

Adjustment of Syrian refugee children into pre-school education in Turkey

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Abstract: A qualitative case study was used in this study in order to determine the pre-school education adjustment problems of a Syrian child refugee who had fled from his homeland and took refuge in Turkey. The research participants were the child's family, teachers, and the principal of the school where the child was educated at pre-school. For the purposes of the study, data were collected through interviews and analyzed by the qualitative content analysis method. According to study results, one of the important factors affecting the adaptation of the children to the school is the communication problem. Another factor is the fact that Syrian families do not have sufficient financial condition. Also, official procedures, though not directly affecting the child, can indirectly affect children through parent-teacher relationships. Another remarkable result is prejudices, which have been examined in three different dimensions as children, parents and teachers, and recommendations for solutions were presented.

Keywords: School adjustment, pre-school education, Syrian refugee children

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INTRODUCTION

Data of the United Nations (2016) showed that the 3.5% of the world populations come from refugee people. When this rate gets increase, the issues on the country which got some refugees from others get increase too such as feeding, education, and sheltering problems. According to the researchers, there are many reasons to migrate from countries as refugee such as, war, poverty, unemployment, political instability, and economic insecurity (Cummings, Pacitto, Lauro, and Foresti, 2015; Karasu, 2013; Metcalfe-Hough, 2015). The Arab spring was one of the significant time for countries which had civil war against government such as North African countries, and Middle East countries (Güleç, 2012). Economic crisis, dictator regimes, and worst life conditions could be the some of the important factor that impacted the civil wars in these countries. Tunç (2015) stated that civil war in Syria which started on March 2015 was caused four million people's migration to other countries which is the one of the most emigration around the world. The position of Turkey with Syria as politically and geographically impacted to get more refugees into Turkey. The Figure 1 shows the distributions of percentages of Syrian refugees in other countries (UNHCR, 2016). The data shows that, Turkey has the most Syrian refugees (42%) and then Lebanon (29%).

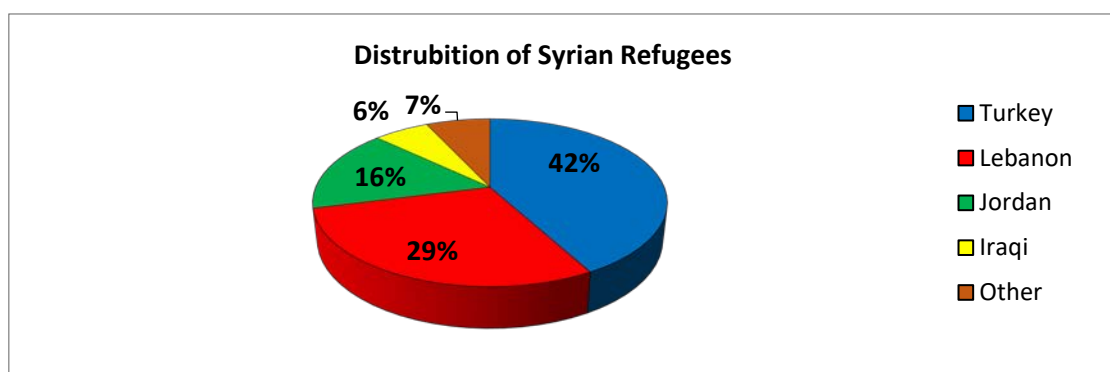


FIGURE 1. Distribution of Syrian refugees in different countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2016).

Syrian refugees are really impacted the cities in Turkey based on the city's current populations, cultures, and education system. Kilis which was the pilot city for this study is one of the most affected cities in Turkey because of its geographic position. Directorate General of Migration Management, [DGMM] (2016) stated that, Kilis was first city which has 93.50% of the total population were Syrian refugees. Hatay which is another city in Turkey and had border gate with Syria as geographically is following as second city in Turkey which has 24.38 % of the populations were Syrian refugees. This situation affected the conditions of cities due to their sheltering, health, employment conditions, and education. For example, Syrian labors work in the work place by the getting low salary when they compared with Turkish labors. According to the data set of Child Trends Databank (2015) these situations show some similarities in United States due to the its position about taking refugees from other countries.

The data sets showed that 53% of the refugees' populations who live in sheltering area in Turkey were between age of 0-18 and 49 % of the refugees' populations were live in the cities. For the early childhood ages, 16,5 % of the children live in shelters and 15.9% populations of the children live in cities and go to school (Disaster and Emergent Management Presidency, 2013).

Early childhood years which were covered ages of 0-6 years old children are really important for children due to their social, cognitive, and physical development. If a child has trouble during these ages, it may cause more damages in their future. It is suggested that children should have good education and family condition. However, children who come from refugee background, impact more than other children. Karoly and Gonzales (2011) stated that immigrant children had lower rate of participating early care programs than their native counterparts. It means, if a child comes from nasty social environment, uneducated, and careless family background, it will be impact more their future years (Behtoui and Neergaard, 2016). Especially, if a child sees or lives in conditions of war, emigration, or natural disasters, he or she may get more impacts and his or her future life will be more traumatic when they compared by their peers. Özer and Şirin (2012) worked about Syrian children and their families. Researchers stated that most of the Syrian refugee children had lots of stress, traumatic life experiences, and depression. Especially, children who come to new country, environment, and culture have hard time when they are adjusting these new ecosystems. Children need new friends and education which could help them to get used to new culture in their host countries (Özer and Şirin, 2012).

School Adjustment

School adjustment is a child's adaptations to school, culture and education in different environment which meet first time. In other words, "School adjustment is the process of adapting to the role of being a student and to various aspects of the school environment" (Lakhani, Jain, & Chandel, 2017, p. 332). Preschool children had really hard time on their first days of school. So, one of the aims of Turkish Ministry Education National Education (MoNE) (2013) for early childhood education in Turkey is preparing children to elementary education. Moreover, researchers stated that "It (school adjustment) is not only related to a child's progress and achievement, but also their attitudes towards school, anxieties, loneliness, social support and academic motivation" (Lakhani, Jain, & Chandel, 2017, p.334). Research shows that children's loneliness and social dissatisfaction are negatively related to their school achievement Furthermore, there are four sources of motives for children's adjustment; need for approval, identification, self-enhancement, and need to be correct (Sasser, Bierman, & Henrichs, 2015). So small-age children (pre-school and primary school level), especially those who are new to the school, and sometimes older children (high school and middle school) may face serious problems with school adjustment (Yalçın, 2016). The child who has problems in adjustment may lose his/her love of education and interest in school, and his/her academic success often falls (Ceyhan and Kocabas, 2011). It has been observed in studies that these conditions are negatively affect teachers and peers as well as children's families (Başaran, Gökmen, and Akdağ, 2014; Coplan and Arbeau, 2008; Dinçer et.al., 2013; Doğan et. al., 2008; Eratay, 2011; Erermiş et.al., 2009; Erten Sarıkaya, 2013; Ewing and Taylor, 2009; Gülay, 2009;

Kandır and Koçak Tümer, 2013; Kandır and Orçan, 2011; Ozden and Celen, 2014; Shields et.al., 2001; Şeker and Özdemir, 2014; Taylı, 2007; Yalçın, 2016; Zolberg & Benda, 2001;).

School Adjustments of Refugee Students

School adjustment for refugee children shows more issues than others. Guo (2002) and Lu (2007) stated that due to school adjustment, migrant children had low school attendance and graduation. Researcher stated that one of the reasons of missing in classroom is financial barriers. Moreover, refugee children's education lives at urban schools are worse than their rural schools (Liang and Chen 2007). There are also issues about language and communications skills. Researchers suggested that governments should addressed the issues about making preschool attendance in universal and "language barriers and informational gaps, can be addressed through the way publicly subsidized and private or nonprofit programs are structured" (Karoly and Gonzalez, 2011, p.71). So, scholars stated that, most of the refugee children had troubles when they communicate and made a friendship with other children due to their language skills (Mercan-Uzun & Bütün, 2016).

Even if there are some issues on the helping refugee children in Turkey, some of the studies also had lensed to new studies by the showing new gaps in refugee children's education. Şen (2013) worked about reasons of civil war in Syria and Syrian refugees life experiences. In another study, Orhan (2013) worked about Arab Springs and how it impacts Arabian world. Another researchers worked about Syrian refugees health, feeding, and educational needs in the country where they emigrate (Karadağ and Altıntaş, 2010). In another study, Erdoğan (2014) stated that in Turkey, even if Syrian refugee children had language issues, the number of schools and educational needs are improving in the cities which have refugee children. In the study about refugee children's education, researcher found that one of the important issues was language (Deniz, 2009). In another study, Karoly and Gonzalez, (2011) stated families' poverty status, parental education, and ethnicity. Based on the literature, current study aimed that "Investigating issues about Syrian children refugees' who are early childhood ages and their adjustment into Turkish early childhood education system and their parents, teachers, and school principal' concerns on the school adjustment process."

METHODS

Research Design

In this study which aimed to investigate a Syrian refugee children's school adjustment into Turkish early childhood education, a qualitative phenomenological design has been used. Phenomenological design is a model which aims to examine deeply and widely a topic in its real condition (Yin, 2009). Phenomenology design were described also by Moustakas (1994) as conscious knowledge associated with saying what is perceived, sensed, and known from the person's experience. Related with the aim of the current study which participants' experiences with Syrian children, it has been thought that phenomenological design is appropriate model for the using as research design. Due to the important of phenomenological design Yüksel and Yıldırım (2015) stated that "The general purpose of the phenomenological study is to understand and describe a specific phenomenon in-depth and reach at the essence of participants' lived experience of the phenomenon" (p.3).

Research participants

The research groups consisted in children's family, teacher, and the principal of the preschool where he was educated and which is affiliated to the Ministry of National Education in the city of Kilis in the academic year of 2016-2017 (N=16). The Kilis were selected into study for two reasons, there are more Syrian refugee in the city and most of the schools have refugee children in their classroom. According to the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) (2019) data, there are 116.079 Syrian refugees which is 81, 44% of the population in Kilis.

While deciding research sample, purposeful sampling method was used. Purposeful sampling method is a method which is researcher decides the sample depends on his/her research purposes (Ekiz, 2013). Due to the participating into study, each participant reported their consent form before collected data. . For the Syrian participant, all the consent forms also translated into Arab forms for the getting consent forms by the Syrian participants. Demographic information about participants was shown in the *Table 1*.

Table1. *Demographic information about participants*

Participants	Codes	Age	Education Level	Works	Experiences	Major
Parents (N=10)	P1	27	Elementary	House wife		
	P2	35	High school	Technician		
	P3	42	Elementary	House wife		
	P4	29	Elementary	House wife		
	P5	33	Primary School	Secretary		
	P6	32	High school	House wife		
	P7	28	Primary School	House wife		
	P8	34	Primary School	House wife		
	P9	35	University	Teacher		
	P10	42	Elementary	House wife		
Teachers (N=5)	T1	37	University	Teacher	12 years	Early Childhood
	T2	26	University	Teacher	2 years	Early Childhood
	T3	42	University	Teacher	17 years	Early Childhood
	T4	29	University	Teacher	4 years	Child Development
	T5	27	High school	Assistant Teacher	7 years	Child Development
Principals (N=1)	P	43	University	Principal	19 years	Elementary Education

The Table 1 shows that most of the Parents have elementary education level and work as house wife. Only one of the parents works as a teacher. The distributions of parents' ages are between 27 and 42 years. In addition, majority of the teachers have university degree and only one of the teacher who works as an assistant teacher and has high school degree. The experiences of teachers between 2 and 17 years. Three of the teachers have early childhood degree and two of them have child development degree. Principal of the school is 43 years old. He works 19 years and has elementary education degree.

Research instrument

The data were collected through the information obtained by screening the domestic and foreign sources as well as interviewing with the participants. The interview forms were related with Syrian refugee children who go to preschool. As a data collection tool, Semi-structured Interview Forms which prepared by the researchers for the purposes of the research were used. Sixteen individual interviews were conducted with 4 teachers, 10 parents, 1 principal, and 1 assistant teacher at school. Here is the some of the semi-structured interview forms which are used during collection process:

1. Semi-structured Parents Interview Form
2. Semi-structured Teacher Interview Form
3. Semi-structured School Principal Interview Form

Semi-structured Parents Interview Form: It is an interview form that focuses on parents' perceptions about their children's school adjustment and issues that may happen during that

time. In the parents interview form, there were 8 semi-structured questions. The questions were about children's school adjustment, issues that children shared with parents about school, school attendance of children, and parents' enrolment in to education. One of the sample question is "What do you think about your refugee children's education could be?"

Semi-structured Teacher Interview Form: It is an interview form that aimed to collect teachers' perceptions about their Syrian child refugee students' school adjustment and their school life. In the teacher interview form, there were eleven semi-structured questions. The questions were related with issues about Syrian refugee parents and children, refugee children's school attendance issues, teachers' works about school adjustments of their Syrian refugee children's into Turkish education. One of the sample questions is "How should refugee children participate in education? What can be done about this?"

Semi-structured School Principal Interview Form: The form which aimed to collect data from school principals about their Syrian child refugee students and these students' parents during Syrian child refugee students' school adjustment. In the principal interview form, there were 11 semi-structured questions. The questions were about issues about parents, teachers, and children, Syrian parents' expectations from their school, teachers' perceptions about Syrian children in their classroom, and Syrian refugee children's integrations into education. One of the sample questions is "What are the parents' views against having their children and refugee children in the same classes?"

Data collection and analyze

Sixteen individual interviews were conducted from 4 teachers, 10 parents, 1 principal and 1 assistant teacher at school. Participants were interviewed while their available time. Interview process took between 25 and 28 minutes. The interview which made by 5 Syrian parents was made by the translators' help during interview process. Translator who knows Turkish and Arabic and work at school while helping teachers and principal during connections with Syrian refugee children and their parents. The documents which collected from 5 Arabic parents were translated into Turkish by the translators' help. For the translation issues from Arabic data, one of the Arabic preservice early childhood teachers from University got helped during interview process and translation process. After that one of the experts who knows Arabic and teach Arabic to Turkish university students also checked the translation of the interviews of Arabic parents. When all the interview documents collected, they were transferred into digital copy.

Descriptive data analyses were used in the study. According to researchers this technique is help to organize, grouping, comparing, and find detail results from qualitative data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). By the using Nvivo10, the data which collected from 16 interviews, were analyzed by the creating new codes during descriptive analyze. During data analysis, each data transferred into digital copy and uploaded Nvivo Program. Than data analyzed all together and codes had been built by the content analysis. Each researchers coded separately and 86% of the reliability score were calculated by the using $\text{reliability} = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}} * 100$ (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Due to the results of the formula, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that 80% agreement between coders on 95% of the codes is sufficient for a qualitative study. The reliability scores of different coders were acceptable due to formulate of Miles and Huberman (1994).

RESULTS

The purpose of this study to investigate early childhood Syrian refugee children's school adjustment and issues during that time. Descriptive data analyze which is a kind of qualitative study method was used. The codes and categories were made by the interview data. Data results showed that refugee children had some problems during school adjustment; language and communication issues, financial means problems, quality education and prejudices against refugees. These issues are also impacts their school attendances. The Table 2 shows the distributions of codes by each participant's data.

Table 2. Distributions of participants about issues of school adjustment of Syrian refugee children

Participants	Codes	f	%
Parents (N=10)	Language and Communication (P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10)	6	60.00
	Financial means (P2, P4, P6)	3	30.00
	Prejudge (P8, P5)	2	20.00
	Quality Education (P1)	1	10.00
Teachers (N=5)	Language and Communication (T1, T2, T3, AT)	4	80.00
	Prejudge (T1, T2, T3)	3	60.00
	Financial means (T1, T2, AT)	2	40.00
	Quality Education (T4)	1	20.00
Principal (N=1)	Prejudge	1	100.00
	Language and Communication	1	100.00
	Financial means	1	100.00

The Table 2 shows that one of the big issues about Syrian refugee children's school adjustment was language and communication which was conducted by most of the parents (%60.00), teachers (%80.00), and principal (100.00). Moreover, prejudices and financial means issues were another issues that parents, teachers, and principal pointed. Parents and teachers also conducted that there was a problem about financial means such as buying school supplies, feeding and other fees.

Language and communication issues

The data results showed that one of the biggest issues which Syrian children had while school adjustment was "language and communication issues". The problems occur while teacher-child and teacher-parents' communications about school and parent enrolment. It is because of the Syrian refugees mother tongue is Arabic and Turkish students speak only Turkish in classroom and also outside of the classroom by the parents. Because of that it causes some serious problems during children' adjustment into Turkish Pre-K schools. By this issue, T1 stated that

"I don't know Arabic and they (Syrian child and their parents) don't know Turkish. The principal of school didn't help us by the working with a translator in classroom for the children's learning Turkish. That is why, we (teacher and Syrian child) used body language when we need to talk each other."

T2 stated about how language issues impact children's engaging activities in early childhood classroom:

"I worked a multi-cultural classroom which has Syrian and Turkish children. I think that all Syrian or Turkish children may be placed in classroom because as a teacher we are confused how we can organize activities due to different background of students. While creating activities, if I focused Turkish students, Syrian children don't understand anything. If I focused Syrian children, Turkish students don't understand. That is why, in classroom a chaos occurs while Syrian children' school adjustment."

In addition, T2 also stated that language and communication problems impact not only herself but also other children in classroom. She stated that

"One of the most common problems is language. We can't speak with each other. We used language but it is not enough for explain we we meant. This problem occurs also while discussing with parents too. Similarly, Turkish children also have hard time while playing with their Syrian peers in classroom".

Furthermore, P3 stated similar hard time while interacting with teachers about their children's education. P3 stated that

"I just dropped my child to school if I can't find any translator for talking with my child's teacher about his education. If I find any translator, he is helping me and also classroom teacher while we are talking about my son and also needs of school for education (e.g. classroom materials, paints, papers, and other supplies for activities".

Financial means and quality education

Another factor that impacts Syrian refugee children's adjustment into early childhood education was their parents' socio economic conditions for supporting their children's financial means and educational level. Researcher stated that "some children would achieve upward assimilation as a result of their parents' high socioeconomic status and favorable context of reception, eventually integrating into the white middle-class mainstream" (Lu and Zhao, 2013, p.4). Parents' educational level could be helped to children when they integrate early childhood education. When teachers expect any parents' involvement at home, Syrian parents may not help their children. This is also same for socio economic conditions. Economical background also may impact the children's school attendances and adjustment indirectly. Related with this T1 stated that:

"We request some school supplies form all families of children in classroom. Generally, we request them in the beginning of semester. However, we have stress while requesting from Syrian families because of their economic conditions. That is why, we have some issues while doing some activities with Syrian children in classroom because They usually don't have any school supplies for education. In expectedly, it impacts their education."

In addition, T2 also shared her thoughts about quality of education in classroom and stated that *"we requested some books from families of children for activities. However, Syrian families couldn't buy them for their children. That is why I copied the books' pages and distributed to Syrian children."* Furthermore, in this point, T1 also stated that:

"I have hard time when I do some activities with children. For example, if I do any art activities, Syrian children don't have any school supplies. That is why, I should buy for them with my own money. Sometimes, I use Turkish children's school supplies which more for them and shared with Syrian children."

Similarly, principal of school stated that *"we have chance to collect some money for school' needs from Turkish parents. However, we can't do that from Syrian parents. This situation gave hard time to us in front of Turkish parents."* (P). Moreover, T4 stated also about it that *"I think, classroom should be created by all Syrian children or Turkish children because I do have really hard time when I am doing activities with children. Sometimes, we can't do whatever aim to do it."* This shows the how quality of education decreases due to this confusing.

Prejudges

The results of the data showed important results about prejudices of different factors. According to results there are different prejudices from different side such as: children, parents, and teachers' prejudices against refugee children and their education in pre-k level.

Children' Prejudges

According to data results, some of the Turkish children had some prejudices against their Syrian refugee peers in classroom. Related to children' prejudices, T2 stated that *"Turkish children has some prejudices against Syrian children in classroom and they didn't play with them. So, some of them sometimes were teasing with some Syrian children."* In addition, data results also showed

that some of the Turkish children were given derogatory nickname for their peers in classroom. T2 also stated for this topic that *“Turkish children were not calling their Syrian peers by their name in classroom. They were calling them as ‘Arab’ in classroom.”*

Parents Prejudges

The data results showed that especially Turkish parents had prejudices against Syrian children and their parents. That is why they were giving pressures against principal for their children. Principal stated that *“Especially Turkish parents wanted from me to remove their children to other classroom which doesn’t have any Syrian children. Sometimes they would like to remove their children into other places.”* However, data results showed that some of the Turkish parents got used to Syrian families and they were getting more kind against Syrian parents.

Teachers’ Prejudges

Due to the results of study, teachers also shown some prejudices against Syrian parents and children. Related to teachers’ prejudices, T1 stated that:

“Not only children in classroom, I also had prejudices against Syrian children in classroom at the beginning of school semester. I had concerns how I can do activities with them. Because half of the classroom Turkish students and other half of them were Syrian children. But, then, I got used these situations. Nowadays, we don’t have any issues in classroom besides language.”

In this point, T3 also stated her negative thoughts which were at the beginning of semester. In addition, principal of school stated that

“Teachers didn’t want to work in the classroom which had some Syrian children at the beginning of semester. But Syrian children also need education. Then, we discussed these things with teachers and then some of them accepted to work on those classrooms. Sometimes, I am talking with teachers who work in these classrooms and asking them how is it going? Most of them stated that they got used to these situations and there is no any problem about it.”

These thoughts of principal also show that some of the teachers had prejudices against Syrian children. It is probably about they don’t know how they can teach to multicultural groups in early childhood education.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of study was the exploring the issues of Syrian refugee children during school adjustment. That results showed that language and communication issues are the one of the biggest issues while children’ school adjustment in early childhood education. Syrian parents and children’ speaking Arabic and teachers and other Turkish children in classroom speak Turkish, are the one of the essential issues while communicating teacher-children and teacher- parents. Another factors which impact negatively Syrian children’ school adjustment that financing and socio-economic conditions of Syrian families. According to results, there are also issues about prejudices against Syrian refugees. The data analyses showed that there are different types of prejudices against these people such as, children based, teacher based and parents based.

It has been observed that Turkish families are prejudiced against Syrian refugee families and they did not want to send their children to the same school and class with the children of the Syrian families, but over time the Turkish families have become accustomed to the Syrian families and children. This result supports the results obtained from other studies (Erdoğan, 2014; Tunç, 2015).

In research findings, language and communication are the most common problems faced by school administrators, and especially teachers and parents. The fact that the Syrian family and children did not speak Turkish, and those teachers did not speak or understand Arabic result in serious communication problems between children and parents, which affects the quality of education given in class adversely. This result is in parallel with other related studies (UNCHR, 2016; Ataman, 2015; Tunç, 2015; Erdoğan, 2014; UNICEF, 2013; Deniz, 2009).

Another finding in the study was Syrian refugee families did not have financial means to afford their children's education in this regard, which also support other studies in literature (Moinolnolki, and Han, 2017; Kiang and Supple, 2016; Tunç, 2015; Türkmen Sanduvaç, 2013). Due to improving families' financial income, they may give some more attention to their children' education. Than their children may engage into their early childhood education.

Due to the refugee children's school adjustment issues, Turkey also have hard time when it compared with other countries which had similar issues. Based on this, teachers who work under this condition in Turkey may have trained about how they can work with multicultural groups in early childhood classroom. Based on the Syrian refugee children' education, principal and teachers may learn how to contact with their Syrian children and parents by the given some conferences and training program from university academicians. The data results showed that one of the biggest issues were about language and communications. Related to language issues, teachers who work with Syrian refugee children can get some Arabic language classes based on in-service training programs and courses. By the given information to Syrian parents about Turkish education system, they can also get some courses about Turkish language, and school system. In addition, this study conducted by the few participants, due to school adjustment of Syrian refugees, future studies may focus on elementary, primary, and high-school by the working with more participants.

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