IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES OF SYRIAN IMMIGRANT CHILDREN IN TÜRKİYE

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to investigate the identity and language development processes among children from Syrian immigrant families born in Türkiye and living in accommodation centers. The study's participant population includes bilingual/multilingual individuals who speak Turkish and Arabic and are learning English as a foreign language. It's crucial to study their language and identity development processes to properly integrate these individuals into Turkish society and build an efficient language and culture education program as they interact across languages. The data for the study was collected with the participation of 100 secondary school students aged between 10 and 14 who were born or raised in Türkiye and whose families migrated to Türkiye as refugees due to the civil war in Syria. The study data was collected through an adopted questionnaire previously used in a different study (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004) and interview questions prepared by the researcher. The findings of the study reveal that each participant identified themselves as Syrian instead of Turkish when asked about their ethnic identity. Despite being born or raised in Türkiye and learning Arabic and Turkish while growing up, it was determined that the participants formed a Syrian identity instead of a Turkish one. On the other side, it was found that while the participants were able to successfully complete the affirmation and exploration phases of the process of developing their Syrian identities, they were unable to finish the resolution stage.

Keywords: *Sociolinguistics, Identity development, Language development, Bilingual individuals, Bicultural Individuals, Immigrant individuals.*

Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Göçmen Çocukların Kimlik ve Dil Gelişim Süreçleri

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Türkiye'de doğan ve geçici barınma merkezlerinde yaşayan Suriyeli göçmen ailelerin çocuklarının kimlik ve dil geliştirme süreçlerini araştırmaktır. Çalışmanın katılımcı nüfusu, Türkçe ve Arapça konuşan ve yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen iki dilli/çok dilli bireylerden oluşmaktadır. Bu bireylerin Türk toplumuna etkin bir şekilde uyum sağlamaları ve diller arası etkileşimde bulundukları için etkili bir dil ve kültür eğitim programı oluşturmaları için kimlik ve dil geliştirme süreçlerini incelemek çok önemlidir. Çalışmanın verileri, Türkiye'de doğup büyüyen ve Suriye'deki iç savaş nedeniyle aileleri mülteci olarak Türkiye'ye göç eden 10-14 yaş aralığındaki 100 ortaokul öğrencisinin katılımıyla toplanmıştır. Çalışma verileri daha önce farklı bir çalışmada (Umaña-Taylor ve diğerleri, 2004) kullanılan uyarlanmış bir anket ve araştırmacı tarafından hazırlanan görüşme soruları aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları, katılımcıların tamamının etnik kimliği sorulduğunda kendisini Türk yerine Suriyeli olarak tanımladığını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, Türkiye'de doğup büyümüş olmalarına ve büyürken Arapça ve Türkçe'yi bir arada öğrenmelerine rağmen katılımcıların Türk kimliği yerine Suriyeli kimliği geliştirdikleri belirlenmiştir. Öte yandan katılımcıların Suriyeli kimliklerini geliştirme sürecinin onaylama ve keşfetme aşamalarını başarıyla tamamlarken çözüm aşamasını tamamlayamadıkları sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Sosyodilbilim, Kimlik gelişimi, Dil gelişimi, İki dilli bireyler, İki kültürlü bireyler, Göçmen bireyler.*

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1. Introduction

Identity development refers to the complex process by which humans develop a distinctive view of themselves, and it is distinguished by continuity and inner unity. It is so closely tied to words like "the self," "self-concept", "values," and "personality development" (Herman, 2011). On the other hand, ethnic identity indicates a person's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the aspect of their thoughts, feelings, and behavior that results from belonging to that group (Ashmore et al., 2004). The ethnic groups of concern in the context of L2 acquisition and use usually include one or more target language (L2) communities as well as the learners' own (ancestral) ethnic group. The concept of ethnic identity encompasses all of the emotions, experiences, and actions that together determine a person's position in relation to belonging to one or more ethnic groups (Trofimovich & Turuševa, 2015). It is inevitable for individuals to learn a second language who are born and raised in a society where a language apart from their mother tongue is spoken. As stated in the studies above, the majority of these individuals also tend to grow up learning the languages of their own ethnic origins. Therefore, it is important to investigate and examine the identity and language development processes of these individuals who use both languages in varying contexts for different reasons by integrating them into their language learning and use processes. According to government statistics, there are more than 3 million Syrians in Türkiye under temporary protection status as of August 2024, making it the second-largest host nation for refugees worldwide (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, 2024). Bilingual or multilingual people who speak Arabic and Turkish and are learning English as a second language make up the majority of this demographic. In order to effectively integrate these people into Turkish society and create an effective language and cultural education program as they interact across languages, it is imperative to research how they develop their language identity. The theoretical framework on identity development is mainly grounded on Tajfel's social identity theory and Erikson's theory of identity formation (Phinney, 1989; Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2002, as cited in Umaña-Taylor, 2004). Tajfel's social identity theory (1981, as cited in Trepte, 2013) investigates the phenomenon of the "ingroup" and "outgroup" based on the idea that identities are formed through a process of difference that is defined in a relative or flexible fashion depending on the activities one engages in. According to this hypothesis, perceived group status differences, the perceived legitimacy and durability of those status differences, and the perceived ability to transition between groups are the basis for predicting specific intergroup behaviors.

On the other hand, according to Erikson (1968, as cited in Côté & Levine, 1987), ego identity is a complex process. Although the "identity of the ego" is fundamentally a psychological issue, understanding its multifaceted nature requires embracing social psychology and sociological viewpoints. This is true because the ego interacts with the people in its social surroundings as well as the normative expectations of that environment, in addition to interacting with itself and the other mental structures (i.e., the id and superego for Erikson). According to Erikson, the idea of ego identity appears to be defined by two main features: the ego's sense of temporal-spatial continuity, which is, in his opinion, the sine qua non of ego identity, and the arrangement of positive and negative identity elements (self-concepts) that bind people's experiences of themselves when they interact with the social world. Erikson's work has been empirically operationalized in a number of ways, but the identity status model has proven to be the most resilient (Marcia, 1966). Marcia expanded on Erikson's idea, arguing that this stage is better understood as the degree to which an individual has both explored and committed to an identity in a range of life domains. These domains include politics, occupation, religion, intimate relationships, friendships, and gender roles, rather than consisting of identity resolution or confusion as Erikson claimed. The teenager must make such commitments in two important areas: ideology and occupation. Marcia's (1980, 1994) operationalization of Erikson's theory of identity development divides people into four identity statuses: diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved, depending on

their level of commitment and exploration. On the basis of this typology, those who have not yet committed or investigated their identities would be classified as "diffuse" in this typology, while those who have done so but have not yet made a commitment would be classified as in "moratorium." On the other hand, people who have committed to a certain identity but have not explored would be viewed as foreclosed, whereas people who have committed and explored would be viewed as achieved (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Identity research has primarily concentrated on the theoretical contributions of Erikson (1968) and the empirical findings of Marcia (1966), particularly in the domains of occupation, ideology, sex roles, and, more recently, interpersonal aspects (Phinney, 1988). Regardless of the degree of their ethnic involvement, Phinney concentrated on the process of ethnic identity formation, which is how people learn about the consequences of their ethnicity and decide how it should play a part in their lives. In his three-stage model of identity formation, he proposed three stages of identity development. Stage 1 is called Unexamined Ethnic Identity which is characterized by a lack of investigation into ethnicity and indicates that minority individuals tend to adopt the majority culture's values and attitudes, including negative perceptions of their own group. Stage 2, called the Ethnic Identity Search/Moratorium, argues that the first stage of ethnic identification is thought to last until adolescents come across an event that prompts them to look for their ethnic identity. Lastly, Stage 3, namely Ethnic Identity Achievement, is regarded as having a strong, self-assured feeling of one's own ethnicity and is the desired result of the identity process. At this stage, acceptance and internalization of one's ethnicity are correlated with identity accomplishment. To evaluate her theoretical model of ethnic identity development and better understand individual variability in the value and personal salience of ethnic group membership, researchers and clinicians need a brief, administered measure of ethnic identity that is valid and reliable across racial and ethnic groups. In contrast to tests for a single group, Phinney (1992, as cited in Brown et al., 2014; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004) developed the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) to assess individuals' subjective experience of belonging to any group. The measure evaluates ethnic identity attainment by measuring people's positive attitudes towards their ethnic group.

Based on those developments in the theories and findings on ethnic identity development, it was argued that (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004) this measurement focused on people who have committed to their ethnic identity and gone through a phase of self-discovery and favorable sentiments toward their ethnic group are said to have achieved their ethnic identity. Previous studies on ethnic identity have been predicated on the idea that achieving ethnic identity entails having a favorable sense of belonging to the group. Instead of concentrating on the procedure, the crucial element of this type of research has been the favorable reaction to one's ethnic group. As a result, only those who exhibit a positive commitment to their ethnic identity are classified as having an achieved identity when using the MEIM. Because one's commitment is confused with their confirmation of their ethnic identity, the assessment is therefore inconsistent with the thesis. Therefore, they suggested a new typology for investigating ethnic identity statuses that is consistent with both Marcia's operationalization of Erikson's theory and Tajfel's social identity theory. Their typology is similar to Marcia's in that it looks at whether people have a high or low level of exploration and resolution about their ethnicity. In line with Marcia's concept, their typology employs the statuses diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved. Furthermore, the suggested typology includes a third factor that aligns with social identity theory. Individuals' affirmation scores determine their position (diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium, or achieved). Therefore, someone with high affirmation but low exploration and commitment scores would be classified as diffuse positive, whereas someone with low scores on all three would be classified as diffuse negative. According to that model, three different factors make up ethnic identity: (a) how much people have investigated their ethnicity, (b) how much they have decided what their ethnic identity means to them, and (c) the emotion (good or negative) that they connect with that decision. Consistent with Marcia's first operationalization of

Erikson's theoretical framework, the model still employs diffuse, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved as identity states.

The correlation between language and identity formation is unequivocal among immigrant individuals. Regarding the language development of immigrant individuals, Li (2013) delineated four distinct yet interconnected theoretical frameworks employed by academics to structure their inquiries: the individual perspective, the contextual perspective, the human capital perspective, and the ethnicity perspective. The individual viewpoint analyzes how personal traits and attributes, including age of migration, duration of residency, educational attainment, and gender, influence the acquisition and development of the destination language. The contextual perspective examines elements such as familial settings and the circumstances of both countries of origin and destination in relation to immigrant language learning. The human capital perspective explores the financial gains and profits resulting from immigrants' investments in learning the target language, viewing language acquisition as an act of both personal and financial investment. The ethnic perspective links immigrants' acquisition of the destination language to their ethnic identity and dedication. Numerous viewpoints have been used to analyze how Syrian immigrants have adapted to their new countries, including identity and language development, social and cultural adaptation, fostering a feeling of belonging, social, economic, and psychological issues, etc. (Alagöz, 2021; Al-Shar & Al-Tarawneh, 2019; Cain, 2020; Evans, 2020; Giovanis et al., 2024; Macken, 2018; Pearlman, 2020; Rahim et al., 2023). The civil war in Syria has made it inevitable for millions of Syrian immigrants to leave their homes and settle in various parts of the world. In order for these immigrants to find shelter in the new countries they settled in as refugees, they had to learn the language and culture of that country. Many of the children of immigrant families were born in the countries they settled in, and many of them were raised in bilingual and bicultural environments, learning both their mother tongue and the language of that country. In order to ensure the correct and effective integration of Syrian immigrant children into the countries they settled in, it is important to investigate the identity and language development processes and present the findings on this issue. Several studies have been conducted on the identity development processes of Syrians living in various countries around the world and in Türkiye, and different findings have been yielded. For example, in a study conducted on the identity and language development processes of Syrian adult immigrants living in Canada (Ghadi et al., 2019), it was argued that the participants' various identities had been progressively undermined or changed by the realities they encountered in Canada. Despite this, they had a strong desire to reestablish their identity constructions from their home country in the new setting. Another study investigated the identity and sense of belonging of Syrian refugees in the Swedish context in four stages: self-identification, the interviewees' perceptions of stereotypes, belonging, and the function of language. The findings revealed that Syrian refugees feel as though they are caught between Sweden and Syria (Balikci, 2020). Kincal (2025) investigated how Syrians' experiences as refugees are impacted by their inability to forge a strong sense of national identity due to Syria's historical and social framework. It was proposed that modern ideas of identity, which see it as malleable and continuously influenced by cross-cultural interactions, are challenged by the uprooting and resettlement of Syrian refugees abroad. Many Syrian refugees try to give up their national identification while embracing the new culture in their surroundings in an effort to create a better future in a safer setting. Furthermore, they frequently minimize their ethnic heritage in favor of assimilation rather than integration. Based on Berry's acculturation model (1997, as cited in Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., 2021), another research investigated the topics like life satisfaction, interactions with the host society, and the plans for the future of Syrian adults living in Türkiye as they relate to psychological and sociocultural adaptation processes. Research findings revealed that pre-migration expectations, religion, economic worries, and perceptions of Turkish nationals' expectations and attitudes toward Syrians all had a significant impact on the psychological and sociocultural adaptation of Syrian refugees. According

to the informants, refugees' acculturation is negatively impacted by economic worries and uncertainty about the length of their stay, which delays their psychological and sociocultural adaption (Şafak-Ayvazoğlu et al., 2021). From another perspective, Zeno (2017) investigated the identity formation processes of Syrian refugees in Germany and Türkiye in terms of dignity and humiliation as being micro-level challenges. According to research on participants' meaning-making in their own settings, the dynamics of shame and dignity were found to be dialectically linked in particular situational situations and formed by the lived experiences of refugees in both the host country and their place of origin. Another study examined the relationship between social identity continuity and mental health among Syrian refugees in Türkiye. The findings showed that being a member of several groups prior to migration was associated with a higher chance of maintaining group memberships after migration (such as a sense of social identity continuity), which in turn predicted higher life satisfaction and lower depression levels. However, being a member of multiple groups was also directly linked to higher levels of despair (Smeekes et al., 2017). Cevik (2024) investigated the extensive impact of Turkishness, a term that has been engrained in politics and daily interactions since the Republic's inception, and how it contributes to continued discrimination against Syrian refugees. The findings show that historical legacies, cultural biases, and exclusionary experiences have a major impact on both immigrant and local identities. Another study on the language use of multilingual refugees in Türkiye shows that their interactions with the Turkish language and community have a significant impact on their linguistic practices and identification attitudes. Participants reported creating their self-identity in response to and contrast with commonly prevalent negative myths regarding refugee images. Language choice and code-switching appear to be crucial discursive and interactional mechanisms for indexing stance-taking in the development of narratives in the interview setting (Erdogan-Özturk & Sagin-Şimsek, 2025). A case study (Karanfil & Demir, 2021) investigated how two refugee siblings raised by their multilingual mother create their Turkish-English-Arabic multilingual identity sequentially and simultaneously in the domestic context, where they converse in English and Arabic while being exposed to Turkish in societal settings. The findings show that developing a multilingual identity is a means of socializing and succeeding in their host nation. The study has significance for multilingual child-raising in refugee settings, as it suggests that simultaneous use of children's language repertoires fosters interlanguage development, resulting in increased linguistic awareness and use. From another perspective, Kaşkaya & Çapar (2024) how Turkish and Syrian refugee children perceived otherness in a cross-cultural setting. The results show that while play, success, talent, empathy, and friendship also influence how otherness is perceived, pupils typically link differences to physical traits. It is noteworthy that Syrian children under temporary protection tended to have more positive views of the other, while Turkish youngsters usually had negative views.

It is evident that a more comprehensive response to the escalating refugee issue is required because of the fact that Syrians in Türkiye are now more than merely short-term "guests" (Padda, 2016). According to the literature, it is observed that the identity development processes of Syrian immigrants living in various parts of the world and in Türkiye are examined from different perspectives, but the study participants are mostly adults. The above-mentioned identity development theories argue that identity development processes in adults and children may occur at different periods. Considering that adult Syrian immigrants who settled in Türkiye had already developed a Syrian identity in Syria before their migration, it suggests that the identity development processes of children born in Türkiye and raised bilingually and biculturally may differ from their parents. Additionally, it has been observed that Syrian immigrant studies focusing on child participants in terms of identity and language development are found to be limited in the literature. The aim of this research is to investigate the identity and language development processes among children from Syrian immigrant families born in Türkiye and living in accommodation centers. The study's participant population includes bilingual/multilingual individuals

who speak Turkish and Arabic and are learning English as a foreign language. It's crucial to study their identity and language development processes to properly integrate these individuals into Turkish society and build an efficient language and culture education program as they interact across languages.

2. Methodology

This research aims to examine the processes of identity and language development in children from Syrian immigrant families born in Türkiye and residing in accommodation centers. This study utilized a mixed-methods research design. Mixed methods research amalgamates qualitative and quantitative methodologies to offer a holistic understanding of intricate phenomena. By integrating the advantages of both approaches, researchers can triangulate data, corroborate findings, and attain profound insights into study inquiries. This methodology facilitates the examination of varied viewpoints, permitting the acquisition of comprehensive, contextual data in conjunction with statistical analysis (Ahmed et al., 2024).

2.1 Participants and Procedure

The participants of this study were 100 secondary school students aged between 10 and 14 who were born or raised in Türkiye and whose families migrated to Türkiye as refugees due to the civil war in Syria. They were born or raised since their early childhood and continue to live in a refugee center where only Syrians live, located in Kahramanmaraş, Türkiye. The parents of each participant were interviewed, given comprehensive study information, had their questions addressed, and signed an informed parental permission form prior to the collection of study data. The participants were selected according to the purposeful sampling method since the aim of the study is to investigate the identity and language development process of Syrian children who are growing up bilingually and biculturally. The purposeful sampling method is known as the deliberate selection of informants based on their capacity to clarify a certain theme, concept, or phenomenon (Robinson, 2014).

2.2 Data Collection

The study data was collected through an adopted questionnaire previously used in a different study (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004) and interview questions about the language background of the participants prepared by the researcher. The questionnaire was used to assess identity development processes of the participants. It evaluates three categories of ethnic identity formation: exploration, resolution, and affirmation, in alignment with the theoretical frameworks of Erikson and Tajfel. On the other side, the demographic information and language background of the Syrian refugee children were obtained by a self-reported linguistic demographic information form to evaluate their language development processes. The form was designed to obtain demographic information about the participants, such as their age, gender, and length of stay in Türkiye, as well as to determine whether they grew up learning both Turkish and Arabic. The validity and variability of open-ended questions were checked and approved by two other scholars working in similar fields. In addition, a pilot study was conducted with 10 students from different grade levels to validate the suitability of the questions for the study before administering actual interview questions. The final version of the interview questions were organized according to the pilot study. The data collection process took approximately one academic semester. Data were obtained through a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 10 minutes. As all participants were minors, each interview was conducted individually to prevent them from being affected by other participants' responses.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data obtained through the self-reported linguistic demographic information form was subjected to content analysis. On the other side, data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.

2.4 Ethical Approval

Ethics committee approval for the present study was granted by Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University Social Sciences and Humanities Ethical Committee with the decision number 2024-16 on 09.08.2024.

3. Findings

Demographic and self-reported language information of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic, Self-reported Language Information of the Participants

Question	Response	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	24	24
	Female	76	76
	Total	100	100
Age	10	4	4
	11	32	32
	12	35	35
	13	12	12
	14	17	17
	Total	100	100
Identity	Syrian	100	100
	Turkish	-	-
	Total	100	100
Were you born in Türkiye?	Yes	70	70
	No	30	30
	Total	100	100
First language at home	Arabic	68	68
	Turkish	5	5
	Both	27	27
	Total	100	100
Where did you start learning Arabic?	At home	100	100
	At school	-	-
	Total	100	100
Where did you start learning Turkish?	At home	-	-
	At school	100	100
	Total	100	100
Level of Arabic	Poor	-	-
	Good	-	-

	Very good	-	-
	Native	100	100
	Total	100	100
Level of Turkish	Poor	29	29
	Good	51	51
	Very good	20	20
	Native	-	-
	Total	100	100
Do you think you take on different identities when speaking Arabic and Turkish?	Yes	71	71
	No	29	29
	Total	100	100
Do you think you have any changes in your communication skills when speaking Arabic and Turkish?	Yes	68	68
	No	32	32
	Total	100	100

The purpose of the first question was to record the participants' gender. It was discovered that 76% of the participants were female (n=76), with the remaining 24% being male (n=24). The second question aimed to reach the age distribution of the participants, and it was determined that the ages of the participants varied between 10 and 14. The third question investigated the self-reported identity definition of participants, and all of them (n=100) reported to be Syrian. The fourth question examined whether the participants were born in Türkiye in relation to their identity development processes. It was determined that 70% of the participants (n=70) were born in Türkiye, while the remaining 30% (n=30) were not. However, the researcher asked the participants who were not born in Türkiye when they came to Türkiye, and it was discovered that they all came at a young age and grew up in Türkiye, which they could not recall. The fifth question was designed to find out which mother tongue bilingual Syrian immigrant children growing up in Türkiye use more commonly at home, given the significant relationship between mother tongue and identity development. Examination of the participants' answers revealed that 27% (n=27) of them used both Arabic and Turkish at home, while 68% (n=68) of them used Arabic and 5% (n=5) of them used Turkish. Based on this data, it can be inferred that even though all of the participants were born or raised in Türkiye, they have actively employed Arabic in their daily family life and have not abandoned the language as a component of their Syrian identity. In the sixth and seventh questions, participants were asked where they learned Arabic and Turkish, respectively. The purpose of this question is to learn what type of bilingualism the participants have developed. When the responses were examined, it was concluded that all of the participants, i.e., 100% (n=100), learned Arabic at home from the moment they were born, and, likewise, all of them, i.e., 100% (n=100), learned Turkish from the moment they started school. The participants were classified as consecutive bilinguals, as they learned Turkish as a second language before the age of 11 and Arabic as their first language (Hamers & Blanc, 1989, as cited in Hamers & Blanc, 2000). In the eighth question, when the participants were asked about their Arabic proficiency, i.e., 100% (n=100), it was found that all of them had native Arabic knowledge. On the other hand, when asked about their Turkish proficiency in the eighth question, it was determined that most of the participants had a good level of Turkish knowledge, i.e., 51% (n=51), 20% (n=20) had a very good level, and 29% (n=29) had a poor level of Turkish knowledge. The purpose of the final two questions was to ascertain whether the participants observed any differences in themselves when speaking the two languages. The purpose of asking these questions is to determine whether there is a relationship between their languages and identity. Firstly, it was aimed to find out whether they take on different identities when speaking Arabic and Turkish. In response to this question,

71% of participants (n=71) reported taking on different identities when speaking Arabic and Turkish. According to the remaining 29% of individuals, speaking two languages did not cause any identity differences. The last question inquired as to whether speaking Arabic and Turkish caused a shift in participants' communication patterns. Similarly, the majority of participants, i.e., 68% (n=68), reported that there occurred a change in their communication style, while the remaining 32% (n=32) stated that they did not experience any change in their communication style. When the researcher asked participants who said "yes" to this question what changes they had noticed in their communication styles, all of them said that speaking Arabic made them feel more at ease and natural, while speaking Turkish made them cautious and made them make an effort to avoid making mistakes. Based on the evaluation of the responses to these questions, it can be said that the participants' identity development processes are more dominated by their Arabic languages and Syrian identities.

Table 2

Summary Results for Statements to Determine Affirmation Process of Identity Development

Item	Does not describe me at all		Describes me a little		Describes me well		Describes me very well		M	SD
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	70	70	16	16	6	6	8	8	1.5200	.92638
7	69	69	16	16	5	5	10	10	1.5600	.97773
9	52	52	9	9	2	2	37	37	2.2400	1.40791
10	68	68	18	18	5	5	9	9	1.5500	1.43196
13	51	51	8	8	1	1	40	40	2.3000	1.43196
16	69	69	17	17	6	6	8	8	1.5300	.92611

Note: Column Values: f= Population, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

Summary results for statements to determine the affirmation process of identity development are presented in Table 2. Those statements include negatively worded items about the feelings of participants on their identities. Recognizing and respecting the different facets of an individual's identity, such as color, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic background, and ability, is a key component of the affirmation process of identity formation. In these items, participants were given statements containing negative evaluations about their ethnic identity and were asked to respond using 4 points as does not describe me at all, Describes me a little, describes me well and describes me very well. Items 1, 7, 10, and 16 include statements indicating the participants' general negative thoughts and discomfort about their ethnic origins. When the responses to those statements are examined, it is revealed that most participants are content to be Syrian and do not hold unfavorable opinions about their ethnic background. One of the reasons why the participants are satisfied with their Syrian identity may be that they grew up and lived in an environment where they did not feel alienated from their ethnic origins, since everyone living in the accommodation center where they lived was Syrian. On the other hand, Items 9 and 13 include statements investigating whether they would like to have a different ethnic identity if they had the chance to choose. Examining the participants' answers to these items, almost half of the participants responded that they did not have such a desire, while the other half stated that they might want to have a different ethnic identity. When the data in Table 2 is evaluated in general, it is concluded that the majority of participants are content with their ethnic identity, but a considerable proportion of them would like to have a different ethnic identity if given the option. One of the factors influencing this result could be that the participants grew up and continue to live in a bilingual and bicultural environment in a different linguistic and cultural context in Türkiye.

Table 3

Summary Results for Statements to Determine Exploration Process of Identity Development

	Does not describe me at all		Describes me a little		Describes me well		Describes me very well		M	SD
Item	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
2	62	62	22	22	-	-	16	16	1.7000	1.08711
4	13	13	27	27	20	20	40	40	2.8700	1.08855
5	17	17	27	27	3	3	53	53	2.9200	1.22003
6	82	82	11	11	-	-	7	7	1.3200	.80252
8	21	21	26	26	3	3	50	50	2.8200	1.25835
11	87	87	7	7	1	1	5	5	1.2400	.71237
15	18	18	28	28	2	2	52	52	2.8800	1.23321

Note: Column Values: f= Population, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

Table 3 displays the summary findings for the statements used to ascertain the identity development exploration process. Those statements include negatively and positively worded items that aim to find out the positive opinions and experiences participants have had to discover their ethnic origins and learn more about them. Exploration is defined as the process of investigating many identity options that one could choose to adopt (McLean & Pasupathi, 2012). In these items, participants were given statements containing positive evaluations about their exploration thoughts and experiences on their ethnic identity and were asked to respond using 4 points as does not describe me at all, describes me a little, describes me well, and describes me very well. Items 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, and 15 include statements that probe participants' activity experiences to gain more insight into their ethnic background. As is seen in Table 3, the majority of individuals reported engaging in a variety of activities associated with their Syrian identity. Food, music, watching television, and social and cultural activities pertaining to Syrian identities are all connected to these activities. It is evident that practically every participant only responded negatively to item 11 in the group with positive words. When asked in-depth questions about this claim during the interviews, participants responded that they were taught about their ethnic origins from birth by their families and did not need to investigate it on their own using the internet, social media, newspapers, and cultural publications. A broad evaluation of Table 3 reveals that, despite being born in Türkiye or being raised bilingually, Syrian immigrant children are brought up by their family in a setting where Syrian identities and traditions are prevalent. The results may be explained by the fact that immigrant families reside in an accommodation center that is exclusively populated by Syrian immigrants and lack Turkish neighbors with whom they can interact socially. Furthermore, it is clear from the data that the participants mostly employed their Syrian identities in their familial, social, and cultural relationships, while solely using their Turkish identities in academic settings and school settings.

Table 4

Summary Results for Statements to Determine Resolution Process of Identity Development

	Does not describe me at all		Describes me a little		Describes me well		Describes me very well		M	SD
Item	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
3	62	62	24	24	1	1	13	13	1.6500	1.01876
12	54	54	27	27	1	1	18	18	1.8300	1.11966

14	61	61	22	22	1	1	16	16	1.7200	1.09249
17	58	58	27	27	1	1	14	14	1.7100	1.03763

Note: Column Values: f= Population, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

Table 4 presents the summary results for statements used to determine the identity development resolution process. Those statements include positively worded items that probe if the participants have a clear understanding of what it means to them to be Syrian. Resolution is the internalization and acceptance of one's ethnicity in relation to identity accomplishment (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2004). Participants were provided statements in these items that included positive assessments of their internalization and acceptance of their ethnic identity and were asked to respond using 4 points as does not describe me at all, describes me a little, describes me well, and describes me very well. Items 3, 12, 14, and 17 include statements that investigate whether the participants have a complete understanding and sense of being Syrian. As shown in Table 4, most participants expressed uncertainty about what it meant to them to be Syrian. Comparing these data with the information in Table 2 and Table 3, it is evident that while most participants reported no problems with their ethnic origins, they were unable to finish the resolution process despite having experienced a variety of settings and engaging in activities pertaining to the Syrian language and culture. One possible explanation for these findings is that the individuals had not yet fully developed maturity since they were between the ages of 10 and 14 and were brought up in a bilingual and bicultural setting.

4. Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

The findings of the current study align with existing research in the literature. In their case study, Karanfil and Demir (2021, p. 866) examined the Turkish-English-Arabic multilingual identity developed both sequentially and concurrently by two refugee siblings, nurtured by their multilingual mother, in a familial context where they communicate in English and Arabic, while encountering Turkish in their social environment. The findings indicate that the development of a multilingual identity facilitates socialization and success in the host nation. Alshihry (2024) examined the intricate relationship between immigrant teenagers' proficiency in their heritage language and the evolution of their self-identity. The findings underscored the importance of language utilization within immigrant families. According to the results, immigrant youth who frequently hear their heritage language spoken at home get advantages in both linguistic proficiency and the formation of cultural and ethnic identity. Another study examined the role that migration processes have in helping migrants in multilingual societies develop their literary and linguistic abilities and indicated that bilingualism and linguistic adaptability were crucial for migrants' effective integration into host communities (Sabirova et al., 2025). The collective findings of the current study and existing literature reveal a direct correlation between the identity formation processes of immigrant individuals and the languages they acquire, as well as the frequency of their usage. To conclude, language functions as a conduit for traditions, beliefs, and a collective identity, connecting individuals across generations and geographical barriers (Al-khresheh, 2025).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the identity and language development processes of bilingually raised immigrant children whose families migrated to Türkiye as a result of the Syrian civil conflict. The identity development processes of Syrian immigrant children were researched according to the affirmation, exploration, and resolution stages. Each participant identified themselves Syrian instead of Turkish when asked about their ethnic identity. Despite being born or raised in Türkiye and learning Arabic and Turkish while growing up, it was determined that the participants formed a Syrian identity instead of a Turkish one. This result is believed to be caused by the fact that immigrant children reside in a temporary accommodation center exclusively for Syrians, keeping their Syrian identity intact

and passing it on to their children. Another factor can be that children speak Arabic in their social and familial connections and only use Turkish in academic settings. Furthermore, the data's conclusions indicated that while the participants were able to successfully complete the affirmation and exploration phases of the process of developing their Syrian identities, they were unable to finish the resolution stage. The participants, aged 10 to 14, were raised in families with a predominant Syrian identity, and supportive factors from their parents, such as language acquisition and engagement in social and cultural activities, may have contributed to their successful navigation of the affirmation and exploration stages. However, the fact that most participants have not reached the resolution stage of identity development, which is a component of personality development, can be explained by the fact that their growth process is still ongoing and they have not yet reached maturity. This study and its findings are significant, as it investigates Syrian immigrants' identity and language development processes that are critical for effectively integrating them into Turkish society and developing an effective language and cultural education program as they interact across languages.

This study is limited in that it was conducted only with the participation of children residing in a temporary accommodation center where only Syrian immigrants live. For future studies on this subject, a comparative study can be conducted on the identity and language development processes of immigrants living in an environment where only Syrians live and immigrants living in a neighborhood where Turks also live.

5. References

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Appendix

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LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY QUESTIONS

Gender: Male/Female

Age:

1. How many years have you been living in Türkiye?
2. When did you start learning Turkish?
3. When did you start learning Arabic?
4. What language do you speak at home?
5. How well do you speak Arabic?
6. How well do you speak Turkish?
7. Do you think you take on different identities when speaking Arabic and Turkish?
8. Do you feel like you have a different identity when you speak Turkish?
9. Is there a change in your communication style when speaking Turkish?

Ethnic Identity Scale (Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bámaca-Gómez, 2004)

Türkiye is made up of people of various ethnicities. Ethnicity refers to cultural traditions, beliefs, and behaviors that are passed down through generations. When you are answering the following questions, I would like you to think about what YOU consider your ethnicity to be.

Please write what you consider to be your ethnicity here _____ and refer to this ethnicity as you answer the questions below.

	Does not describe me at all	Describes me a little	Describes me well	Describes me very well
1. My feelings about my ethnicity are mostly negative.	1	2	3	4
2. I have not participated in any activities that would teach me about my ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
3. I am clear about what my ethnicity means to me.	1	2	3	4
4. I have experienced things that reflect my ethnicity, such as eating food, listening to music, and watching movies.	1	2	3	4
5. I have attended events that have helped me learn more about my ethnicity	1	2	3	4
6. I have read books/magazines/newspapers or other materials that have taught me about my ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
7. I feel negatively about my ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
8. I have participated in activities that have exposed me to my ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
9. I wish I were of a different ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
10. I am not happy with my ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
11. I have learned about my ethnicity by doing things such as reading (books, magazines, newspapers), searching the internet, or keeping up with current events.	1	2	3	4
12. I understand how I feel about my ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
13. If I could choose, I would prefer to be of a different ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
14. I know what my ethnicity means to me.	1	2	3	4
15. I have participated in activities that have taught me about my ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
16. I dislike my ethnicity.	1	2	3	4
17. I have a clear sense of what my ethnicity means to me.	1	2	3	4