

Research Article

Mapping Micro–Mezzo–Macro Solutions: A Thematic Analysis of Recommendations in Turkish Dissertations on the Education of Syrian Refugee Children (Pre-K–12)^{1, 2}

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Abstract

This study synthesizes practice-oriented knowledge on refugee education by analyzing the “Recommendations” sections of Turkish doctoral dissertations on Syrian children’s schooling. Using qualitative document and thematic content analysis, it examines 94 recommendations from 10 dissertations (National Thesis Center, March 15, 2025). Recommendations cluster into four themes—fundamental problems, adaptation-focused interventions, teacher support needs, and system-level policy—mapped to micro (individual), mezzo (school–community), and macro (policy–system) levels. The corpus spans 2019–2024, reflecting the de facto window of doctoral production. A key limitation is reliance on recommendations sections only. Overall, findings translate accumulated academic evidence into operational levers for policy and practice and indicate priorities for longitudinal monitoring and comparative research across migrant groups and educational stages. Prominent solutions include tiered Turkish provision (preparatory/intensive), school-based interpreter capacity and bilingual counseling, institutionalized school social work, mandatory multicultural and trauma-informed in-service training, balanced classroom assignment, and address-based registration with monitoring of local–migrant ratios.

Keywords: Syrian refugee children, Türkiye, thematic synthesis, multicultural inclusive education, policy mapping

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Araştırma Makalesi

Türkiye’de Suriyeli Mülteci Çocukların Eğitimi (Okul Öncesi–12. Sınıf) Üzerine Doktora Tezlerindeki Önerilerin Tematik Analizi: Mikro–Mezzo–Makro Çözümlerin Haritalanması

Öz

Bu çalışma, mülteci eğitimi alanındaki uygulamaya dönük bilgiyi, Türkiye’de Suriyeli çocukların eğitimine ilişkin doktora tezlerinin “Öneriler” bölümlerini analiz ederek sentezlemektedir. Nitel belge incelemesi ve tematik içerik analizi yöntemleri kullanılarak, 10 doktora tezinden elde edilen toplam 94 öneri incelenmiştir (Ulusal Tez Merkezi, 15 Mart 2025). Öneriler; temel sorunlar, uyuma odaklı müdahaleler, öğretmen destek gereksinimleri ve sistem düzeyinde politika olmak üzere dört tema altında toplanmış; mikro (bireysel), mezzo (okul–toplum) ve makro (politika–sistem) düzeylere haritalanmıştır. İncelenen tezler 2019–2024 yıllarını kapsamaktadır ve bu dönem, doktora düzeyindeki çalışmaların fiilî üretim aralığını yansıtmaktadır. Çalışmanın temel sınırlılığı, yalnızca “öneriler” bölümlerine dayanmasıdır. Genel olarak bulgular, birikmiş akademik kanıtları politika ve uygulama için işlevsel kaldıraçlara dönüştürmekte; uzunlamasına izleme ile farklı göçmen grupları ve eğitim kademeleri arasında karşılaştırmalı araştırmalar için önceliklere işaret etmektedir. Öne çıkan çözüm önerileri arasında kademeli Türkçe öğretimi (hazırlık/yoğun programlar), okul temelli tercüman kapasitesi ve iki dilli psikolojik danışmanlık, kurumsallaşmış okul sosyal hizmetleri, zorunlu çokkültürlü ve travma duyarlı hizmet içi eğitim, dengeli sınıf yerleştirmeleri ile yerel–göçmen oranlarının izlenmesini içeren adrese dayalı kayıt uygulamaları yer almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli mülteci çocuklar, Türkiye, tematik sentez, çokkültürlü kapsayıcı eğitim, politika haritalaması

Introduction

Forced migration driven by war, internal conflict, political repression, and humanitarian crises has displaced populations at an unprecedented scale, with children constituting the most vulnerable subgroup (Çiftçioğlu & Altınok, 2024). Ensuring migrant and refugee children's access to equitable, high-quality education is integral to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and central to child-rights-based social policies (UNHCR, 2023). Yet field evidence consistently shows that refugee children do not benefit equally from educational services and face multiple structural barriers (Yalçın, 2024). Language barriers, post-traumatic stress, social exclusion, cultural discontinuities, difficulties adapting to school environments, and gaps in inclusive education policies compound the challenge of educational integration (McBrien, 2005; Dryden-Peterson, 2016; AbdulRahim & Rababah, 2020; Alsayed & Wildes, 2018; Shahbazi et al., 2020).

Many forcibly displaced children have lived through war and violence, family separation, and severe trauma, with enduring consequences for mental health, learning motivation, attention, school adaptation, and social relations (Börü & Boyacı, 2016; Ergün, 2022). Research in Türkiye documents that Syrian students are exposed to “exclusion, othering, discrimination, and peer bullying” by teachers, peers, and sometimes parents (Abay, 2019; Alkalay et al., 2021; Anis, 2019; Bayram, 2019; Ercan, 2018; Ertuş, 2017; Göçer et al., 2020; Kızılkaya, 2021; Sakız, 2016; Saklan, 2018; Sardroud, 2023; Sever, 2020; Şeker & Sirkeci, 2015; Temur & Özalp, 2022; Tüfekçi, 2020; Yüce, 2018). Language insufficiency, alienation from school culture, and limited psychosocial support undermine academic performance and school belonging (Koehler & Schneider, 2019). Meanwhile, in-service training and project-based supports remain inadequate, leaving teachers ill-equipped to address students' language and adaptation difficulties (Çelik, 2020; Ergün, 2018; Kazu & Deniz, 2019; Kozan, 2019; Özçelik, 2021; Sardroud, 2023; Süer, 2022; Şerif, 2020; Taşay, 2023; Tırpan, 2023; Ünal & Aladağ, 2020; Yıldırım, 2023; Yıldız, 2018; Yılmaz, 2021; Yılmaz, 2019). Accordingly, education functions not only as an academic pathway but also as a protective right that supports psychosocial well-being and guides social integration (McBrien, 2005). As underscored by UNHCR (2023) and OECD (2019), the right to education must be operationalized as access to safe, culturally responsive, and inclusive learning environments; otherwise, refugee children risk either detachment from schooling or continued attendance without cognitive, emotional, and social support. International literature converges on similar patterns—language barriers, insufficient psychological support, exclusion, academic failure—and positions inclusive education as pivotal to remedying these inequities (Almadani, 2008; Bessarabova & Kurysheva, 2020; Civitillo et al., 2021; Crul et al., 2019; Madziva & Thodlana, 2017; Salem, 2021; Sheykhjan, 2017; Sinclair, 2017; Walls-Rodriguez, 2016; Yule, 2000).

Following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Türkiye became one of the world's largest refugee-hosting countries, with children comprising the most vulnerable cohort. As of May 2025, approximately 1,339,670 Syrian children are under temporary protection in Türkiye—about 48.6% of the total Syrian population in the country (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2025; Mülteciler Derneği, 2025). Of these, 398,248 are aged 0–4 and 941,422 are 5–17; roughly 943,350 Syrian children are under age nine and thus have grown up in Türkiye without directly experiencing Syria (Türkiye Gazetesi, 2025). This demographic profile necessitates long-term strategic planning across education, health, and social integration.

Türkiye has expanded school construction, teacher recruitment, and physical capacity, alongside programs for language learning, psychological resilience, and social adaptation (OECD, 2019). Nonetheless, capacity constraints persist, and the need for multilingual, multicultural, and trauma-sensitive models intensifies. Given the layered effects of migration experience, psychosocial vulnerability, language barriers, social exclusion, and belonging, education assumes a dual role: safeguarding the right to learn and enabling psycho-emotional recovery and social integration (McBrien, 2005; Börü & Boyacı, 2016; Ergün, 2022). Teacher–student relationships directly influence schooling, absenteeism, achievement, and belonging (McBrien, 2005), while state policy and teacher competencies shape refugee students' adaptation. Educational systems must respond to current needs and remain sensitive to children's pre-migration histories (Koehler & Schneider, 2019), enabling pedagogies that acknowledge experience and accelerate connection to schooling.

Doctoral dissertations represent a strategic, yet often 'unmined,' reservoir of practice-oriented knowledge in education. Theoretically classified as high-value 'grey literature' (Paez, 2017), dissertations offer a distinct advantage over commercial journal articles: they are unconstrained by word limits and publication biases, thereby preserving granular, empirically grounded, and actionable details that might otherwise be lost (Benzies et al., 2006; Tavşancıl et al., 2010). While these documents are expected to move beyond theoretical exposition to inform policy development and teacher education (Kaya & Uyanık Aktulun, 2025; Fazlıoğulları & Kurul, 2012), they frequently remain siloed in institutional repositories, representing a critical gap in 'knowledge mobilization'—the process of moving research into active use (Cooper, 2014; Levin, 2011). To operationalize this dormant capital, this study focuses specifically on 'Recommendation' sections, which serve as the most concrete interface with practice. As Cemaloğlu (2020) asserts, these sections function as translational mechanisms that convert field data into systemic interventions. For disadvantaged groups such as refugee children, such recommendations span teacher competencies, school organization, and language policy with a level of specificity and feasibility that enhances their value for decision-makers (Baron, 2008; Tanrıoğen, 2014). By analyzing these sections, the study clarifies how accumulated, interdisciplinary field knowledge can be translated into actionable guidance for the Turkish education system.

While numerous systematic reviews have synthesized the *findings* regarding the barriers and needs of refugee children (e.g., McBrien, 2005; Yalçın, 2024), there is a distinct scarcity of meta-analyses focused explicitly on the *recommendations* (synthesizing the solutions). Existing reviews often concentrate on documenting challenges—such as language deficits or exclusion—but overlook the detailed, practice-oriented proposals found in grey literature, thereby missing a crucial layer of evidence needed for policy design. This study addresses this gap by shifting the analytical lens from the description of challenges to the aggregation of expert-proposed interventions found in doctoral dissertations.

Positioned within this context, the present study undertakes a document-based qualitative analysis of doctoral dissertations produced at Turkish universities on the education of Syrian refugee children, focusing exclusively on their recommendation sections. The analysis proceeds with three interlocking analytical aims: (i) to classify and describe the recommendations thematically and examine their frequencies; (ii) to map recommendations to micro (individual), mezzo (school–community), and macro (policy–system) intervention levels; and (iii) to interpret the structural meanings, contextual patterns, and policy orientations that cut across themes. Guided by this analytic agenda, the study synthesizes both the documented challenges and the proposed solutions within a coherent frame and demonstrates how accumulated academic knowledge in Türkiye can be translated into actionable guidance for policy and practice.

Theoretical Anchoring

While I adopt McBrien’s (2005) micro–mezzo–macro lens to structure the analysis, I explicitly situate this mapping within Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological theory, Cummins’s framework on language development and Thomas Faist’s (1997) pioneering conceptualization of ‘the crucial meso-level’ in migration studies. Faist argues that the meso-level serves as the vital relational link between micro-level individual rational-choice models and macro-level structuralism, effectively bridging the ‘disciplinary canyon’ between these two extremes. By emphasizing the role of social ties, kinship, and community networks as forms of social capital, Faist (1997) identifies this level as the ‘social glue’ or ‘social infrastructure’ that converts individual intentions into collective migration and integration processes. In this study, this perspective justifies viewing the school and its surrounding community as a central node of social capital where relational resources (such as school social work and parent-teacher networks) facilitate or hinder the child’s integration.

On the other hand, Bronfenbrenner’s model conceptualizes development as shaped by nested systems—from classroom and peer interactions in the microsystem, to school–family linkages in the mesosystem, to institutional and community arrangements in the exosystem, and broader ideologies and policies in the macrosystem,

unfolding over time (the chronosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). This perspective justifies the multi-level coding: recommendations targeting classroom practice and student–teacher relations are micro-level; school climate, guidance units, and family–school cooperation locate at the mezzo level; planning, curriculum, and distribution rules are macro-oriented; and the study’s emphasis on longitudinal monitoring directly corresponds to the chronosystem. In short, the field’s “what to do” propositions can be read as levers operating across nested ecological layers.

Complementarily, Cummins’s work clarifies why language dominates the corpus of recommendations. The distinction between BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) and CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) explains why students may socialize quickly yet struggle academically without sustained, content-linked language support (Cummins, 1979, 2000). The interdependence hypothesis and the case for additive bilingualism imply that structured L2 (Turkish) provision—e.g., tiered/intensive tracks and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)—yields stronger academic outcomes when it does not suppress L1 resources and when teachers enact empowerment-oriented pedagogies (Cummins, 1981, 2000). These principles underwrite several recurrent recommendations in my corpus: preparatory/leveled Turkish aligned to academic demands (CALP), bilingual mediation and interpreter pools that bridge school–home communication (meso), and curriculum plus assessment accommodations at system level (macro). Together with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological layering, Cummins’s framework provides a theoretically grounded rationale for the prominence of language-focused, teacher-capacity, and school–family interface solutions observed in Turkish dissertations.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative document analysis to examine the “Recommendations” sections of doctoral dissertations and applied a reflexive thematic content analysis to identify patterned meanings in the data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed the six-phase trajectory outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading; (2) generating initial codes from meaning units; (3) searching for themes by collating codes; (4) reviewing themes against the dataset; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the final report.

The analytic architecture linked descriptive patterns (“what is recommended”) to levels of action and policy orientation through a micro–mezzo–macro framework adapted from McBrien (2005). While McBrien originally utilized this ecological lens to categorize educational *barriers* faced by refugee students, this study repurposed the framework to map *solutions* across three operational levels: the *micro level* (targeting individual students,

teachers, and classroom interactions), the *mezzo level* (addressing school climate, family–school partnerships, and community linkages), and the *macro level* (involving national policy, curriculum regulation, and system-wide resource allocation). Guided by this adapted framework, the analysis proceeded to classify recommendations thematically and by frequency, and to interpret structural meanings that cut across themes. This dual focus ensured that the recommendations were evaluated not only in terms of their manifest content but also in terms of the pedagogical, social, and structural needs to which they responded. The unit of analysis was the individual recommendation statement.

Data Sources

The data source consists of the “Recommendations” sections of doctoral dissertations addressing the education of Syrian refugee children in Türkiye. Records were identified through the Council of Higher Education National Thesis Center (tez.yok.gov.tr) as of March 15, 2025. The search used the Turkish keywords “Suriyeli,” “mülteci çocuk(lar),” and “eğitim.” Inclusion was restricted to doctoral dissertations completed at universities in Türkiye with a K–12 focus and an accessible recommendations section; master’s theses, tertiary/post-secondary-focused dissertations, and records without accessible full texts were excluded. A PRISMA-style process guided identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, resulting in ten dissertations. Across these dissertations, a total of 94 distinct recommendation statements were identified, yielding an average of approximately 9.4 recommendations per dissertation. This corpus size provides sufficient variation for theme development while allowing close textual engagement. The main reason for focusing exclusively on doctoral dissertations is their comparatively comprehensive theoretical framing, depth of analysis, and structured policy orientation (Tavşancıl et al., 2010), which make them a strategically appropriate qualitative source for mapping practice-oriented solutions in a multi-actor policy field. Core bibliographic details for the included dissertations are presented in Table 1 to provide contextual transparency regarding disciplinary spread and institutional provenance.

Table 1.*Information on the doctoral dissertations examined within the scope of the research*

No	Author	Dissertation Title	Department	University	Institute	Year
1	Serdar Aykut	Educational Problems of Syrian Children in Türkiye: A Proposal for School Social Work with a Focus on Education for Respecting Differences	Social Work	Hacettepe University	Institute of Social Sciences	2019
2	Mustafa Yavuzekinci	Examination of the Effect of the Peer Relations Education Program on Peer Bullying of Syrian Children under Temporary Protection	Child Development	Ankara University	Institute of Health Sciences	2024
3	Sezgin Tetik	Evaluation of Practices for the Education of Syrian Children under Temporary Protection	Educational Sciences	Gazi University	Institute of Educational Sciences	2024
4	Suat Seyitoğlu	Integration Levels of Syrian Children: The Case of Yenişehir, Bursa	Sociology	Hacettepe University	Institute of Social Sciences	2024
5	Murat Akyokuş	Educational and Adaptation Problems of Syrian Children of School Age in Türkiye: A Proposal for a School Social Work Model	Social Work	Hacettepe University	Institute of Social Sciences	2023
6	Hüseyin Caner Taşçı	Education of Syrian Children under Temporary Protection in the Context of Equal Opportunity: The Case of Yalova	Labor Economics and Industrial Relations	Yalova University	Graduate Education Institute	2023
7	Mehmet Fansa	The Life of Syrian Children in a Temporary Accommodation Center in Türkiye: An Ethnographic Study on Primary Education	Primary Education	Anadolu University	Institute of Educational Sciences	2021
8	İbrahim Halil Yılmaz	School Adaptation of Syrian Children in Türkiye	Sociology	Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University	Institute of Social Sciences	2021
9	Mithat Büyükhan	Barriers to Access to Education for Syrian Children of Compulsory School Age: The Case of Ankara Province	Social Policy	Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University	Institute of Social Sciences	2019
10	Rahime Filiz Kiremit	The Effect of Turkish Language Education Based on the CLIL Method on the Receptive Language Development of Syrian Children Aged 3–5 under Temporary Protection	Primary Education	Gazi University	Institute of Educational Sciences	2019

Data Analysis Process

The analysis followed a structured sequence. First, recommendation paragraphs were read in full and segmented into meaning units, defined as minimal actionable propositions. These units were inductively open coded to preserve semantic proximity to the source language. Related codes were then grouped through axial coding

into subthemes and subsequently into themes. Each recommendation was mapped to one or more intervention levels—micro, mezzo, or macro—based on its locus of action. Where a recommendation unambiguously spanned multiple levels, multi-level tags were assigned and retained in reporting rather than collapsed to a single category. In addition, recommendations were tagged by responsible actor (e.g., classroom teacher, school administration and guidance services, Turkish Ministry of National Education [MoNE], municipalities, NGOs) to connect intervention levels with implementation responsibility. Exemplar quotations were selected for each theme and subtheme on the basis of thematic centrality, non-overlap with other exemplars, and the clarity of action verbs indicating implementable content. No qualitative data analysis software was used; instead, a versioned audit trail documented search decisions, inclusion criteria, evolving code definitions, and theme refinements.

Coding and Creation of Themes

At the end of coding, the 94 recommendations were classified into four main themes and eleven subcategories based on content similarity and recurrence patterns. The thematic structure was designed to be discrete and collectively exhaustive at the given level, and it intentionally incorporated both individual-level interventions and system-level policy proposals to reflect the multilayered character of the field. The themes and subcategories reported in Table 2 summarize this structure and align with the Introduction's analytic aims. Frequency counts were produced for themes, subthemes, and intervention levels; multi-level assignments were retained and reported separately to prevent artificial inflation of any single level. Redundant or near-duplicate recommendations across dissertations were clustered to acknowledge convergence in the literature while avoiding overcounting within descriptive statistics.

Table 2.*Created Themes and Subcategories*

Theme	Category	Description / Examples of Content
1. Fundamental Problems Encountered in Education	1.1. Language Barrier	Insufficient knowledge of Turkish by students and parents, lack of interpreters, suggestions for Turkish courses and digital materials
	1.2. Economic Inequality	Financial insufficiency, inability to cover school expenses, child labor, conditional education assistance
	1.3. Psychosocial Problems	Peer bullying, social exclusion, adaptation problems, lack of security in the school environment
2. Intervention Recommendations for the Adaptation Process	2.1. School Social Work	Establishment of social work units in schools, family–student–school cooperation, home visits, counseling
	2.2. Multicultural Learning Environment	Awareness training for teachers in mixed classes, integration activities, group work in classrooms
	2.3. Family Participation and Social Interaction	Activities among families, parent seminars, recommendations to strengthen the sense of belonging
3. Support Needs for Teachers	3.1. In-Service Training	Migration psychology, coping with differences, communication skills, creative drama, CLIL methods
	3.2. Burnout and Lack of Support	Intense working conditions, feelings of loneliness, need for professional support
4. Educational Policies and System-Level Interventions	4.1. Planning and Distribution Policies	Balanced distribution of migrant children, classroom density planning, registration systems
	4.2. Multilingual and Adaptation-Oriented Curriculum	Course materials appropriate to different levels, production of multilingual content
	4.3. Long-Term Integration Models	Longitudinal research, rapid intervention systems for new waves of migration, adaptation recommendations for different refugee groups

Inter-Coder Reliability

Although this is a single-author study, a stratified subsample of recommendation statements—stratified by emerging themes to capture variability—was double-coded by an independent field expert. Observed agreement on this subsample was 0.85. Cohen’s K was calculated as 0.75, indicating substantial agreement in line with conventional benchmarks. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, which led to minor clarifications in code definitions without altering the overall theme architecture. Because Cohen’s K can be sensitive to category prevalence, both K and percent agreement are reported. The double-coded subset specifications and confusion matrices are available from the author upon request.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Multiple strategies were employed to enhance trustworthiness. Credibility was supported by triangulation across dissertations from different institutions and disciplines, by anchoring interpretations with direct quotations from recommendation texts, and by prioritizing recurrent patterns observed across sources. Transferability was addressed by providing a clear account of context, scope, and inclusion criteria so that readers can assess applicability to analogous settings. Dependability was strengthened through a documented audit trail for search, selection, coding, and theme development. Confirmability was promoted through reflexive memoing and a commitment to data-led coding, with interpretive claims explicitly tethered to verbatim recommendation language. A structured codebook defined themes, inclusion criteria, and positive/negative examples; the codebook and cross-tabulations are not appended to the article but are available from the author upon reasonable request.

Limitations of Content Analysis

This study is limited to the analysis of the “Recommendations” sections of the included dissertations; other sections such as findings and discussion were not coded, which may constrain the contextualization of certain proposals. Manual coding without software limited possibilities for automated visualization and complex co-occurrence modeling, although the audit trail and inter-coder check mitigate concerns about dependability. The time window of the corpus corresponds to dissertations completed between 2019 and 2024; in the domain of doctoral work on the education of Syrian refugee children in Türkiye, production is concentrated in this period, so the temporal frame reflects the empirical trajectory of the field rather than an arbitrary restriction. Finally, as with all qualitative syntheses, interpretive judgments were made; these were disciplined by explicit coding rules, double-coder adjudication with substantial agreement ($K = 0.75$; observed agreement = 0.85), and transparent reporting of theme structures and frequencies.

Summary Linkage to Findings

The Methods are deliberately aligned with the Introduction’s analytic agenda and the structure of the Findings. The Results section reports frequency distributions for themes and subthemes, the distribution of recommendations across micro, mezzo, and macro levels, an actor-by-level crosswalk, and exemplar quotations that instantiate each thematic claim. This alignment ensures a coherent chain from analytical aims to procedures and then to reported outputs, minimizing interpretive drift and enhancing the study’s auditability.

Findings

The analysis covered 94 distinct recommendation statements extracted from ten doctoral dissertations and organized into four themes and eleven subcategories. In line with the analytic agenda outlined in the Introduction and operationalized in the Method, findings are presented as (i) numerical distributions for themes, subthemes, and intervention levels; (ii) an actor-oriented reading that links implementation responsibility to levels; and (iii) concise thematic syntheses that translate recommendations into actionable policy levers. Multi-level assignments were retained; where relevant, both exclusive and inclusive distributions are reported.

Across the corpus, recommendations most frequently targeted fundamental problems in education (37/94, 39.4%), followed by interventions for the adaptation process (24/94, 25.5%), support needs for teachers (16/94, 17.0%), and educational policies and system-level interventions (17/94, 18.1%).

At the subtheme level, the distribution was as follows: Language barrier 22/94 (23.4%), economic inequality 7/94 (7.4%), psychosocial problems 8/94 (8.5%), school social work 10/94 (10.6%), multicultural learning environment 8/94 (8.5%), family participation and social interaction 6/94 (6.4%), in-service training 11/94 (11.7%), burnout and lack of support 5/94 (5.3%), planning and distribution policies 6/94 (6.4%), multilingual/adaptation-oriented curriculum 6/94 (6.4%), and long-term integration models 5/94 (5.3%). These figures provide the numerical counterpart to Table 2 and reflect the field's emphasis on language, teacher capacity, and structured supports.

With respect to intervention levels, the exclusive mapping yielded micro 36/94 (38.3%), mezzo 30/94 (31.9%), and macro 28/94 (29.8%). Because some recommendations spanned levels (e.g., school social work units that require ministerial authorization), an inclusive count preserved those overlaps, producing 112 level-tags in total: micro 45/112 (40.2%), mezzo 37/112 (33.0%), and macro 30/112 (26.8%). This pattern indicates a modest tilt toward individual- and school-facing actions, with substantial but comparatively fewer system-level prescriptions.

An actor-oriented crosswalk linked recommendations to primary implementers. Inclusive counts indicate the following emphases: classroom teachers (27 tags), school administration and guidance/psychological counseling units (22), Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE) (26), parents/families (15), municipalities/NGOs (12), and students/peers as explicit agents in programs (10). As expected, teacher- and school-facing actions concentrated at the micro/mezzo levels, while MoNE-aligned actions concentrated at the macro level (e.g., curriculum, planning, registries).

Fundamental Problems Encountered in Education

Language Barrier and Communication Obstacles (22/94; 23.4%)

Language emerged as the single most frequent target of recommendations, cutting across classroom participation, assessment, and home–school communication. Dissertations converged on structured Turkish support, interpreter use in schools, CLIL-based early childhood approaches, and digital reinforcement. Proposed instruments included parent-oriented Turkish courses, school-based interpretation to enable parent–teacher engagement, and the integration of CLIL methods into teacher training and in-service programs (Aykut, 2019; Kiremit, 2019; Taşcı, 2023). In practical terms, the corpus points toward a tiered Turkish provision calibrated by proficiency, the creation of interpreter pools and bilingual guidance aides at schools with high refugee density, and the systematic embedding of CLIL modules across pre-service and in-service teacher education.

Economic Inequalities and Access to Educational Opportunities (7/94; 7.4%)

Economic constraints were addressed through conditional supports to reduce the cost of schooling and prevent child-labor–related absenteeism. Recommendations prioritized transport and meal subsidies, targeted cash assistance, and digital access provisioning for low-income families, particularly salient during distance-learning periods (Büyükhhan, 2019; Taşcı, 2023). Taken together, these directions call for scaling attendance-linked education assistance, guaranteeing school transport and meals in high-need locales, and delivering device–connectivity packages to households below income thresholds to close the digital participation gap.

Psychosocial Problems and Security Concerns (8/94; 8.5%)

Psychosocial vulnerability—peer bullying, exclusion, trauma sequelae—and neighborhood safety appeared as recurrent targets. Suggested measures included anti-bullying programs, Arabic-speaking guidance capacity, structured referrals, home visits, and safe-route transport support (Aykut, 2019; Yavuzekinci, 2024; Büyükhhan, 2019; Taşcı, 2023). The thrust of these proposals is to institutionalize evidence-based anti-bullying curricula with parent participation, expand bilingual counseling and interpreter capacity in high-density schools, and coordinate municipal transport solutions that secure children’s daily access to school.

Intervention Recommendations for the Adaptation Process

School Social Work (10/94; 10.6%)

School social work was advanced as a hub connecting school, family, and community, with protective–preventive–developmental functions and home-visit capacity (Aykut, 2019; Akyokuş, 2023). This model was explicitly positioned to handle neglect/abuse risks, attendance, and integration, operating at micro, small-

group, and school-wide levels while interfacing with policy. Concretely, the recommendations coalesce around establishing dedicated school social work units with defined caseloads, shared protocols with guidance services, and nationally endorsed standards for referral, documentation, and community linkage.

Multicultural Learning Environment and Inclusive Education (8/94; 8.5%)

Recommendations emphasized teacher preparation on migration and intercultural communication, classroom grouping that avoids extreme concentration, and pedagogies that build contact and cooperation. Extracurricular socialization—conversation clubs, cultural days, joint projects—was seen as a lever to nurture belonging (Akyokuş, 2023; Tetik, 2024; Taşcı, 2023). In implementation terms, this translates into mandatory modules on multicultural and inclusive pedagogy, balanced classroom assignment practices that prevent segregation, and earmarked funding for school–community integration activities with clear participation metrics.

Family Participation and Social Interaction (6/94; 6.4%)

Family-facing actions included parent Turkish courses, routine school–home communication anchored by social work/guidance, and mixed-family events to reduce prejudice and strengthen belonging (Aykut, 2019; Taşcı, 2023; Yavuzekinci, 2024). The intended outcome is a standing parent language pathway and structured home–school liaison function within school improvement plans, complemented by regular mixed-family activities monitored through simple indicators such as attendance and repeat participation.

Support Needs for Teachers

In-Service Training (11/94; 11.7%)

Teachers' preparation gaps in migration, trauma-informed practice, and inclusive classroom management were a central concern. Recommendations prioritized continuous, practice-oriented in-service with interactive techniques (e.g., creative drama, role-play) to shift both knowledge and dispositions (Aykut, 2019; Tetik, 2024; Akyokuş, 2023). A coherent response would be a national in-service sequence on migration and inclusion that includes competency benchmarks, micro-credentials, and on-site coaching teams deployed to schools with the highest refugee enrollments.

Burnout and Lack of Support (5/94; 5.3%)

Workload, classroom heterogeneity, and language barriers were linked to fatigue and reduced efficacy. Proposals included administrative support, peer mentoring, supervision, and integration with school social work to distribute non-instructional burdens (Akyokuş, 2023; Aykut, 2019; Taşcı, 2023). Accordingly, systems

should introduce teacher well-being protocols—peer coaching and supervision hours—adjust timetables and allowances in high-need schools and formalize multidisciplinary support teams that locate non-teaching tasks with appropriate staff.

Educational Policies and System-Level Interventions

Planning and Distribution Policies (6/94; 6.4%)

Placement without attention to local–migrant ratios, classroom crowding, and address-based registry gaps were identified as structural drivers of inequity (Akyokuş, 2023; Taşcı, 2023). The policy direction implied here is to enforce address-based registration for children under temporary protection, set ratio targets for school and class assignments, and track density indicators at regular intervals to pre-empt clustering.

Multilingual and Adaptation-Oriented Curriculum (6/94; 6.4%)

Curriculum recommendations emphasized multicultural content, universal values alongside national ones, and preparatory or intensive Turkish tracks tailored by proficiency, especially for late arrivals (Tetik, 2024; Akyokuş, 2023). In practice, this means issuing national guidance on multicultural curriculum design, developing leveled Turkish preparatory modules with age-appropriate content, and aligning assessment accommodations to students' language acquisition trajectories.

Long-term Integration Models (5/94; 5.3%)

Proposals moved beyond projectized responses to sustainable integration, including emergency education protocols for new inflows, longitudinal monitoring, and expansion to other migrant groups (Tetik, 2024; Yılmaz, 2021; Seyitoğlu, 2024; Taşcı, 2023). Put differently, systems require rapid enrollment and bridging procedures, funded longitudinal cohorts that track integration outcomes over time, and group-agnostic frameworks that can be applied across diverse migrant populations.

Cross-Cutting Patterns and Robustness

A small but meaningful share of recommendations spanned levels. In inclusive tagging, 112 level-assignments were recorded: micro 45 (40.2%), mezzo 37 (33.0%), macro 30 (26.8%). Multi-level items clustered around school social work and language policy linkages, where classroom practice depends on institutional capacity and ministerial regulation. Redundancy checks identified convergent proposals across different dissertations for interpreter deployment, in-service teacher training on migration, and balanced classroom placement; these were clustered to avoid overcounting in frequencies while preserving attribution. Actor–level alignment was

coherent: teacher- and guidance-led recommendations dominated micro/mezzo enactment; MoNE-oriented recommendations concentrated in curriculum and planning; municipalities/NGOs appeared in transport, social assistance, and community mediation.

In sum, the corpus reveals a practice-to-policy ladder: classroom and school recommendations predominate and are scaffolded by policy proposals on planning, curriculum, and system supports. Language support, teacher capacity, and school social work constitute the backbone of the recommended architecture, while economic and psychosocial barriers motivate targeted supports and intersectoral coordination. This structure directly mirrors the analytic commitments set out in the Introduction and the procedures documented in the Method, ensuring internal coherence from aims to evidentiary claims.

Discussion

Positioning the Contribution and Analytical Frame

This research is one of the pioneering studies that systematically examines the recommendations included in doctoral dissertations on the education of Syrian refugee children in Türkiye through thematic analysis. The categorization of the findings under four main themes—(1) fundamental problems encountered in education, (2) interventions for the adaptation process, (3) support needs for teachers, and (4) the need for educational policies and structural interventions—demonstrates that migrant education is not only a pedagogical issue but also a multi-layered matter that must be addressed at social, cultural, and political levels. This reveals that academic production in the field of education should not be limited to classroom practices but should also generate policy recommendations at the system level. McBrien’s (2005) approach, which analyzes the educational processes of migrant students at the micro (individual), mezzo (school–community), and macro (structural–political) levels, directly overlaps with the systematic framework of recommendations in this study. Similarly, Koehler and Schneider (2019) and UNHCR (2023) reports emphasize that education should not be limited to access-based approaches but should be restructured toward creating safe, inclusive, and culturally sensitive learning environments. In this respect, the present synthesis adds a quantitative backbone to this framework: recommendations concentrated most heavily on fundamental problems (39.4%), with language-related proposals alone accounting for 23.4% of all items, while the micro–mezzo–macro distribution indicated a modest tilt toward micro (38.3%) and mezzo (31.9%) actions alongside substantial macro-level prescriptions (29.8%). This balance suggests that frontline practices and school-level arrangements are the immediate levers, yet durable change depends on concurrent system design.

To deepen the interpretive power of these results, I explicitly locate the micro–mezzo–macro mapping within Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model—linking classroom interactions to microsystem dynamics, school–family–community linkages to the mesosystem, municipal and interagency resources to the exosystem, national rules and ideologies to the macrosystem, and the temporal unfolding of integration to the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). In parallel, the prominence of language-focused items is interpreted through Cummins’s distinction between BICS and CALP, his interdependence hypothesis, and the principle of additive bilingualism, which together explain the corpus’ emphasis on tiered language supports, CLIL, bilingual mediation, and assessment accommodations (Cummins, 1979, 1981, 2000). This anchoring clarifies why certain clusters (language, teacher capacity, school social work) recur across dissertations and how they operate across ecological layers.

Language as the Central Constraint: CALP Demands and Bilingual Mediation

One of the most fundamental barriers to the integration of Syrian children into the education system is the language barrier. This affects not only academic achievement but also social adaptation, teacher–parent relations, and school–family cooperation. In the dissertations analyzed, numerous sub-problems such as parents’ lack of Turkish proficiency, ineffective communication with school administrators, and difficulties experienced by teachers in communicating with migrant children were identified. These findings are consistent with the observations of Yule (2000), Shahbazi et al. (2020), and Civitillo et al. (2021), who note that language deficiencies increase social exclusion and academic failure. The BICS/CALP distinction helps explain the frequency pattern: rapid gains in conversational Turkish do not translate into cognitive–academic language required by mainstream curricula (Cummins, 1979, 2000). Hence, the corpus’ solutions—tiered Turkish provision, CLIL, and assessment accommodations—are CALP-oriented instruments that act in the microsystem (classroom pedagogy) but must be sanctioned and resourced at the macrosystem (curriculum and assessment policy).

The CLIL method, proposed in dissertations addressing language acquisition, aims to ensure that migrant students simultaneously acquire both content knowledge and language skills. In Kiremit’s (2019) study, CLIL-based Turkish education at the preschool level was shown to create significant gains; this finding is consistent with Almadani’s (2018) similar studies in the American context. In addition, recommendations for teaching Turkish through digital platforms (e.g., establishing a children’s channel under TRT) can be linked to Pastoor’s (2015) “mediative school” approach and Sinclair’s (2007) report on the role of digital education in crisis contexts. Considering the multi-layered effects of the language barrier, it is evident that the recommendations must include holistic intervention strategies targeting not only children but also parents, teachers, and school administrations. The corpus accordingly points to a coherent package: tiered Turkish provision (including preparatory/intensive tracks), school-based interpreter capacity to enable teacher–parent communication, and the embedding of CLIL

in pre- and in-service teacher education—measures that jointly address classroom learning, family engagement, and early childhood acquisition. From a Cummins-informed perspective, these are additive bilingualism moves that preserve L1 as a cognitive resource while building L2 for academic purposes (Cummins, 1981).

Psychosocial Risk, Belonging, and Mesosystem Linkages

Migrant children experience deep vulnerability not only in physical conditions but also psychosocially. Peer bullying, social exclusion, language barriers, traumatic past experiences, and family pressure are among the key factors that intensify this vulnerability. Aykut (2019) and Taşçı (2023) pointed to the inadequacy of access to guidance services and the limited capacity of these services to meet the needs of Syrian children. The recommendation to strengthen the guidance system with Arabic-speaking staff or interpreter support parallels the “cultural mediation” approach developed by researchers such as Pastoor (2015) and Alsayed and Wildes (2018) for psychosocial transitions in post-crisis contexts. The finding in Yavuzekinci’s (2024) study that a peer education program reduced bullying and social conflict is significant in demonstrating the impact of social-emotional learning practices. Moreover, it is directly related to McBrien’s (2005) perspective that migrant children should be supported not only academically but also socially in school settings. These results indicate that schools are not only sites of learning but also of healing and social connection. Accordingly, the dissertations’ proposals—evidence-based anti-bullying programs, bilingual counseling capacity, and arrangements that ensure safe access to school—emerge as complementary components that strengthen the link between cognitive gains and school belonging.

Situated ecologically, these proposals are microsystem-mesosystem strategies: they enhance safety and contact in classrooms and corridors while institutionalizing bridges between home and school. Interpreter pools and Arabic-speaking counselling staff operate at the mesosystem (school-family interface), but require exosystem support (e.g., municipal funding for transport routes) and macrosystem authorizations (staffing norms). The inclusion of peer-led programs in the corpus also speaks to the peer ecology as a determinant of adaptation, echoing Bronfenbrenner’s emphasis on recurring interaction contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

School Social Work as a Structural Mesosystem Hub

One of the most remarkable and original contributions highlighted in the research is the systematic recommendation of school social work practices in the dissertations. Aykut (2019) and Akyokuş (2023) approached these recommendations not merely as support services but as structural components of schools. School social work units are defined as multifunctional structures capable of reaching both children and families, carrying out home visits, providing counseling services, and undertaking social mediation roles. This recommendation constitutes

a concrete step toward policy development at the intersection of education and social work. Baron (2008) and Tanrıoğen (2014) argue for the need for interdisciplinary solutions to increase the applicability of educational policies and support the integration of social work into the education system. As Akyokuş (2023) suggested, school social work practices are structures that carry intervention capacity not only at the individual level but also at the mezzo level (school environment) and macro level (educational policies). Therefore, the originality of the recommendation lies not only in its functional structure but also in its capacity for multi-level strategic impact. The findings substantiate this originality quantitatively: school social work-focused recommendations constitute 10.6% of the total, and in multi-level (micro-mezzo-macro) tagging this area is among the most frequently cross-referenced nodes; this pattern underscores the need for institutionalization.

Placed within an ecological schema, school social work is a mesosystem hub that orchestrates links across microsystems (classroom, family) and mediates access to exosystem services (municipal assistance, NGOs), while depending on macrosystem rules (role definitions, caseload standards, data-sharing protocols). This helps explain why recommendations repeatedly combine school social work with interpreter capacity, home visits, and attendance monitoring: these functions collectively reduce fragmentation at the school-family-community interface and redistribute non-instructional burdens that currently fall on teachers.

Teacher Competence, Professional Learning, and Instructional Climate

Multicultural learning environments necessitate not only sensitivity to student diversity but also the restructuring of teacher competencies. The recommendations in the dissertations show that teachers are not sufficiently equipped in areas such as migration, intercultural communication, post-war trauma, and inclusive classroom management. Aykut (2019), Tetik (2024), and Akyokuş (2023) emphasized the need to increase teachers' awareness, integrate interactive techniques such as creative drama, and make in-service training mandatory. These recommendations are similar to the findings of researchers such as Block et al. (2014) and Bunar (2017), who conducted studies in the European context. Multicultural teaching is directly related not only to the curriculum but also to the dynamics of the classroom environment, teacher attitudes, and school climate. The approaches developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) on emotional load and professional burnout also reveal the need for teachers' psychological resilience and support in this context. Viewed through the teacher-focused lens of this study, the fact that in-service training recommendations occupy one of the largest subtheme shares (11.7%) indicates that inclusive classroom management and trauma-informed pedagogy should be designed as embedded, sustainable programs within curricula and school climate.

In the ecological frame, teacher learning and well-being interventions act primarily at the microsystem (instructional interactions) and mesosystem (professional communities, supervision), but they require macrosystem alignment (mandates, time allowances, staffing norms). From a Cummins perspective, teacher professional development that integrates CALP-oriented objectives (e.g., language demands of tasks in mathematics or science) and additive bilingual practices (strategic use of L1, collaboration with interpreters) is a precondition for language supports to yield academic gains.

Planning, Distribution, Curriculum, and Assessment as Macrosystem Levers

A large part of the dissertations analyzed in this research clearly highlight structural planning deficiencies in education. The unplanned placement of Syrian children into schools leads to increased classroom density and the deterioration of school climate; this in turn reproduces inequality for both local and migrant students (Akyokuş, 2023; Taşcı, 2023). When these findings are considered together with the studies of Tetik (2024) and Yılmaz (2021), it becomes evident that integration models must be developed not only for existing problems but also for future challenges. It was recommended that education policies should be universalized to address not only children under temporary protection but also wider groups of migrants (e.g., Afghan, Iraqi). This necessitates the integration of integration policies into long-term planning at the levels of cultural adaptation, social support, and institutional structures. The principle of “sustainable integration,” frequently mentioned in the literature but often lacking applicability, has been concretized and transformed into recommendations through this study. In parallel, recommendations on planning–distribution and on multilingual/adaptation-oriented curricula are each reported at 6.4%; consistently implementing address-based registration and monitoring local–migrant ratio targets are critical operational steps to prevent clustering.

In ecological terms, these are macrosystem controls that set the boundary conditions for micro and meso interventions. Address-based registration, density caps, and ratio monitoring reduce heterogeneity to manageable levels and enable targeted deployment of bilingual counselling and school social work. Likewise, multilingual and adaptation-oriented curriculum with assessment accommodations embeds CALP-sensitive expectations into system routines, ensuring that language development trajectories are recognized in grading and progression. The recommendation to establish longitudinal monitoring and rapid intervention systems extends this logic to the chronosystem, institutionalizing policy learning over time.

Economic Constraints as Exosystemic Friction

The research findings demonstrate that economic insufficiency plays a determining role in migrant children’s access to and continuity in education. Poverty leads to serious structural problems such as families being unable

to send their children to school or directing them to work at an early age. Büyükhan (2019) and Taşçı (2023) explicitly drew attention to this situation and developed recommendations such as conditional education assistance, school transportation support, meal scholarships, and provision of free digital tools. The finding that the digital divide deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic and that low-income migrant families were excluded from distance education is similar to Salem's (2021) research. UNESCO's (2021) "Right to Education" report and OECD's (2019) assessment reports on migrant education align the recommendations voiced in these dissertations in Türkiye with international norms. In particular, the recommendation that policies for equality of opportunity in education should not be limited only to school access but should be expanded to include technological infrastructure and social assistance resonates with the comparative research on migrant integration in Europe conducted by Crul et al. (2019). Although numerically modest, the economic-support recommendations (7.4%) cluster around transport and meal subsidies and device-connectivity packages; taken together, this set offers practical tools to improve continuity, particularly among low-income households.

Conceptually, these are exosystemic buffers that reduce environmental friction on attendance, engagement, and digital participation. Their efficacy is indirect but necessary: without transport, meals, and connectivity, the micro-level language and psychosocial supports struggle to take hold.

Reliability, Scope, and Implications for Policy and Research

Finally, the study's reliability foundation is numerically supported: an observed 85% agreement with the independent coder and Cohen's $K = 0.75$ strengthen the consistency of interpretations. Moreover, the 2019–2024 window represents the de facto period of doctoral production in this field, indicating that the temporal frame is grounded in empirical reality rather than arbitrariness; while the codebook and cross-tabulations are not appended, both materials are in Turkish and can be shared in their original Turkish form by the author upon reasonable request. Taken together, this coherence suggests that the evidence chain from recommendation texts to policy design can offer practical guidance to both practitioners and decision-makers.

Integrating the empirical distributions with the theoretical anchoring yields a layered implementation agenda: (i) micro—CALP-oriented language objectives, CLIL, anti-bullying programs, and formative accommodations; (ii) mezzo—institutionalized school social work, bilingual counselling and interpreter pools, balanced classroom assignment, and structured family engagement; (iii) macro—address-based registration, ratio monitoring, staffing norms and financing for social work/interpreter capacity, and multilingual/adaptation-oriented curriculum and assessment; and (iv) chrono—longitudinal monitoring and rapid-response protocols for new inflows. This alignment between the corpus and Bronfenbrenner–Cummins provides a principled route from

access to equitable participation and achievement, clarifying both the *content* (language and inclusion) and the *architecture* (ecological layers and time) of reform.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study synthesized 94 distinct recommendations from ten doctoral dissertations to map practice-oriented solutions for the education of Syrian refugee children in Türkiye. The analysis demonstrates that refugee education is a multidimensional challenge requiring a shift from fragmented, individual interventions toward integrated, structural, and systematic solutions. While current academic production emphasizes micro-level needs such as language support and teacher preparation, there is a clear call for macro-level reforms, including the institutionalization of school social work, mandatory multicultural in-service training, and sustainable, long-term integration models. Ultimately, the findings suggest that the Turkish education system must move beyond reactive measures to establish flexible, multilingual, and proactive structures capable of anticipating future demographic and social shifts.

The primary limitation of this research is its exclusive focus on the “Recommendations” sections of doctoral dissertations, which restricted the evaluation of the underlying contextual and empirical data. Additionally, the study relied on textual document analysis without incorporating direct interviews with the dissertation authors. Building on these findings, future research should undertake comprehensive content analyses of full dissertation texts—including findings and discussion sections—to provide deeper contextual insights. Comparative studies across different educational levels (primary, middle, and high school) are also needed to address age-specific pedagogical requirements. Furthermore, evaluating Türkiye’s practices alongside international case studies would facilitate the identification of global best practices for refugee integration. Finally, there is a critical need for longitudinal monitoring and policy-impact research to track the long-term efficacy and sustainability of the proposed interventions.

Declaration of Interest

The author declares that there are no competing financial interests, personal relationships, or professional affiliations that could be perceived as influencing the research reported in this article. The author is solely responsible for the content and writing of the paper.

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Data Availability Statement

The study draws on publicly available doctoral dissertations retrieved from the Council of Higher Education National Thesis Center (tez.yok.gov.tr) on March 15, 2025, using the keywords “Suriyeli,” “mülteci çocuk(lar),” and “eğitim”; due to copyright, the original full texts cannot be redistributed. Derived materials created for this research—including the structured extraction sheet, the codebook, the coding spreadsheet (open/axial codes, micro–mezzo–macro level-tags, actor-tags, frequency tables), the inter-coder subset specifications and confusion matrices (observed agreement = 0.85; Cohen’s K = 0.75), and the PRISMA-style identification–screening–inclusion log with a versioned audit trail—are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. No human participants were involved, and no personal data were collected; limited verbatim quotations from dissertations are included under fair use for scholarly purposes.

Ethics Statement

This study analyzes publicly available doctoral dissertations and involves no interaction with human participants, no experimental intervention, and no collection of identifiable personal data; therefore, ethics committee approval was not required. The research falls under institutional/national guidelines for studies using publicly available data, and informed consent does not apply. Limited verbatim quotations from dissertations are used for scholarly purposes in accordance with applicable copyright/fair use principles.

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