Ba	Primary school	Teacher	21-30	Primary school teacher
15	Female	36-45	Ba	High school	Teacher	21-30	History teacher
16	Male	36-45	Ba	High school	Teacher	11-20	English language teacher
17	Female	46-55	Ba	High school	Teacher	21-30	Literature teacher
18	Female	46-55	Ba	High school	Teacher	21-30	Arabic language teacher
19	Female	36-45	Ba	High school	Teacher	5-10	Vocational high school teacher
20	Female	25-35	Ba	High school	Teacher	5-10	Arabic language teacher
21	Male	46-55	Ba	High school	Teacher	21-30	Literature teacher

\*Bachelor's Degree, \*\*Masters' Degree

### Data Analysis

Inductive data analysis, one of the characteristics of interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2002), was conducted by the researchers who are the primary instrument to interpret the meaning the participants created (Merriam, 2002). More specifically, content analysis was preferred in which themes were reached by using the data, coded under the categories, and the findings were interpreted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Firstly, draft themes were obtained out of the data collected through voice recordings. Then, the draft themes were revised. The themes were obtained inductively by establishing a relationship between the codes. The codes were associated and combined under a common concept. Then, basic categories were determined using the axis coding method. MAXQDA 11 software was used to analyze the data. The data of the participants are reported with their code names (P1, P2, etc.).

### Validity and Reliability

For qualitative research, validity means conveying the researched subject as close to reality as possible (Cho & Trent, 2006, p. 319). In this context, it was ensured that the current research findings were conveyed by using direct quotations obtained from the participants. Guba (1981) used the concepts of plausibility and transferability instead of validity and consistency and confirmability instead of reliability for qualitative research. In this study, convenience sampling was used and a detailed description of both the participants and research process and results to ensure transferability, data were analyzed by two researchers for consistency and expert opinion was taken for confirmability.

### Ethical Approval and Process

Each participant was informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of personal information, and their rights in the study process. The data obtained will not be used for purposes other than the present study. Interview records and transcripts of the records are kept confidential.

### Findings

In this section, the findings on the phenomenon of migration and the integration of refugee students into the Turkish education system at the point of ensuring quality in education are presented within the framework of the opinions and experiences of teachers and school administrators. The findings obtained in the current study were presented in a hierarchical structure consisting of themes, sub-themes, and codes. Themes, sub-themes, and codes of the research, which examines the quality of education in the integration of refugee students into the Turkish education system, were obtained based on the induction method. The findings were supported by direct quotations from the participants.

### Policy and Practices

Within the scope of the answers given to the interview questions directed to the participants, the theme of policy and practices was created, and the sub-themes and codes related to the theme are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 showed the policy and practices, policies and practices related to society, and policy and practices in education sub-themes. Regarding the sub-theme of policies and practices related to society, the codes of living in a different region, lack of studies on policy and practices, unawareness of the policies, support for policies, attitude of the society, general status of the country, integration of refugees into society, peaceful country codes were obtained. On the other hand, in the sub-theme of policies and practices in education, the codes of cooperation, solution for the lack of materials, continuity of coeducation, seminars for teachers, improvement efforts, and language education were obtained.

The opinions of the participants on the sub-theme of policies and practices related to society, obtained from the research, are as follows:

*I think that there is no household or person left that the government cannot reach. Our government is extremely self-sacrificing in this regard, and it shows this in numbers. The European Union promised to send us help in the care of refugees. They sent 10% - 15% but did not send the rest, and despite this, when we look at the figures, around four million dollars were spent. But as I said, this should not be seen as an expense, because these are now our brothers and sisters. (P13)*

**Table 2.** Sub-themes and codes related to the theme of policies and practices.

Theme	Sub-themes	Codes
Policy and practices	Policies and practices related to society	➤ Living in a different region
		➤ Lack of studies on policy or practices
		➤ Unawareness of the policies
		➤ Support for policies
		➤ Attitude of society
		➤ General status of the country
		➤ Integration of refugees into society
	Policies and practices in education	➤ Peaceful country
		➤ Partnership
		➤ Solution for lack of material
		➤ Continuity of co-education
		➤ Seminar for teachers
		➤ Improvement effort
		➤ Language education

*They also need to be registered. There is an uncontrolled migration. For example, they come to Türkiye. They come to the city they want to live in. This also needs to be blocked. We want a conscious and controlled distribution. We have such students who have not come to school for a year. Because there is no job. They have to go wherever their father finds a job. We have the registration, but we cannot reach the parent. Unfortunately, there is such a lack of control. I demand that this be prevented. (P19)*

The opinions of the participants on the policy and practices in education sub-theme obtained from the research are as follows:

*To learn Turkish, there must be education again. Maybe there can be courses opened by Public Education Centers for parents, in school conditions. There may be chat courses there. These courses may not necessarily be like teaching “A” letter but aim to bring them into society. They may even be particularly attracted to a craft course. (P8)*

*Turkish proficiency courses were also opened at primary and secondary school levels. I want these courses to continue. For example, recently, an eighth-grade student came and did not know any Turkish, and I was calling and communicating with another Syrian student. Since there is no such program, I placed him in any eighth-grade class. There will be a certain period until he learns Turkish and how much will he be able to learn on his own? After that, he will begin to study. Currently, the education he received without learning Turkish is very limited. This issue could have*

*been resolved faster this way and I think it should go with that and get resolved faster this way. (P3)*

Within the scope of the answers given to the interview questions directed to the participants, the theme of undesirable behaviors was created, and the sub-themes and codes related to the theme are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 demonstrated the sub-themes of the education dimension and the social dimension related to the theme of undesirable behaviors of the participants. The codes of undesirable behaviors and lack of education related to the sub-theme of the education dimension were revealed. In the social dimension sub-theme, the codes of those not having any bad behavior, personal problems, the effect of culture and religion, war, communication problems, family, and adaptation problem were obtained.

The opinions of the participants on the education dimension sub-theme obtained from the research are as follows:

*In this way, we have a very problematic refugee student. He resists a lot about dressing, does not listen to the lesson, is interested in something different in the lesson, or sleeps. (P8)*

*Second, let's say the kids made a problem. In this case, the control of the families is very good, and the problem does not continue. We cannot rule out this problem in Turkish children. The same behavior continues, and the family takes ownership. I don't know, maybe this is because they live as refugees in another country, but there the problem goes away. Unfortunately, it continues in the child who comes from a place with a low socio-cultural level. He is already convincing his own family in his language. (P19)*

**Table 3.** Sub-themes and codes regarding the undesirable behaviors theme

Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes
Undesirable behaviors	Education dimension	➤ Undesirable behaviors
		➤ Lack of education
	Social dimension	➤ Not having any bad behavior
		➤ Personal problems
		➤ The influence of culture and religion
		➤ War
		➤ Communication problem
		➤ Family
	➤ Compatibility problem	

**Table 4.** Sub-themes and codes related to the course tools theme

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
Course tools	Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Solutions to the material problem</li> <li>➤ No lack of material</li> </ul>
	Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ No resources required</li> <li>➤ Arabic materials</li> </ul>

The opinions of the participants on the social dimension sub-theme obtained from the research are as follows:

*I have never had such a problem with my other refugee students. One of our students has just arrived and does not speak Turkish very well. It's not negative behavior, but we just can't adapt to the lesson because he doesn't understand us. He drops out of class because he doesn't understand. I can't say that this is a negative behavior either. (P8)*

*I have not witnessed any undesirable behavior on behalf of my class. The children that I and my friends work with are also very well brought up on a moral point of view. That's why we didn't have such a problem. (P14)*

Within the scope of the answers given to the interview questions directed to the participants, the theme of course tools were created. Table 4 shows sub-themes and codes related to the created theme.

Table 4 displayed the sub-themes of materials and resources related to the theme of course tools of the participants. The codes for the solutions to the material problem related to the sub-theme of materials and the absence of material deficiency have been reached. In the sub-theme of resources, the codes for the non-obligatory resources and Arabic materials were obtained.

The opinions of the participants on the sub-theme of materials obtained from the research are as follows:

*We do not have any problems due to the branch, but let's say that there are materials that must be taken in courses such as technology design. There, too, the economy comes into play. There is a problem because the financial situation of those who come here is troubled. But somehow the teachers help them knowing their situation. Sometimes the teacher is helped by communicating with the shopkeepers. Sometimes, the problem is solved by contacting the administration. So again, it's up to the public. (P2)*

*We have visual cards, we can express. Or I use the smart board too much. The child understands because there is quite a visual on the smart board. We have a chess course*

*at school. We think you understand chess too. His teacher is also very agreeable. I don't have any difficulty in getting other resources, his father gets the resources. (P7)*

The opinions of the participants on the sub-theme of sources obtained from the research are as follows:

*While I was teaching them Turkish voluntarily, I sought a resource on how to teach Turkish to a foreign student and no one helped me. I heard that someone from the university was teaching Syrians. I don't know him, but I told someone who knows him. Finally, I searched and found a book. (P15)*

*We do not take any other resources other than textbooks. This is not mandatory and is optional. In this exam system, where the child has difficulty understanding Turkish, we do not demand that they carry the question whether they can take a source or not. Since it is not compulsory, teachers continue their education regardless of resources. (P3)*

Within the scope of the answers given to the interview questions directed to the participants, the theme of the teaching process was created. Table 5 shows sub-themes and codes related to the theme created.

Table 5 showed the sub-themes of the participants' attitude towards the course and academic achievement related to the teaching process theme. The codes of in-class behaviors, compliance with the course, and the opinions of school administrators related to the sub-theme of attitude towards the course were reached. In the sub-theme of academic success, participation in the Arabic course and the effect of the language barrier to participation codes emerged.

The opinions of the participants about the attitude towards the lesson sub-theme obtained from the research are as follows:

*As I said, there is no problem for those who come to Türkiye beforehand, they can express themselves. I have female students in 7th grade. They raise their hands, attend class, make jokes, laugh, and have good communication with their friends. But those who have come to Türkiye for the last two years are also having difficulties. When I ask, they cannot pronounce, understand, comprehend, or give us feedback. This is how trouble arises. (P2)*

**Table 5.** Sub-themes and codes related to the teaching process theme

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes
Teaching process	Attitude towards the lesson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ In-class behaviors</li> <li>➤ Adaptation to the lesson</li> <li>➤ School administrators' opinion</li> </ul>
	Academic success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Participation in Arabic class</li> <li>➤ Effect of language barrier to participation</li> </ul>

**Table 6.** Sub-themes and codes related to the integration of refugee students

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
Integration of refugee students	Cultural integration	➤ Current integration status
		➤ The influence of culture on the integration process
		➤ Perspectives
		➤ Cultural conflict
	Academic integration	➤ Learning and adaptation problems in the environment
		➤ Previous learning
		➤ Compatible students
		➤ Teacher attitude in integration
		➤ Integration of parents

*It is very difficult at first; they do not participate and are only in the role of listeners. After a certain period of time, as their understanding and interpretation of Turkish improve, they can adopt a different attitude and attend the lesson. A little more like this; When the teacher asks a question, they can answer. They can put themselves in the background during the lesson. (P3)*

The opinions of the participants regarding the academic achievement sub-theme obtained from the research are as follows:

*And since I am an Arabic teacher, I do not have a problem with the children, I get along in every way. More often, they contact me, they come to me when something happens, or when the parents come, we get help from the guidance service. (P6)*

*Because they have a weak interest in the lesson, they fail the exams. Class participation is not at the desired level. (P1)*

Within the scope of the answers given to the interview questions directed to the participants, the theme of integration of refugee students was created. Table 6 shows sub-themes and codes related to the theme created.

Table 6 displayed the sub-themes of cultural integration and academic integration related to the theme of integration of refugee students. The current integration status, the effect of culture on the integration process, perspectives, and cultural conflict codes related to the sub-theme of cultural integration were obtained. In the sub-theme of academic integration, the codes of learning and adaptation problems in the environment, previous learning, compatible students, teacher attitude in integration, and parents' integration were obtained.

The views of the participants on the sub-theme of cultural integration obtained from the research are as follows:

*Integration has not been achieved in any way. I look at this situation from a human and emotional perspective. The situation of the children in my school is very dire in this regard. I do not think that we are in a planned and programmed, problem-solving action. Maybe it's*

*somewhere else and that's what I think because I haven't seen it. (P15)*

*The children of the families who came early studied here, progressed a lot, and socialized. The malicious ones are always a nuisance, and they are ubiquitous. But we see that those who have been trained here are healthier. The integration of those who came here as young men was more difficult. We see that the integration of those who are in the field, that is, in working life, is better. But of course, the integration of those who wander around and remain uninterested becomes more difficult and slower. The compatibility of these people is a problem. (P21)*

The opinions of the participants on the academic integration sub-theme obtained from the research are as follows:

*We were training in difficult conditions. You are educating Turkish children. You are trying to teach Syrian children as well. Because after all, they are also our students, but it requires a lot of effort. (P14)*

*Their integration is very good. I do not observe that our student is having a lot of problems. Since I am the principal of the school, I cannot see all the students, but sometimes when I meet that student, I do not see that he is having a problem. But I don't know how it works with him or with his friends. (P17)*

*When I enter the classroom, I call out by name; There is absolutely no stereotyped judiciary like the Syrian. there is no discrimination in any way, and I don't think any of my friends look at it that way either. I can even say that it is positive discrimination. We, as teachers, try to integrate them. There may be language problems in some courses, but we are happy with their effort, dedication, and determination to struggle. We can also be positive. (P13)*

Within the scope of the answers given to the interview questions directed to the participants, the language barrier theme of refugee students was created. Table 7 shows sub-themes and codes related to the theme created.

**Table 7.** Sub-themes and codes related to the language barrier theme of refugee students

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
Language barrier of refugee students	Language education	➤ Turkish at home and in the family
		➤ Interaction with Turkish
		➤ Turkish courses
		➤ Turkish education
		➤ The necessity of language education
	Other	➤ Experience in Türkiye
		➤ Those who do not know

**Table 8.** Sub-themes and codes related to quality in education

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
Quality in education	Quality is not adversely affected	➤ No negativity
	Failure to provide quality	➤ Readiness ➤ Decreased quality
	Language education	➤ Interaction with different cultures ➤ Language deficiency

Table 7 displayed the participants' language education and other sub-themes related to the theme of integration of refugee students. The codes of Turkish at home and in the family, interaction with Turkish, Turkish courses, Turkish education, and the necessity of language education related to the sub-theme of language education were obtained. In the other sub-theme, the codes of those who have no experience and knowledge of Türkiye were obtained.

The opinions of the participants on the sub-theme of language education obtained from the research are as follows:

*I say to the family that you will speak Turkish at home, you need to learn it too. Families need to be open and willing to this situation. Afterward, a seminar and training can be given. But it will be learned on the job. That's why they need to be more involved in society. (P4)*

*The best environment in which a language can be learned is the laboratory where the language is found. Refugee students can learn the language in their classroom and school environment. If the Turks abroad learn a foreign language in a short time in the places where they are, it is necessary for them to learn a foreign language in this environment. Learning takes place in the natural environment of the language by establishing a dialogue with the students. (P1)*

*Otherwise, these students should normally be offered a separate Turkish course. It can be opened in schools, under the Ministry of National Education, Directorates of National Education or Public Education Centers. Because such a course should be opened for newcomers and those who do not speak Turkish at all. (P2)*

The opinions of the participants on the other sub-theme obtained from the research are as follows:

*But some ten-year-olds were born in Türkiye. They have transcended most things and are at ease and have adapted to the culture. If there is an interruption now, if it is over, those who come will somehow adapt. But every time he comes, the wheel starts to turn again and that's when trouble arises. (P2)*

Within the scope of the answers given to the interview questions directed to the participants, the theme of quality in education was obtained from the data. Table 8 shows sub-themes and codes related to the created theme.

Table 8 showed the sub-themes of not adversely affecting the quality of education, inability to provide quality, and language education related to the theme of quality in education. The code of no negativity related to the sub-theme of not adversely affecting quality was obtained. In the sub-theme of not providing quality, readiness, and quality reduction codes were reached. In the sub-theme of language education, the codes of interaction with different cultures and language deficiency were obtained.

The opinions of the participants on the sub-theme of not adversely affecting the quality obtained from the research are as follows:

*It is necessary to distinguish between the quality of our education system. Because my two Syrian students in the eleventh grade are among the most successful students in the class. Since they have been here for a long time, they also have a high level of language proficiency in Turkish and I cannot say that they have reduced our education quality because their perception level is also very high. Since I am a vocational course teacher for other students, I think they have the infrastructure and I cannot say that they have reduced our education quality. However, I cannot say that they have increased the quality and I try to keep them at the class level, and we do not have any problems. (P8)*

The opinions of the participants on the sub-theme of not providing the quality obtained from the research are as follows:

*I am speaking for my student whose class I am teaching, and I am also a primary class teacher. He's a hardworking student, he studies very well, and he only has three weak points. It's not in very bad condition either. Although he does not have a high level of proficiency in Turkish. They've been here for 7-9 years and haven't had any problems and seem to have adapted very well. (P16)*

*They negatively affect our education system; I cannot say that they are integrated. We have a lot of discipline problems in this regard. Their academic success is not at the desired level. We have exceptional students who have been successful. But success should not be overstated. (P1)*

The opinions of the participants on the sub-theme of language education obtained from the research are as follows:

*Since they have problems with the language, we have a little more difficulty with them rather than the benefit. We have difficulties in lecturing and comprehending what is being told. (P2)*

*When they see students with a slightly different structure in terms of quality, the children want to learn a foreign language. English is taught in our country, but since these students come from Syria, there is a tendency towards the Arabic language. (P20)*

When the findings of the research are examined, it is seen that the quality of education is affected by various factors in the integration of refugee students into the Turkish education system. It is seen that the prominent ones among these factors are education policies, socialization, attitudes of internal and external stakeholders regarding education, course materials, economic situation, teaching process, language, and readiness.

### **Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations**

This study aimed to reveal the perspectives of teachers and school administrators about the integration of refugee students at primary and secondary school levels into the Turkish Education system with regard to the quality of education. While investigating the positive and negative effects of refugee children on the education system in terms of their individual development and adaptation to social activities, the experiences in this process were revealed. As a result of interviews with participants, it was observed that the current integration status of refugee students differed according to school levels. The results within the scope of the research were discussed and suggestions were provided.

Findings from the interviews primarily revealed current policies and practices regarding the education of refugee students. It is possible to state that no consensus on policies and practices related to society. It is argued that with the support of policies, many practices have been implemented in our country for refugees such as financial aid. On the one hand, it is stated that this aid should not be seen as an expense upon supporting the financial aid. Similarly, in the literature, it is thought that these students should be given scholarships (Nayir & Çetin, 2019). Contrary to these views, it is stated that too many refugees are allowed to enter the country and that refugees harm the country's economy (Özdemir & Öner Özkan, 2016). It is evident in the current study that there is no order in immigration and this uncontrolled lack of control causes many problems such as attendance according to participants' views. Başar, Akan and Çiftçi (2018) note that not taking any action against these students due to a lack of legal legislation causes student absenteeism and there are problems in assessment and evaluation. Similarly, it is concluded that the frequent relocation of refugee students negatively affects the education process, and teachers and school administrators are unprepared for these students (Akdeniz, 2018). While the reason for this might be the large number of classrooms and the effort to develop a program, it is also thought that teachers may be afraid of taking extra responsibility. On the other hand, increasing the duties and responsibilities of teachers negatively affects the teaching process in schools (Erdem, 2017).

Considering the opinions about policies and practices in education in the current study, language barrier was considered as a critical problem. Teachers expect courses to be opened for both refugee students and refugee families to solve the language problem. It is possible to say that a refugee student with a language problem is deprived of education by remaining

passive in the lessons. For this reason, the necessity of Turkish courses in the regions where refugee children are present has been emphasized (Yenen & Uluçan, 2020). In addition, it was stated that refugee families should be involved in society and attend courses within their knowledge and skills. The perpetuation of language problems makes it very difficult for refugee families who have to leave their own countries to establish a social bridge with the society they live in (Akıncı, Nergiz & Gedik, 2015). In this context, it is evident that the findings of the current study are in congruent with the findings of the related studies in literature.

In the current study, the theme of undesirable behaviors was divided into two sub-themes as the educational dimension and the social dimension. In the education dimension, some of the participants stated that they were faced with a problem student, while other participants stated that they did not have any problems with refugee students, and in case of such a problem, refugee families were interested in solving the problem. When compared to refugee students, the problems created by Turkish students could not be solved for much longer. It is evident that environmental and social differences, educational infrastructure, and equipment of refugee families cause some undesirable behaviors in the classroom (Delen, 2019). While some of these behaviors are listed as disobedience, lack of attention, and aggression, it is stated that the majority of parents have a positive attitude toward education (Özoruç & Sığırtaç, 2022). Teachers and school administrators are needed to solve the undesirable behaviors of some refugee students who are excluded by their peers, witness the death of their relatives, or have family problems (Karaağaç & Güvenç, 2019). It can be stated that there are behavioral differences among refugee students, and these differences are directly related to socioeconomic status, moral problems, and family interests. However, there are also undesirable behaviors in the social dimension. Refugee students experience difficulties while learning prosocial behaviors and distinguishing the appropriate environment for this behavior (Güllüce, 2020). Refugee students who cannot adapt to the school culture are also students who occasionally resort to violence, speak inappropriately, or damage school items (Sarier, 2020). Similar to the literature, it is possible to say that there are teachers who encounter students with problem behaviors and that those students continue their education under the supervision of counseling teachers. It is expected that school psychological counselors, who have to make a serious effort to create a healthy school culture, will break this negative perception (Kağnıcı, 2017). There might also be Turkish students who cause some refugee boys to exhibit undesirable behaviors, so environmental factors might be quite effective in the emergence of these behaviors. However, it is possible to say that there are also teachers who do not face any problems in the social field apart from the language problem. Participants stated that morally well-educated refugee children did not engage in any undesirable behavior at school and in the classroom. The reason for this result may arise from the characteristic of refugee students. It is possible to say that some refugee students are shy and introverted (Yurdakul & Tok, 2018).

It is possible to say that some teachers did not demand materials as it is not compulsory to buy materials or resources, no need for extra material in some branches, or using visual cards and smart boards instead of materials. It is known that teachers, school administrations, or shopkeepers provide support to students who are unable to buy materials due to

financial problems when requested. On the other hand, some refugee families might be in a position to meet the material cost. It was stated that teachers who were trying to solve the language problem between themselves and refugee students sought to obtain resources for learning Arabic, but they could not find such a resource with their efforts. According to equality of opportunity, which is one of the basic principles of Turkish National Education, all opportunities offered in education should be delivered to every child (Keskinılıç Kara & Şentürk Tüysüzer, 2017). For this reason, all opportunities offered by the Ministry of National Education are used equally for every student. However, it was stated that the necessary training, material, and technical support could not be provided to the teachers who made great efforts to meet the needs of refugee students (Roxas, 2010). It is known that refugee families generally have low economic status and live in crowded houses while working population is low (Ertuş, 2017). For this reason, any resource requested by teachers causes refugee parents to find themselves in a financially difficult situation.

Another dimension compared in the study is related to the teaching process. Considering the attitude of refugee students toward the course, it is evident that there are significant differences between students who were born in Türkiye or who have been in Türkiye since a young age and those who entered Türkiye at a later age. It is known that students who have come to Türkiye in recent years have problems with communication and participation in the course, as well as teachers who state that the interest in the course is good in former students and that these students do not have any problems in expressing themselves. When the literature is examined, it is stated that refugee students, who feel like students for the first time and realize that their visibility has increased, gain self-confidence over time and try to take the floor in the lessons and participate in the interaction in the classroom (Yılmaz & Günel, 2022). It is also possible to say that the language problem should be eliminated for participation in the course. For this reason, teachers state that refugee students should go through a language education before being included in the education system (Tosun, Yorulmaz, Tekin, & Yıldız, 2018). Refugee students, who are more active in Arabic lessons compared to other lessons, try to solve their problems in social life, especially by communicating with their Arabic teachers. Similarly, refugee students are stated to be more successful in Arabic and memorization-based courses compared to other courses (Tunga, Engin, & Cagiltay, 2020).

When the participants were asked about the integration level of refugee students, which is one of the most important aims of the study, some participants stated that integration was not achieved in any way and there was no problem-solving action. Children born or raised in Turkish culture might be more inclined to adapt and make progress in their education. It has been observed that people who came to Türkiye at a young age have language problems and cultural conflicts. However, the participants stated that the integration of students who were not open to change and uninterested was very difficult. The related research show that students who have difficulty in the cultural adaptation process experience culture shock (Zavalsız & Gündag, 2017). In this context, it is stated that Syrian families need more support to learn the sociocultural status of their new country (Martzoukou & Burnett, 2018). While it is necessary to develop policies for the integration of refugees to ensure social order, it can be stated that the first condition for the solution to this problem is language courses (Çetin, 2016).

It was stated that refugee students did not have a clear knowledge of the level of integration, but there was no problem with adaptation in general. Contrary to our findings, there are also studies indicating that refugee students have a problem with integration with Turkish students and there is an alignment among themselves (Sarier, 2020). The participants stated that there were situations where positive discrimination as opposed to negative discrimination was experienced by refugee students and that they made a great effort to integrate those students. In cases where the adaptation problem continues, it is possible to say that this situation is usually caused by the language barrier. Because language-related issues bring problems with adaptation (Özenç & Saat, 2019). Opinions on language teaching related to the integration of refugee students were also obtained in the study. Refugee children need to be in Turkish-speaking environments to learn Turkish. Arabic is often spoken at home for refugee students who struggle to communicate in Turkish at school. The Arabic-speaking of refugee parents not only negatively affects their social life, but also complicates their children's education life. Refugees need to learn Turkish to establish healthy social relations, take an active part in social life, and achieve academic success (Akdeniz, 2018). When related studies are examined, it is evident that refugees generally have a positive attitude towards Turkish (Akkaya, 2013). People who are willing to learn Turkish or who have to learn Turkish might have achieved this to a large extent. The refugees who speak Turkish are observed to be less exposed to social exclusion and that especially those who have a profession are a value to our country (Topgöl, 2016). Unlike our findings, it is stated that serious progress has been made in the education of refugees in Türkiye, and a holistic approach including long-term solutions and social policy support is needed (Yaylacı, Serpil, & Yaylacı, 2017). Policies to be regulated should be put forward in line with the concepts of equality and rights.

When the sub-dimensions related to the theme of quality in education are examined, it is revealed that the current language knowledge of refugees affects the quality. The language deficiencies of refugees are regarded as the most fundamental problem by teachers (Erdem, 2017). It is stated that teachers who think that refugee students affect the quality of education negatively, experience a lot of discipline problems in this regard, and language problem also affects academic success. However, with the presence of students with different language levels in the classroom, it is observed that teachers cannot achieve the desired efficiency (Boylu & Pinar, 2019). When the language problem is resolved, problems in terms of the quality in education might disappear. Teachers who could not adequately establish a dialogue with Syrian students state that these children should be introduced to Turkish before starting primary school (Koçoğlu & Yelken, 2018). In some studies, with a similar subject, it is emphasized that supporting refugee students and families and providing a culture-based education are very important for the development of language (Avcı, 2019). This is because the parents' inability to speak and understand Turkish and the cultural exclusion negatively affect the communication between the school and the parents (Başar, Akan, & Çiftçi, 2018).

The participants of the study generally expressed that refugee students born or raised in Türkiye had fewer problems in adapting to language and culture. Students who have been living in Türkiye for a long time are observed to be generally active in the classroom, successful in the lessons, and have a very high level of perception. It is thought that refugees trying

to integrate into society have a significant impact on increasing the quality of education (Dolapcı, 2020). It is possible to say that those students do not reduce the quality of education, but they do not have a positive effect on the quality. Moreover, it is stated that Turkish students are willing to learn a new language, as they have friends who speak Arabic. People who have a positive attitude towards refugees do not distinguish themselves (Palaz, Çepni & Kılcan, 2019). It is evident that teachers who have refugee students in their classes are more successful in communication and adaptation, which is a requirement of inclusive education (Terzi, Göçen & Altun, 2019).

In general, it is evident that the main problem of refugee students in our country is language deficiency. There is a consensus that language deficiency negatively affects school success. However, it is possible to say that as a result of cultural and moral differences, there is a problem with adaptation to school and conflicts may arise with Turkish students. In line with these emerging problems, teachers sometimes face difficulties, and they make a great effort to overcome those difficulties. The needs have been determined to increase the policies implemented to ensure the integration of refugee students and to carry out strict supervision on implementation. It is thought that parents will contribute to the education of their children by emphasizing that they should be involved in society and have responsibility rather than being supported by aids.

Suggestions for new arrangements and the content of the policies implemented were involved in the current study. Undesirable behaviors and academic failures of refugee students, and ways to take a more active part in the teaching process to cope with negative emotions can be investigated in future studies. In the interviews, it was concluded that some students were integrated, while some students had significant problems with adaptation. New studies can be carried out to reveal the differences by making a comparison between the students who are integrated and those who cannot be integrated. In terms of suggestions for practice, teachers should be informed and guided regarding the political decisions taken for refugee students. Parent training programs should be designed for the families of refugee students and the adaptation problem should be resolved more smoothly. Intensive Turkish language training programs should be provided to overcome the language barrier. To prevent cultural conflict and facilitate the adaptation process, policy makers need to consider the orientation process in detail.

#### Author Contributions

During the research process, the first author of the study contributed to the method, data analysis, findings, and discussion sections of the study besides translation to English, and the second author contributed to the method, discussion, and conclusion sections.

#### Ethical Declaration

This study was conducted with the approval decision taken at the Ethics Committee for Human Research in Social Sciences (Protocol No. 2022/278) of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, dated 14.11.2022, at the 2022/278 meeting.

#### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within this study.

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