



## School Principals' and Teachers' Problems related to the Education of Refugee Students in Turkey

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to determine the problems, the solutions and the suggestions of the school principals and teachers towards the Syrian refugee students in the primary schools in Turkey. The research group of the study included four school principals and six teachers. The research was conducted by qualitative methods. The results revealed that the school principals mostly live communication, adaptation, accreditation, absenteeism, psychological and financial problems related to Syrian refugee students. Teachers also have problems such as communication problems with these students. Principals have opened 'support rooms' for these students; have worked for adaptation of these students, have been in contact with the families. The teachers opened literacy courses and worked to socialize these students with their classmates. Both principals and teachers have primarily proposed the creation of specific curricula for these students and the activities to solve the problem of language and cohesion for these students.

**Keywords:** *Migration, Syrian refugees, refugees, refugee education, Turkey.*

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### Introduction

The civil war that started in Syria in March 2011 has caused millions of people to uproot and leave their country; primarily migrating to Turkey and some traveling onwards to the West out of Turkey. The movement of such a large population towards the West was so intense that European Union countries, unprepared for such an action, were also surprised at what they would do. For example, while 1,761,486 of the millions of people who escaped the war in Syria came as refugees<sup>†</sup> to Turkey, Lebanon opened its doors to 1,183,327, and Jordan took in 630 thousand, Iraq 250 thousand and Egypt 134 thousand in 2015 alone. In addition, there were 140 accepted by the UK and 4,500 by France (BBC, 2015) in 2015; plus 10,000 in the US (Connor, 2016), 12,587 in the Republic of Congo (Krogstad & Radford, 2017), and a further 9,000 in France (BBC, 2016a) in 2016. The countries to which the Syrians fled had no idea where to place and how to accommodate the thousands of people who came seeking refuge. Syrian refugees primarily have problems of feeding and asylum in the countries they took refuge in. For example, according to official figures (BBC, 2016b), France vacated the refugee camp in Calais, which was home to seven thousand refugees, mostly Syrian, due to substandard living conditions and conflicts between French police and refugees in October 2016.

Refugees are groups or nationalities who have been abruptly uprooted from their homeland by manmade crises such as war, conflict or political unrest, or by natural disasters such as epidemics, floods, hurricanes, drought, famine or earthquakes. For decades, the consistency and sheer immensity of these manmade disasters have resulted in the wholesale displacement and mass movement of people from their disaster-afflicted homelands to new host countries (Pennells & Ezeomah 2002). Furthermore, refugees have brought with them problems of cultural integration in addition to the issue of accommodation in their new host countries. The former "way of life" of refugees is at least as important as the problem of seeking asylum. In this context, refugees have also caused many problems in the countries that have accepted them, since they have also carried forward their own way of life to these countries. For example, in 2016, women attending Christmas celebrations in some cities in Germany, and especially in Cologne, reported being surrounded by groups of young Arab men aged 20 to 30, and that they were sexually assaulted and their mobile phones

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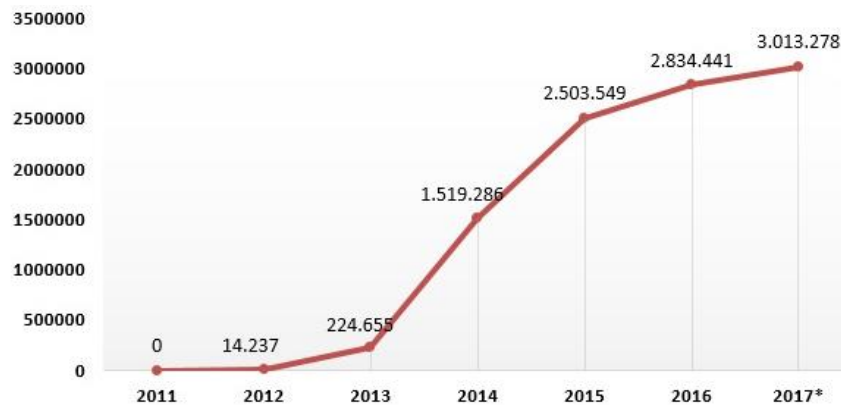
<sup>†</sup> The concept of refugee and the concept of asylum seeker are legally different. However, in terms of this study, both concepts have similar meanings. For this reason, there was no distinction between these concepts in the study, and the concept of the refugee was used because it was more widely known/used in the public.

and wallets then stolen (BBC, 2016c). After the mass harassment events in Cologne, more formal complaints were filed, but only three people were charged with sexual harassment. Similarly, in the cases of Hamburg, only four of the 245 investigative files have been transferred to the courts and only one conviction obtained. All these issues raise debates that current legislation does not deter sexual crimes. On this basis, sexual crimes were redefined in Germany and a new regulation was introduced. In addition, the Cologne Police Department decided to increase the number of police patrolling on New Year's Eve ten times to 1,500 officers in order to prevent similar events from recurring (Heinrich, 2016).

#### *Situation in Turkey*

Due to its geographical location, Turkey has become a bridge between East and West for many years, especially for migration. Those fleeing wars or turmoil in the Middle East first take refuge in Turkey and then head to the West out of Turkey. Turkey has begun to take back irregular migrants intercepted in Turkish waters near to the Greek islands after the Readmission Agreement was signed between the EU and Turkey in 2013, and the EU-Turkey statement of March 2016 (GIGM [Ministry of Interior, General Directorate of Migration Administration], 2016). Furthermore, Turkey signed a readmission agreement Protocol with Bulgaria in May 2016. Then, in 2016, the European Commission approved the EU's allocation of three billion Euros for Turkey to reduce the flow of immigrants into Europe (BBC, 2016d). According to the EU, 55million Euros have so far been released in payment to Turkey for the improvement of conditions in refugee camps located in Turkey, and 40 million Euros have been sent for the education and humanitarian aid of refugees (BirGun, 2016).

Turkey also signed a Readmission Agreement with Norway in April 2016 and compromised with Switzerland on a Readmission Agreement in December 2016. In addition, Turkey amended its own Temporary Protection Regulation in April 2016, granting protection to Syrian citizens who have sought refuge in Turkey, as well as those taken back under readmission agreement after March 2016 who had passed through Turkey to Greece via the Greek islands of the Aegean. Figure1 shows the numbers of Syrian refugees who have been temporarily protected within Turkey from 2011 to early 2017.



\*as of 17 May 2017

Figure 1: Number of Syrian refugees who have been temporarily protected in Turkey (GIGM 2017).

According to a report by the Turkish government's General Directorate of Migration Administration (GIGM, 2016), refugees living on the streets and those engaged in activities such as begging are urged to attend temporary refuge centres in various parts of the country. The needs for accommodation, health, and education of these refugees are able to be satisfied in these centres, and in 2016, Syrians numbering 7,367 were transferred to the refugee centres. As of 31 December 2016, a total of 258,545 Syrian refugees were resident in ten temporary refuge centres established in cities across Turkey. In addition, in 2016 a Temporary Protection Identity Certificate was issued by the Turkish authorities to Syrian refugees. Table 1 shows the distribution of Syrian refugees in Turkey according to age and gender (GIGM, 2017). Furthermore, the Procedure and Principles of Work Permits Issued for Foreigners under Provisional Protection (Law No: 8375) was introduced in January 2016. This directive allowed registered Syrian refugees to seek work in Turkey.

*Table 1. Distribution of Syrians according to age and gender\**

Age	Male	Female	Total
0-4	190,793	177,426	368,219
5-9	221,736	208,783	430,519
10-14	168,295	155,166	323,461
15-18	139,615	177,558	257,173
19-24	251,893	192,501	444,394
25-29	163,485	127,412	290,897
40-44	68,579	64,178	132,757
45-49	52,898	48,668	101,566
50-54	42,472	40,726	83,198
55-59	28,575	28,402	56,977
60-64	19,815	20,241	40,056
65-69	13,158	13,544	26,702
70-74	7,022	7,788	14,810
75-79	4,360	5,201	9,561
80-84	2,297	2,903	5,200
85-89	1,243	1,540	2,783
90+	584	729	1,313
Total	1,611,991	1,401,287	3,013,278

\*as of 17 May 2017, (GIGM, 2017)

The sheer number of refugees already in Turkey has triggered significant demographic change after the readmission agreement signed between the EU and Turkey. The General Directorate of Immigration (GIGM, 2016) reported that Turkey was accommodating a total of 2,582,600 refugees; with 269,150 located in temporary refuge centres, and 2,313,450 living elsewhere in Turkey as of February 2016. However, this number has since increased to 3,551,078, according to data from May 2017. This data also announced that there was a total of 3,013,278 Syrians registered; 249,009 of whom are living in temporary refuge centres while 2,764,269 are living outside of these centres (GIGM, 2017). Despite official data, the number of refugees in Turkey is considered still unknown. According to the *Sozcu* newspaper (Sozcu, 2017), the Minister of Internal Affairs stated that the 3,551,078 Syrian refugees total the same as the population of 17 provinces in Turkey, a number that constitutes 4.45% of Turkey's 79,814,871 population. Erdogan, Kavukcu, and Cetinkaya (2017) stated that more than 92% of refugees are living in city centres within the Turkish community.

The refugees, who constitute more than 4% of the population in Turkey, have caused serious problems as well as serious changes in the country. For example, according to the *Yeni Akit* newspaper (2017) a Deputy Prime Minister stated in February 2017 that the number of Syrian workers in Turkey is more than ten thousand, and that those with professions will be given Turkish citizenship. Thus, before the referendum held in April 2017, which resulted in changing the administrative form of the Republic of Turkey to that of an executive presidency, it was decided to grant Turkish citizenship to 80 thousand Syrians (Yeni Akit, 2017). This decision resulted in allegations that the Syrian refugees would vote in favour of the government due to their new citizenship, granted just before the April referendum. This added a shadow to the legitimacy of the referendum; to which a Deputy Prime Minister answered the allegations as:

It would be a pity to think of the change of the referendum with 10 -20 thousand voters in a country where there are more than 50 million voters. The result of the referendum cannot be changed with just 10 -20 thousand additional voters, and it cannot be imagined. These are pointless delusions. (Mynet, 2017).

The debate on the legitimacy of the referendum is still ongoing (BBC, 2017a, 2017b; Saglar, 2017).

It is also observed in daily life across Turkey that most Syrian refugees live outside of the temporary refuge centres. This situation is particularly harmful to the refugee children. Syrian children have serious needs, especially in the field of education and protection. Besides their own psychological trauma, they are also exposed to numerous risks including social exclusion, discrimination, economic and sexual exploitation, and child marriage (UNICEF, 2017). Erdogan (2014) reported that the number of Syrian babies born in 10 cities where there are refugee camps located in Turkey as 30 thousand between April 2011 and October 2014. He points out that 230 thousand Syrian children have been born in Turkey, which ranks first in the world with its 3.5 million refugees (Kahvecioglu, 2017). In this context, education

emerges as a serious problem, as well as the basic needs of both the Syrian children already living in the country and the new-born.

#### *Basic education for Syrian Children in Turkey*

There are 25 camps set up for refugees in 10 provinces throughout Turkey, and these camps provide education for Syrian children for all school ages, including preschool education. According to data from January 2017 (UNICEF, 2017), 1.28 million of 2,854,968 Syrian refugees in Turkey are children and 870 thousand are of school age. The Turkish government estimates that more than 490 thousand Syrian children are enrolled in Turkish schools in various parts of the country, while 380 thousand children cannot go to school.

In September 2014, the Turkish government guaranteed the education of Syrian children by law. The regulation orders, for example, foreign students who have no residence permit, foreign identity number or educational certificates to be placed in an educational institution according to their oral representations. Hence, temporary training centres were established in provinces which included refugee centres. Turkish language is taught in these centres, and in addition, refugees also have vocational skills taught at informal education institutions where social and cultural courses are organised. In addition, supportive courses are offered by school principals to ensure that refugee students are in harmony with the school and the country, through educational services in public schools or in temporary training centres. In other words, Syrian children have the right to legally enrol in public schools in Turkey, and the wider education policy for Syrian refugees in Turkey covers six areas (Duruel, 2016); (a) Temporary training centres, (b) Public schools, (c) Private schools opened by Syrians, (d) Vocational courses and projects, (e) Orphanages, and (f) Higher Education.

According to a report by the Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD, 2017), there are 80,742 thousand children are being educated in Turkish refugee centres as of 2017. In addition, a total of 508,846 Syrian children continue their education, from kindergarten through to finishing high school. One of the most serious issues faced by Syrians in Turkey is their children not being educated. As Stevenson and Willot (2007) stated, there are many factors that prevent refugee children from attaining an education such as poverty, the experience of trauma, violence, threat, interrupted education, and language difficulties. The refugee experience is different for every person so that it cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, there are similar challenges faced by all refugees in the countries in which they seek refuge, peace and safety (Stuecker, 2006).

It is stated in the Turkey 2015-2019 Strategic Plan (MEB, 2015) that studies will be undertaken to ensure the adaptation of Syrian refugee students to the education system. In 2016, the Turkish government has also made new decisions about the education of Syrian children in public schools. For example, in-service training programmes will be held for teachers, school principals, and other staff to ensure that Syrian children are exposed to accusation, exclusion or separation in any educational environment in the country. In addition, Syrian students will be offered their own language training programmes outside of class hours in order to keep their language and culture alive. Furthermore, the first reading-writing curriculum will be offered for Syrian children in the first grade of primary schools. For other class levels, Turkish language courses will be organised for Syrian students who are in need of additional help. Training courses and programmes, especially Turkish language courses, will be opened at weekends and during semester or summer holidays in order to assure the adaptation of Syrian students who, compared to existing students, have shortfalls for their grade (MEB, 2016). From these decisions, teachers and school principals have huge additional responsibilities related to the education of refugees in Turkish schools. Therefore, the problem of educating Syrian students is not only the Government's problem, but also a problem for school principals and teachers. In this context, this study is seen as an important step in resolving some of the issues faced by teachers and school principals who work in schools that educate Syrian students. This study aims to determine the problems experienced by the principals and teachers who have Syrian students in their school/class, the solutions they bring to address these problems and their suggestions to resolve them. Today, the education of refugees has become an issue for many countries. In this context, this study is believed to support the current literature by identifying the problems and potential solutions of refugee educators through their reflections.

### **Method**

This study examines the problems of school principals and teachers related to educating Syrian students. The research is designed and conducted in a phenomenology pattern, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Phenomenology is defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2015) as the perception and interpretation of individual perceptions or perspectives on a certain phenomenon, and phenomenological approach is well suited to study affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences.

#### *Study Group*

The research group comprises four school principals and six teachers who educate Syrian children in the Kocaeli province of Turkey during the 2016-2017 academic year. All of the participants agreed voluntarily to participate in the study. Of the four school principals, two are female and the other two are male. Of the six teachers, five are female and one is male. Of the four school principals, two are 36 years old, one is 33 and the other is 46 years old. One of the school

principals has 27 years of seniority (professional experience) in education (teaching and management), two principals have 15 years, and the other has 12 years. In addition, one of the principals has 20 years seniority of management, one has 12 years, one has seven years, and the other has two years. The teachers are 32, 33, 42, 44, 45 and 49 years old, and they have 10, 16, 17, 20 and 21 years seniority of teaching, respectively.

#### *Collection and Analyzing the Data*

The data were collected by interview technique. Firstly, a semi-structured interview form was prepared by the researchers. The interview form was then piloted to confirm that it acceptably addressed the research problems. An appointment was made before each interview and interviews carried out at the agreed time. Using the interview form, participants were individually interviewed face-to-face for 20-35 minutes. All the interviews were held within a two month timeframe. Participants were advised that interview notes would be taken by the researchers during the interview. These interview notes were then written up and reported as interview data. The reported data was then analysed by content analysis. Direct quotes from participants' responses have also been used to ensure reliability of the study.

### **Results**

This study aimed to reveal the problems, the solutions, and the suggestions related to the Syrian students in schools. Therefore, the results were given in this direction.

#### *The problems experienced by the principals and teachers*

The results revealed that school principals considered there to be 11 problem areas faced by Syrian refugee students. These problem areas are communication/language, accreditation, adaptation, economic, feeding, psychological, absenteeism, habitat, problems stemming from Turkish parents, problems from teachers, and abusing their privilege. The teachers interviewed stated nine different problems faced by Syrian refugee students as socioeconomic, language/communication, inadequacy of educational materials, age-class level imbalance, discipline, cultural differences, graduation system, different way of writing, and communication with family. The following excerpts are some of the statements made by the school principals and teachers interviewed:

*Principal 1:* Our biggest problem is communication, which starts when they first arrive. What grade should this child be in? What grade will we take them into? They have no accreditation certificates or identity documentation; they arrive with nothing. We cannot even communicate; therefore we are trying to find teachers who can speak Arabic. There is an accreditation commission that decides which students will be placed in which grade, and class. We look at their age, but of course do not enrol the older children in the first grade. The child is then sitting in his/her class, but they are unable to do anything. They cannot communicate with the other children in the class or with their teacher. They have adaptation problems. Their clothes and home situations have problems. They have many drawbacks. Their materials/equipment are always missing, and so we are trying to help them. They come to school without being properly fed in the mornings. They have psychological problems related to what they have seen in the war. These problems are also then reflecting on the school.

*Principal 2:* The most important problem is that they do not attend the school regularly... ..They have a lot of psychological problems... There are major problems in socioeconomic terms. They come to school tired because they are going around begging in the evenings. We are having problems with ID numbers.

*Principal 3:* This is the third year that the Syrian students have been at our school. The children who first arrived were better off socioeconomically. Their parents found a job here immediately. However, the family situation of students who arrived here later was very poor in economic terms. There are 16 Syrian students in our school. There was uncertainty about how they would manage the curriculum when they first arrived. We did not know exactly what we were going to do. At first, our own students found the Syrian students strange. Turkish parents also caused problems. Teachers were also thinking "How am I going to train these children?"

*Principal 4:* Syrian students are having difficulty getting out of the "guest perception" because they are aware that they have come to Turkey by way of migration. They do not feel as though they belong to the school. They perceive education as time-consuming rather than as a learning process. Since they are not in the proper grade with peers of their age, they cannot express themselves well enough, they are treated anomalously in the classroom. The government gave them these privileges and they are aware of this, but many of them are abusing this situation. They complain about their teachers or friends, saying "We are Syrian, that's why they do it".

*Teacher 1:* Fatma could not read or write when she first arrived in my class. She could not really understand our language. She had learnt a little Turkish in the refugee camp in Kilis, but she speaks Turkish quite well right now. She perceives the classroom as quite unusual, and could not get used to it at first. She was quite quiet at the beginning. She did not want anything and did not accept what was given to her. Over time, she overcame this. She was in my class for half a semester and became used to the class towards to end. She was not participating in the lessons. She was quiet yet eager to learn. Although I did not teach her the shapes of the letters, she followed me and took on other letters during the course. She was a very careful student. We've had our communication difficulties. The other students in her class have become friends with her; they wanted to share their things with Fatma, but Fatma did not accept them. At first, she did not trust the class. Then she got used to me when she saw my relationship with the rest of the class. Her family has placed Fatma entirely in my care. She has not created any problems. I would take ten minutes with her as an individual. She was observing what was going on around her. There was a problem related to the direction of the letters, but she got used to it in time. Her family has financial problems.

*Teacher 2:* Cultural diversity, student adaptation and language problem are the most problematic areas. The fact that the parents do not speak Turkish is very significant to me. I could not contact the families to give information about their child. I found a Syrian parent who speaks Turkish and through them I was able to communicate with the parents of my Syrian students. Some children were not enrolled according to school enrolment ages. The students who have to enrol in lower grade classes are then recorded as attending the higher grade classes. There is no separate graduation system for the Syrian students, which I think is a significant problem.

*Teacher 4:* ...They have difficulty in getting training materials, so obviously I supply them. Because their elders do not speak Turkish, they cannot undertake reinforcement exercises at home. They have difficulties in expressing themselves, although they are older than the norm for their class level. They are trying to dispose of their energy through misbehaviour in the classroom. I have difficulties communicating with their families.

*Teacher 5:* I have two brothers in my class aged ten and eight. The older one does not speak Turkish, and so always tells his brother about his problems in his own language. He therefore uses his brother as a translator. He is behaving aggressively because he cannot express himself and gets into fights during class breaks or lunch breaks. Their parents' situation is also very bad. They carry the wounds of war in their souls.

*Teacher 6:* The most important problem is the language. Communication with students who do not speak the (Turkish) language was a problem at the beginning. After the language problem, there are socioeconomic problems. There are some students who are in a very bad way. These children are not yet fully used to being in Turkey. The painful events and language problems they are experiencing have a significant impact on their education as students.

#### *The solutions produced by the principals and teachers for these problems*

The results show that both the school principals and teachers produced 10 solutions to the problems they have experienced with their Syrian students' education. According to the results, opening Turkish language courses at Public Education Centres is one of the first efforts of school principals to help solve the problems experienced by the Syrian students in their schools. When there are not enough students to open a course, the school principals open "support rooms" in order to teach literacy to these students with the help of Turkish teachers, or class teachers. The school principals try to solve behavioural problems of Syrian students by dealing with their problems on a one-to-one basis in schools. The school principals keep in touch with the parents of the Syrian students where there are problems with irregular attendance. They provide financial support to these families in trying to ensure that student absenteeism is minimised. Syrian students benefit from free meals in the school cafeteria. In addition, the principals have taken care to help the Syrian students socialise in schools. Some of the statements of the school principals are as follows:

*Principal 1:* We open Turkish courses in order to resolve the language problem. Our school was the first to do this. We have lots of Syrian students. The number was higher last year. We have 21 students this year, but last year the number was more than 30. Apart from the class time, we are opening a separate course for these children called our "support room". We use our own teachers to teach them there. We are opening a Turkish language course. It's very useful. We have been running these courses now for two years. Together with their lack of materials, clothing issues also affect their education. We are trying to resolve this through collecting money between our teaching staff and taking advantage of the budget of the PTA. Our sensitive parents help out too. The other day, we went to the house of a socioeconomically

poor student. There was literally nothing in his house. One parent bought them a fridge, another oven or something. We've gradually furnished their houses. A few companies from our neighbourhood provided their food for a month. We are trying to include these children in the events at school, and to provide all kinds of opportunities to socialise these students together with the other children.

*Principal 2:* First, we try to keep these children coming to the school regularly. Next, we try to prevent them from begging. We are slowly advancing, step by step. We're trying to make them a part of the community...

*Principal 3:* Teachers did not know what to do with these children at first. Afterward, they got used to them. We solved these children's adjustment problems. After all, they are just children, and children get used to each other easily. We strengthened the social relations of the Syrian children with the other children. We meet with their parents.

*Principal 4:* We are trying to teach Turkish in order to solve their language problems at the beginning. They are studying with the 1st grade for this purpose. They are having difficulties because they do not have a proper education programme. Better feedback happens where the family is a bit concerned, but if the family does not care, the child uses the school as a place to play and create mischief.

According to the results, teachers interact with the Syrian students and teach them literacy in free lessons. Teachers are devoting time to the Syrian children and making efforts towards their academic development. They are trying to ensure that the Syrian students do not feel lonely in the classroom. They try to keep the sense of failure away from these students by preparing homework assignments more appropriate to their level. They use Syrian and Turkish speaking parents in order to communicate with those parents who do not speak Turkish. They meet with the parents of the Turkish students, inform and enlighten them about the Syrian students. Some of the teachers' expressions on this are as follows:

*Teacher 1:* Fatma's house was bombed in Aleppo. I told my students about Fatma when she was out of the classroom... The students gave pens and gifts to Fatma, and shared their food and crayons with her. The parents doubted whether Fatma was hygienic or not. I informed them in a meeting. The community did not want to accept her. Children also made their parents conscious of the Syrian families. I did not do any extra work for Fatma, just did what I was doing with my students. I tried to socialise her.

*Teacher 2:* I was doing literacy work in my spare class time for them. I gave them different homework. I tried to communicate with them with the help of the other parents who are Syrian and speak Turkish. Turkish student classmates were helping them with their homework I assigned them. I was in touch with the school principal about these students, but I did not receive enough support. We were constantly discussing these students with the school counsellor. I was constantly reporting on the current situation. I asked the principal to send these children to the first grade at least for their Turkish classes. At the end of the academic year, these students have not been re-enrolled at the same grade. Even though I said that they did not know how to read and write, and would have more difficulty in the next grade, they were sent up to the next grade without knowing anything.

*Teacher 3:* I've already done all I can with these kids to socialise them with the other students... I taught them reading and writing and all the letters. I did these studies during school time and have solved these problems through classroom work. I have motivated these children before the class time so that they would not be excluded by the other students.

*Teacher 4:* I try to spend more time with them than my Turkish students in order to overcome the difficulties they encounter. I have been in constant dialogue with them about the rules and methods of studying. In addition, I am constantly in contact with the school counsellors so that problems can be overcome more easily.

*Teacher 5:* I started to look for a solution to this problem in my own class at first. When he wanted to go to the toilet, he was using hand signs to show his need. I asked him to say, "Can I go to the toilet?" And then I sent him to the toilet. I taught him to say "Good morning" in the mornings. I talked to him constantly and tried to make him get used to Turkish.

*Teacher 6:* Syrian students cannot participate in the lectures because of their weak understanding of Turkish. They do not get enough in-class acquisition and this causes the child to cool off from school by reducing their interest in the lessons.

*The suggestions of the principals and teachers to solve these problems*

Lastly, school principals suggested 12 solutions and teachers suggested 10 for the problems that they have experienced with Syrian students in their schools. The school principals proposed providing orientation training for the Syrian students at first. The parents do not know Turkish, therefore, the school principals proposed to give special language courses to them. They stated that these students could not adapt themselves to the current curriculum, hence they recommend preparing private curricula for these students. They also mentioned the importance of rehabilitation studies, and suggested opening literacy courses for these students in schools. In addition, they suggested educating Syrian students in a single school. The lack of school bus services creates a major problem for those students who live some distance from the school. The principals suggested that a shuttle bus service should be provided for these students. The school principals indicated that these students should be supported more socially too. They also stated that absentee students must be tracked more strictly in order to overcome the problem of absenteeism. They claim that some Syrian students regard themselves as superior to the other students at school; therefore, these students need the support of school counsellors to help ensure that they feel and act more equal to the other students. Finally, they stated that the laws restricted them from trying to resolve problems related to their Syrian students. They suggested creating legal arrangements that will make them feel more able to overcome these problems. Some of the solutions proposed by the principals are as follows:

*Principal 1:* First of all, I would rather keep a solid record of the Syrians as they entered the country. I wish there were offices for this; child psychologists; those who speak Arabic, I wish there were teachers; and a commission to determine the grades each child should be in. I wish they would take language courses lasting a few months. I wish the socioeconomic situation of these Syrians was analysed and reported, we would all be more comfortable if it were properly reported. Currently, we put the children into education directly without any preparation. We have to provide an orientation programme for these students. Language courses are very important, and their families should also attend these courses. A compulsory family education can be given to these parents. How will the child live in Turkey? What is the situation of this child at school? What do the children eat? How does the child treat other people? The integration training that we have done with our own students can also be applied with these children. Special plans can be made for these children. I think these children should be rehabilitated first of all, and then taken into regular education.

*Principal 2:* Literacy courses must be opened in every school. There must be different methods to help them participate in daily life. These pupils should be gathered in one school wherever possible. A common application must be made to integrate them into the community. These students should be provided with a school bus shuttle service.

*Principal 3:* These children and their families should be supported more socially. It should never be forgotten that these children have the right to an education and they should be trained according to the principle of “continuing education” in order to integrate them into Turkish society. Some of the children are forced into begging by their parents. The government should absolutely prevent this; and these children should not be employed as cheap labour either. Their school attendance should also be closely tracked.

*Principal 4:* First of all, it should be ensured that these children feel they belong here. Their differences should be seen as a wealth. Along with their families, they should be more aligned with the school, and classroom teachers can undertake “parent activities” towards this. The school counselling guidance service should be in contact with the families, and areas created where the children can express themselves. Of course, an appropriate curriculum should also be implemented for them. They should be motivated to use the opportunities offered by the State, for adaptation and belonging to the community instead of using them for their own benefit. It should be ensured that they regard themselves as equal, not as privileged, in the community. Instead of just presenting them with something already prepared, we need to develop practices that enable them to earn through labour. Educational institutions should feel more confident while trying to resolve problems related to them. Educators should not be worried about “what will come next?” after they impose a sanction related to them. All students should be treated equally.

The teachers proposed that the Syrian children be educated in classes appropriate to their age or in special classes created especially for them. They suggested that the government rather than individuals should fulfil the Syrian families’ needs. Teachers indicated that students who do not speak Turkish had difficulty in all their courses, and proposed opening special literacy courses at schools where needed. In addition, they proposed opening up support rooms for these students and providing them with individualised education. They indicated that these practices would address some of the academic difficulties faced by these children. Meanwhile, they stated that the Syrian students who “passed” the upper levels without actually learning anything could not adapt to senior grades; and that those students



should repeat their grade level education. Teachers have indicated that many school principals and guidance counsellors do not have enough information about the problems of Syrian students. In this context, they suggested in-service training for both counsellors and principals about the subject. The teachers emphasised the importance of providing them with psychological support. Lastly, they emphasised the need for a more suitable curriculum for the Syrian students. Some of the statements made by the teachers are as follows:

*Teacher 1:* In my opinion, class teachers or Turkish language teachers should do literacy activities with Syrian students. Special opportunities must be afforded to them as their traditions somewhat differ. They must work in better harmony with their teachers as appreciating their teacher is one of the most important conditions in solving the integration problems faced by these students. It's important to show empathy with them. Special afterschool studies should be undertaken with these children.

*Teacher 2:* First of all, their families should be taught Turkish. The Ministry of National Education can open free courses for them. Syrian students should be provided with an individualised education in support rooms, and literacy courses must also be open to them. These children should be educated in the appropriate class for their age. If necessary, they should repeat a grade level. Separate classes can also be created for Syrian students. School principals and guidance counsellors should be trained and informed about the subject.

*Teacher 3:* Everything was in my endeavour when the Government integrated these children into the class. These children should never be treated with prejudice. These students often need to talk, and their troubles should be listened to by someone. These children should be given technical support. The reasons for their escape from homeland can be identified and a more suitable lifestyle for them can be prepared accordingly. The state should determine their aims and should treat them accordingly. I think they should go to classes based on their age group where they are. It would be wrong to separate these children from other students. The state should give them an increased level of financial support.

*Teacher 4:* Special classrooms can be created for these students. After Turkish literacy studies and adaptation processes, they can be taken back into classes at their own level. They should not regard the schools as places where they only come to fill time. The government must improve the conditions of the families.

*Teacher 6:* Special classes for Syrian students, as I saw during an overseas assignment, can help to solve the problems here. The curriculum for these special classes was prepared differently. The number of Turkish lessons can be increased. In addition, a program of teaching Turkish to foreigners can be developed. Since the current Turkish language program and Turkish materials that we practice in our classes are prepared for students whose mother tongue is Turkish, they are largely unsuited to the Syrian students.

### Discussion and Conclusions

Syrian citizens amassed at the Turkish border due to the internal conflicts in Syria in March 2011. Turkey executed an "Open Door Policy" for these people, and they have been pouring in to the country since then. They were taken to temporary refuge centres in the first few months and most were granted Turkish citizenship. Today they are living and working in various provinces throughout Turkey. Meanwhile, Syrian children were enrolled in the Turkish public school system. Naturally, this implementation has brought about various problems for educators, school principals, the Syrian students themselves, and also for their parents. This study has attempted to represent the problems from the perspective of the teachers and school principals who have dealt directly with these students in their schools. In addition, solutions that the educators have found to the problems mentioned have been outlined. Finally, this study aimed to identify proposals for solutions that the educators could not implement, but that they believed would go towards resolving the educational problems of the Syrian students. For this purpose, separate interviews were held with a group of teachers and school principals who volunteered to participate in this research study.

The results of the study indicate that the school principals primarily see communication and adaptation problems in relation to their Syrian students. They have opened Turkish language courses in collaboration with Public Education Centres for those students who do not know Turkish. In addition, they have provided "support rooms" to help the students through individualised education. They have tried to deal with the issues facing their Syrian students in order to address problems in their integration into Turkish society. Additionally, they have charged these students with various duties in order to socialise them within their schools. They have enabled the Syrian students to benefit from free access to the school cafeteria in order to address their nutritional problems. They have found sponsors for the families of Syrian children faced with financial difficulties. In addition, they have been to visit the families in their homes of those students who exhibit absenteeism problems to be in direct contact and to resolve the problem.

One of the important problems challenging the school principals is the lack of accredited documentation for the Syrian students. In addition, students who do not speak Turkish have to attend the first-grade class no matter how much older they are than the majority of other first-grade students. This implementation has resulted in psychological issues which the school principals have not found a solution to. Another issue that the school principals could not find a direct solution to is the lack of an appropriate curriculum for the Syrian students. The fact that teachers did not know exactly what they would do with the Syrian students at first was reflected by the school principals as a considerable problem.

The school principals proposed that Syrian students be given orientation training first off. According to the school principals, it is inevitable that literacy courses will need to be opened in all schools where there are Syrian students in attendance. They indicated that the implementation of a private curriculum for Syrian children would significantly reduce the difficulties they experience in educational settings and provide these students with a better chance of integration within the school Turkish school system. Not only the Syrian children, but also their families have a (Turkish) language problem; therefore the importance of opening up language courses for their families as well was emphasised by the school principals.

The school principals proposed that a shuttle (school bus) service needed to be provided for Syrian students who live far away from their schools. They revealed that some Syrian students were being employed or were being used as cheap labour, which has interrupted their education. A joint targeted action by the Ministry of National Education and the General Directorate of Security could resolve the problem.

The teachers interviewed also expressed that they experience problems of language and communication with Syrian students in their classrooms. The teachers indicated that they end up communicating with some Syrian students who do not know Turkish by enlisting the help of other Syrian students who speak a little Turkish. They stated that they also contribute to their language learning practices by teaching them one-to-one in "support rooms" during empty lesson hours in their teaching schedules. Another important problem stated by the teachers is that illiterate older Syrian students are being educated with the first graders, and the older students cannot adapt to the classroom environment, nor do the other students accept them. This is a general problem that all the teachers complained about. These children often exhibit undisciplined behaviours in the classroom, and teachers revealed that they spend more time with these students than the others and have involved the school guidance counsellors to aid managing their integration into the class.

The results revealed that teachers have communication problems with Syrian parents who do not speak Turkish, and that they solved this problem with the help of other Syrian parents who know Turkish. The results indicated that the teachers informed their other students about the Syrian children before they joined the class in order to prevent any negative reaction. In addition, they informed the Turkish parents about this too. The fact that the writing system in Syria is right-to-left seemed a significant problem to start; however, the Syrian students have become accustomed to writing from left-to-right with the help of their teachers. One of the problems that cannot yet be resolved is the lack of a graduation system for Syrian students. The participant teachers believed that this problem could be handled with a new curriculum.

To conclude, a proper curriculum might be developed for the Syrian students in order to help them integrate into the community and to overcome some of the troubles they face in what is for them a new culture. Thus, they can be more easily adapted to the Turkish culture and try to become a part of the Turkish community. In addition, these children can be educated in classes created especially for them, and thus educated in classes more appropriate for their age groups and thereby increasing their chances of success. Parents are an important element of a child's education. The opening of literacy courses for families who do not speak Turkish will make these parents better integrate with the community, as well as strengthen their relationship with the school. The psychological support provided by the experts to these students is inadequate at present. One of the important tasks of the Ministry of National Education is to provide in-service training to school guidance counsellors in order that they may then guide the Syrian students in their schools.

According to the results, the Syrian students are being used as beggars or cheap labour. In this context, the State should take all necessary measures to ensure that these children are able to attend school regularly. The results revealed that the counsellors who should primarily deal with these students are not well-informed about their condition and difficulties. Therefore, the counsellors need to receive in-service training on the integration of Syrian students in order for these students to be afforded a more conscientious level of psychological support. Lastly, the results revealed that Syrian students often attend schools that are far away from their homes. It is proposed that these students should be educated in schools that are closer to where they live; or where this is not possible, these students should benefit from the provision of a school bus shuttle service.

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