

ELRUHA

12. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH



November 17-19, 2024
Şanlıurfa, Türkiye

EDITORS
Prof. Dr. Mudhaffar M. Noori
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hasan ÇİFTÇİ

ISBN - 978-625-367-949-1

PROCEEDINGS BOOK

CONGRESS ID

CONGRESS TITLE

EL RUHA

**12. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

DATE AND PLACE

November 17-19, 2024

Şanlıurfa, Türkiye

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PARTICIPANT COUNTRIES (29)

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ISBN- 978-625-367-949-1

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Issued: 05.12.2024

ISBN - 978-625-367-949-1

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THE EXAMINATION OF TEACHERS' OPINIONS ON REFUGEE STUDENTS

Okan SARIGÖZ

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Abstract

Refugee students are children who have been forced to leave their country due to war, conflict or various persecutions and are trying to continue their education in another country. In Turkey, which constantly receives migration and has a large number of refugee students, the right to education of refugee students is secured by international and national legislation. All refugee students with temporary protection status have the right to receive free education in public schools in Turkey. In addition to basic needs such as nutrition and shelter, communication, education and cultural problems also arise for refugee students who settle in a country with migration. Language, cultural and educational problems are usually left in the background. Teachers, on the other hand, encounter problems such as language deficiency, low academic success and cultural differences in the education processes of refugee students. The purpose of this research is to determine the views of teachers on refugee students. The study group consists of teachers who are doing a non-thesis master's degree in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Hatay Mustafa Kemal University in the 2024-2025 academic year. In order to determine the teachers' views on refugee students, a semi-structured interview form consisting of 4 questions was developed by the researcher as a data collection tool and used in the research. The phenomenological model was used as a method in the qualitative research. At the end of the research, it was concluded that teachers have the most problems with communication, namely language, with refugee students, that students have problems in obtaining materials related to the lessons due to their inadequate economic situation, and that this situation can affect the academic success of the entire class, and that sometimes there are problems between students in the classroom due to customs, traditions and traditions or their lives in terms of socio-cultural aspects. In addition, it was concluded that teachers are happy to help families or refugee students in difficult situations, and that their job satisfaction increases.

Key words: Refugee student, migration, immigrant student

**ÖĞRETMENLERİN MÜLTECİ ÖĞRENCİLERLE İLGİLİ GÖRÜŞLERİNİN
İNCELENMESİ**

Özet

Mülteci öğrenciler, savaş, çatışma veya çeşitli zulümler nedeniyle ülkelerini terk etmek zorunda kalan ve başka bir ülkede eğitimlerine devam etmeye çalışan çocuklardır. Devamlı göç alan ve oldukça fazla mülteci öğrenciye sahip olan Türkiye’de mülteci öğrencilerin eğitim hakkı, uluslararası ve ulusal mevzuatlarla güvence altına alınmıştır. Geçici koruma statüsündeki tüm mülteci öğrenciler, Türkiye’deki devlet okullarında ücretsiz eğitim alma hakkına sahiptir. Göçlerle birlikte bir ülkeye yerleşen mülteci öğrencilerle ilgili beslenme ve barınma gibi temel ihtiyaçların yanı sıra iletişim, eğitim ve kültürel sorunlar da ortaya çıkmaktadır. Dil, kültürel ve eğitim sorunları ise genellikle daha geri planlarda kalmaktadır. Öğretmenler ise mülteci öğrencilerin eğitim süreçlerinde dil yetersizliği, düşük akademik başarı ve kültürel farklılıklar gibi sorunlarla karşılaşmaktadırlar. Bu araştırmanın amacı, öğretmenlerin mülteci öğrenciler hakkındaki görüşlerini belirleyebilmektir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu, 2024-2025 öğretim

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yılı Hatay Mustafa Kemal Üniversitesi Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim Anabilim dalında tezsiz yüksek lisans yapan öğretmenler oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada öğretmenlerin mülteci öğrenciler hakkındaki görüşlerini belirleyebilmek amacıyla araştırmacı tarafından 4 sorudan oluşan yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme formu veri toplama aracı olarak geliştirilmiş ve araştırmada kullanılmıştır. Nitel olarak yürütülen araştırmada yöntem olarak olgubilim modeli kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonunda, öğretmenlerin mülteci öğrencilerle ilgili olarak en fazla iletişim yani dil konusunda problem yaşadıkları, öğrencilerin ekonomik durumlarının yetersiz olmasından dolayı derslerle ilgili materyalleri temin etmede sorun yaşadıkları dolayısıyla bu durumun tüm sınıfın akademik başarısını etkileyebildiği, örf adet gelenek ve göreneklerden dolayı ya da yaşantılarından dolayı sosyo kültürel açıdan bazen sınıfta öğrenciler arasında sorunların yaşandığı gibi sonuçlara ulaşılmıştır. Ayrıca araştırmada öğretmenlerin zor durumda kalan ailelere veya mülteci öğrencilere yardım etmeden dolayı mutlu oldukları, iş doyumlarının arttığı gibi sonuçlara ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Mülteci öğrenci, göç, göçmen öğrenci

INTRODUCTION

Refugee students are children who are forced to leave their countries due to war, conflict, or persecution and strive to continue their education in another country. Turkey, especially following the Syrian civil war, has experienced a massive influx of refugees, which has led to significant changes in its education system (Er & Bayındır, 2015). The right to education for refugee students in Turkey is safeguarded by both international and national legislation. Refugees under temporary protection status are entitled to receive free education in public schools in Turkey (Sarigöz, 2017). These students can access education from primary to high school levels and benefit from various support services, including Turkish language education (Erden & Gökçe, 2009; Sarigöz, 2020; Tunç, 2015).

People may migrate from their homeland to other regions or countries for various reasons. While some seek better living conditions, others are forced to migrate due to natural disasters, terrorism, or war. The Syrian civil war stands as a prominent example of forced migration, resulting in the largest refugee crisis since World War II. Eleven million Syrians have been displaced, with four million seeking refuge in neighboring countries. Turkey is one of the countries hosting the largest number of refugees, accommodating 2.2 million Syrian refugees as of 2015 (Ay, 2015; Erdoğan, 2014; UNICEF, 2013; Weinstein, Tomlinson et al., 2003).

Refugee students face various challenges in their educational processes. Language barriers, cultural adaptation difficulties, trauma, and psychological issues (Cengiz et al., 2015; Güney Tarhan & Yavaş, 2023a; Sarigöz et al., 2015; Yavaş, 2023b) are the primary factors that hinder these students' success in education. Additionally, economic hardships and the lack of awareness among families regarding education are also significant issues (Börü & Boyacı, 2016; Güllüpmar, 2010). Despite these challenges, various opportunities and solutions exist for improving the education of refugee students. In Turkey, special education programs and support services are provided for refugee students (Sarigöz, 2014). Temporary Education Centers (TECs) and Turkish language courses offered in public schools help students overcome language barriers. Additionally, psychosocial support programs and teacher training initiatives facilitate refugee students' adaptation to educational processes (Balkar et al., 2016; Kirli, 2014; Önen et al., 2014).

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Migrations have social and economic impacts on the host regions. For instance, small cities like Kilis have been significantly affected by large waves of migration. Initially perceived as an act of benevolence, the situation may evolve into unwelcome hosting over time, leading to prejudices between the local population and refugees (Cengiz, 2015; Özer et al., 2016). In addition to basic needs such as shelter and food, communication, education, and cultural issues emerge with migration. Language, cultural, and educational issues are often overlooked. Teachers face difficulties in educating refugee students due to language deficiencies, cultural differences, and low academic achievement (Sarığöz, 2023). To address these issues, solutions such as language education, multicultural education programs, and fostering effective communication between teachers and parents are recommended (Arabacı et al., 2014; Gupta & Zimmer, 2008; Sakız, 2016; Sandal et al., 2016). Refugee children deprived of educational opportunities may face more severe challenges in the future. Therefore, further research and solutions for refugee students' education are necessary.

METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design, study group, data collection tools, data collection process, and data analysis.

Research Design

This study is a qualitative investigation into teachers' perspectives on refugee students. The qualitative research process includes the development of questions and procedures, the collection of data typically from participants' natural settings, the use of inductive data analysis to derive general themes from specific cases, and the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2017). The research adopts the case study design, a qualitative research method. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2021), the fundamental characteristic of a qualitative case study is the in-depth exploration of one or multiple cases.

Study Group

The study group consists of 11 teachers pursuing a non-thesis master's degree in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Hatay Mustafa Kemal University's Institute of Social Sciences during the 2024–2025 academic year. The study group was determined using the maximum variation method, one of the purposeful sampling techniques. To ensure ethical considerations, the participants' personal information has been anonymized, and the teachers have been coded as T1, T2, ..., T11.

Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Process

The study data were gathered using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher. Initially, a literature review was conducted to create the interview questions. Teachers who had refugee students in their classrooms were identified, and interviews were conducted to identify the challenges and positive experiences they encountered. Based on these insights, a two-question interview form was prepared. These questions were then posed to other teachers, and their verbal responses were transcribed into written texts. The responses were subsequently coded and analyzed. The interviews were conducted during the teachers' free time, with each interview lasting approximately 10 minutes.

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Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2021) define content analysis as the process of uncovering non-predetermined themes, categories, and codes, organizing the data within these themes and codes, and presenting the findings in a clear and accessible manner to the reader. In this study, codes were first identified, and themes were created based on these codes.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained based on teachers' opinions are categorized into themes and codes, and excerpts from the interviews are directly quoted and summarized.

Table 1 includes teachers' positive opinions about refugee students.

Table 1: *Teachers' positive opinions about refugee students*

Theme	Code	Participants	F
General perspective	Equal opportunities	T1,T2,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10,T11	11
	Employment, profession	T1,T2,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10,T11	11
	Academic achievement	T1,T2,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10,T11	11
	Interaction, communication	T1,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10,T11	10
	Tolerance, socialization	T1,T2,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T11	10
	Self-confidence, self-respect	T1,T2,T3,T5,T6,T8,T9,T10,T11	9
	Hope, expectation	T2,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10	9
	Integration, unification	T1,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10,T11	8
	Empathy, sympathy	T1,T3,T4,T6,T7,T8,T10,T11	8
	Motivation	T2,T3,T5,T6,T7,T9,T10,T11	8
	Economy, financial matters	T1,T2,T4,T6,T7,T9,T11	7
	Skills, behavior	T3,T5,T7,T8,T10,T11	6
	Health, hygiene	T5,T7,T8,T9,T10	5
	Peace, harmony	T6,T9,T11	3
	Effort, love, respect	T2,T8	2

When Table 1 is examined, it can be observed that teachers hold predominantly positive opinions about refugee students. In fact, it can be said that teachers adopt an accommodating attitude toward refugee students and are willing to provide all kinds of support to them. Some of the teachers' views on the subject are as follows:

"Refugee students are our children. Therefore, we should treat them with more compassion, warmth, and tolerance. Considering the traumas they have experienced, we must enhance their self-confidence, address their knowledge gaps, facilitate their integration with other students, and, if possible, provide them with all kinds of material and moral support." (T1).

"Refugee students are also our future. We do not live alone in this world. Therefore, we must take care of disadvantaged students, improve their achievements, ensure equal opportunities, pay attention to their health, approach them with tolerance, and, if necessary, meet with their families to address any other material or moral problems they may have." (T9).

"I do not approach the matter from the perspective of refugees. Such situations can happen to any nation. Therefore, providing support is essential. For this reason, I try to assist all refugee students in my class and other classes in areas such as health, success, communication, expectations, self-confidence, and integration." (T11).

Table 2 presents the teachers' negative/limited opinions about refugee students.

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Table 2: *Teachers' negative opinions about refugee students*

Theme	Code	Participants	F
General perspective	Material shortages	T1,T2,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10,T11	11
	Economy, budget	T2,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10,T11	10
	Class size	T1,T3,T4,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10,T11	9
	Individual needs	T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9,T10,T11	9
	Language differences	T2,T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9	8
	Academic achievement	T1,T5,T6,T8,T9,T10,T11	7
	Lack of socialization	T2,T3,T4,T7,T8,T9,T10	7
	Incompatibility	T3,T4,T5,T6,T7,T8,T9	7
	Discrimination, exclusion	T2,T5,T6,T7,T8,T10	6
	Security	T1,T4,T6,T7,T8,T11	6
	Anxiety, concern, stress	T2,T7,T9,T10,T11	5
	Lack of interest	T6,T7,T9,T11	4
	Inequality of opportunity	T2,T8,T9	3

When Table 2 is examined, it is evident that the most significant issues related to refugee students stem from increased class sizes. In interviews with teachers, they mentioned the challenges of teaching in overcrowded classrooms. Teachers also highlighted negative aspects related to refugee students, such as material shortages, security, anxiety, and addressing individual needs. Some teachers' views on the subject are as follows:

"I am happy to help refugee students. However, the overcrowding of my class reduces both the clarity and quality of the lessons and eliminates equal opportunities compared to other students in different schools. Additionally, language barriers increase misunderstandings, and factors such as differing levels of academic achievement among students make teaching in these classrooms difficult." (T8).

"In fact, our problems with students begin with their families. Some families are not very involved with their children, which complicates teachers' responsibilities. When we encounter a problem with a student, we sometimes struggle to find someone to address it. This disrupts the harmony within the classroom. Particularly, the increase in class sizes, parental indifference, financial difficulties, and language barriers are the biggest issues we face in classrooms." (T9).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study aimed to identify both the positive experiences and the challenges faced by refugee students based on teachers' perspectives and to propose solutions for addressing the negative aspects.

The findings related to teachers' positive opinions about refugee students suggest that providing educational opportunities to refugee students helps them secure better employment opportunities in the future. Education stabilizes the lives of refugee children and facilitates their better integration into society. Learning the language during their educational journey enhances refugee students' social and academic success. Interaction with different cultures fosters cultural awareness and tolerance. Success in the school environment boosts refugee students' self-confidence and self-esteem. Moreover, education helps refugee students rediscover purpose and direction following traumatic experiences.

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The study also concluded that the education received by refugee students contributes to their integration into the local community and helps them build social networks. Bringing together students from diverse cultural backgrounds fosters empathy and understanding within society. Successful refugee students can serve as positive role models for both other refugee children and the local community. Furthermore, these students can inspire hope and motivation among their peers, demonstrating that success in education is attainable. Additionally, educated refugee students can contribute to the economy in the future by participating in the workforce.

It was found that the skills gained during the educational process enable refugee students to integrate into the workforce more quickly and effectively. The participation of students with diverse talents enriches the workforce and promotes innovation and diversity. Education supports refugee children in their recovery process following traumatic experiences, instilling hope and fostering a positive outlook for the future. It also alleviates the concerns of refugee families about their children's future while strengthening family bonds. Furthermore, education promotes societal harmony and cohesion.

Based on teachers' opinions, several issues and limitations concerning refugee students were identified. The study revealed that refugee students' education could strain existing educational resources, as school budgets in some areas may not suffice to meet the needs of these students. Refugee students lead to increased class sizes, requiring teachers to manage larger groups of students. Overcrowded classrooms can reduce the quality of education and hinder the addressing of individual student needs.

The study also found that refugee students may face challenges in adapting to local students due to their diverse cultural backgrounds. Cultural differences can sometimes lead to social exclusion and discrimination against refugee students. Additionally, the integration of refugee students into schools can raise security concerns in some communities.

Recommendations

Refugee students, as individuals who have migrated to other countries under various circumstances, should be approached with empathy to better understand their experiences. Therefore, in order to better understand these students, empathy should be shown, efforts should be made to understand them, and assistance should be provided while taking these feelings into account.

Refugee students and their families often face economic challenges; therefore, they should be supported in obtaining necessary school materials.

Given their circumstances, refugee students may not feel psychologically well. Hence, they should be approached with greater emotional sensitivity, and assistance should be provided to help them access psychological support when needed.

Students facing language barriers should be grouped together in the same classes and taught by teachers proficient in their native languages.

Provincial Directorates of National Education should organize in-service training programs for teachers in regions with refugee students, addressing the challenges they may face and strategies for effectively supporting these students.

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