

## School Principals Views on Syrian Refugee Students' Education in Turkey: Challenges and Recommendations

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to identify the administrative problems that school principals face at schools in the city located in the east of Turkey with high Syrian student population and to provide suggestions for overcoming these problems. The city is a province in Turkey having the highest ratio of Syrian to Turkish population with 95.61 %. Therefore, the city is an important topic for the education and social integration of Syrian students. Based on the findings, it has been identified that school principals experience problems such as language and communication problems, crowded classrooms and environments, registration uncertainties, accordance between the parents (Turkish-Syrian), school culture, discipline and behavior. In addition, problems were also identified under headings such as financial resource insufficiency, personnel requirements and in-service training requirements. It has been emphasized that making courses more active, increasing the number of course hours for the targeted culture language will be more beneficial for overcoming the language issues. It has also been indicated that equal distribution of Syrian students to the schools and balancing the student ratio in the province through the use of transportation options if necessary will also be beneficial.

**Key words:** Syrian Refugees, School Principal, Refugee Education Problems, Language Barriers, Turkey

### INTRODUCTION

The immigration activity starting from Syria in 2011 due to the civil war in Syria is the most important immigration wave towards Turkey that has taken place in recent years. This immigration wave started in April 2011 with 252 people reaching up to 3 million 645 thousand 140 people since the start of the civil war according to the January 2021 data of the Directorate General of Migration Management. This number has placed Turkey among the top ranked countries affected from migration activities throughout history (GİGM, 2021; Güçer et al., 2013).

In 1951, Turkey signed the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its addendum the 1968 Protocol with a "geographical limitation". It has been set forth due to this limitation that only those fleeing from European countries can be considered as "refugees". While those who immigrated to Turkey from Syria were first considered as refugees; a new status definition soon became necessary due to the ongoing domestic conflict in Syria, the significant increase in the number of refugees and the decrease of their possibilities to return back to their countries. Syrians were taken under the status of "temporary protection" within the scope of the Temporary Protection Regulation that went into effect in 2014.

Thus, the Syrians under temporary protection as guests were started to be accommodated and their primary needs were started to be met until the end of the security issues in their homeland (Dillioğlu, 2015; Seydi, 2014). In the beginning, Syrians within the scope of temporary protection had needs such as accommodation, health, clothing, food and security but soon another important requirement emerged with regard to the integration process due to the need for the education of the school age children and the young population (Dillioğlu, 2015; Karadağ & Altıntaş, 2010; Seydi, 2014). It has been set forth with the "Circular on Education and Teaching Services for Foreigners" numbered 2014/21 issued by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) that the education activities for Syrian students will be provided in provinces by schools under the inspection of Provincial Directorates of National Education and Temporary Education Centers (TEC). The city located in the east of Turkey is one of the provinces at which this process was put into practice.

The number of Syrians under temporary protection at the Shelter Centers in Turkey was 215.565 people during the period when there was a need to conduct a study at the city (GİGM, 2018). During the same period, the number of Syrians living outside the shelter centers was 3.589.384

people. Shelter Centers are 22 container cities established in 10 provinces and 23.397 people live in one container cities in the province of the city within the scope of our study and it is reported based on the official numbers that there are 130.746 Syrian citizens living in the city. With these numbers, the city is ranked number one among the provinces in Turkey with 95.61% indicating the ratio of Syrian citizens to the local population (GIGM, 2018). Attention has been given to meet the educational requirements of Syrian citizens since the start of the mass immigration and policies have been developed for this purpose. These students have started their education at state schools within the scope of such policies in order to ensure their integration to the Turkish Education System. Minimizing the problems that may be encountered during integration will speed up the integration process thereby preventing any loss of time.

In this regard, it is important to identify the problems faced by principals at official state schools in the city located in the east of Turkey where Syrian students within the scope of temporary protection are continuing their education and their suggestions for the solution of these problems.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Hence, the primary objective of the present study was to "identify the problems faced by principals at official state schools in the city where Syrian students within the scope of temporary protection are continuing their education and their suggestions for the solution of these problems. School principals are not the only decision makers of integration in education. However, they play a determining role with regard to the implementation of school processes. Similarly, school principals are able to carry out a comparison between policy-implementation since they have the opportunity to view the situation from the perspective of schools as an area of implementation where integration policies meet with individuals. Lack of including the opinions of the other actors in the integration process may be considered as a limitation. However, the opinions of school principals are important for their holistic perspective with regard to the processes implemented at schools.

Thus, a new perspective will be attained with regard to the obstacles at the school level related with the integration of Syrian students and possible solutions while making a contribution to ensuring that the integration is more successful.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The study was conducted based on the case study pattern from among the qualitative research models with an effort to understand the current situation at schools at which there is a high Syrian student population density. A specific case is examined and described in depth during case studies. Case studies enable us to see the events in detail, develop explanations and make assessments (Merriam, 1998).

### **Study Group**

The school principals who took part in the study group were selected via criterion sampling which is one of the random sampling methods. The primary education schools (1st and 2nd level) in the province of the city with the highest number of Syrian students were identified for the selection of school principals subject to interviews. Interviews were conducted with principals of three secondary schools and seven primary schools within the scope of the predetermined criteria. Descriptive information about the study group is given in Table 1.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The data were acquired in the present study using semi-structured interview method. The interview form consists of three sections. The 1st Section is related with participant attributes such as age, seniority, gender, education status, management experience. The 2nd Section includes questions related with the institution where the school principal works at such as the number of students and type of education. Whereas the 3rd Section contains a total of nine primary questions and 20 sub-questions on identifying the administrative problems at the school and solution suggestions. The required permits were obtained from the city Provincial Directorate of National Education prior to conducting interviews with the participants. The interviews were carried out based on the voluntariness of the participants. The participants were informed that the interviews will be recorded and it was guaranteed that the acquired data would remain confidential. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes on average.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using the content analysis method. The voice recordings obtained during the interviews were listened after which they were transcribed and classified under similar headings. The interviews were then coded and placed under certain categories following the analysis.

### **Validity and Reliability of the Study**

Internal validity (credibility), external validity (transferability), internal reliability (consistency) and external reliability (verifiability) studies were conducted during the present study in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the study (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). In-depth data acquisition was conducted during the interviews carried out in the reliable environment established for internal validity (credibility) as a result of the long term relationship with the participants. The interviews were recorded; after which they were transcribed and participant approvals were taken by permitting them to read the transcriptions. Experts were consulted during the interview form preparation and all stages of analysis. Analyses were carried out by two experts in the field of Education Management, Inspection, Planning and Economy during all stages of the study. One

**Table 1.** Distribution of the participants with regard to age, gender, branch, seniority, management experience, education status and the number of Turkish-Syrian students at their schools

Participant Code	Age	Seniority	Management Experience	Branch	Education Status	Turkish Students	Total Students	Syrian Student Ratio
SPS1	42	20	7	Prim. Mat.	Undergraduate	629	699	4.8
SPP2	53	33	23	Classroom Teach.	Undergraduate	588	941	37.5
SPP3	45	22	4	Classroom Teach.	Undergraduate	760	1295	41.3
SPP4	40	25	9	Classroom Teach.	Undergraduate	299	542	44.8
SPP5	50	30	30	Classroom Teach.	Undergraduate	330	610	45.9
SPP6	46	24	19	Classroom Teach.	Undergraduate	508	877	42.1
SPS7	37	13	2	Science and Tech.	Undergraduate	560	700	20
SPS8	48	25	10	Social Sci.	Master's	201	269	25.3
SPP9	45	20	9	Classroom Teach.	Undergraduate	0	610	100
SPP10	40	18	5	Classroom Teach.	Undergraduate	388	624	37.8

The participating school principals were coded as SPS1, SPP2, SPP3, SPP4, SPP5, SPP6, SPS7, SPS8, SPP9 and SPP10. "SP" denotes the word school principal; "S" is used to express the 2nd level that is the secondary school education whereas "P" represents the 1st level that is the primary school section

of the experts used content validity for examining the relationship between the results and questions; while the other expert examined the consistency between the acquired data and the coding.

Preliminary interviews were conducted with 23 individuals from among the school principals who have Syrian students at their schools when preparing the interview form in order to identify the question headings and these data were put into question form again in accordance with the opinions of expert academics. The interview form was finalized as a result of these processes. The opinions of the participants were quoted directly during the study for external validity (transferability) after which diversification and detailed descriptions were made. Literature were meticulously scanned to attain internal reliability. The findings and results of these studies were used to verify the reliability of the results of the present study. Data sources were defined clearly and details were provided with regard to how the interview form was prepared, how the interviews were conducted, how the analysis process was carried out and how the results were obtained in order to attain external reliability.

## RESULTS

### Language and Communication Problem

The participants were asked: "Do you experience any language and communication problems at your school because of the Syrian students?" All the participants stated that language and communication issue is the most important problem they experience. The opinions of some participants on this issue are presented below:

*Language is a major issue. We experienced problems both as principals and also as teachers. We actually wished that our Ministry would send the students to a one year adaptation program during which they learned the language instead of directly initiating the integration process, in this way we would at least not experience these problems as dramatically as this. (SPP2)*

*It is clear that we are experiencing language problems, this lack of communication is present between the students, teachers-students, parents-teachers and parents-principals. (SPP4)*

*...language is our biggest problem, our teacher colleagues first try to teach the language and then move on to academic education which causes a significant loss of time. (SPP6)*

It was observed when the opinions of the participants were examined that in general all of the school shareholders are experiencing a multidimensional communication problem between the teachers-students, teachers-parents, parents-administration with regard to the procedures and activities related with Syrian students. In this regard, Özer et al. (2016) put forth that the language barrier as the primary obstacle standing in the way of academic success also prevents the establishment of communication between the individuals thus becoming the primary issue in the education of refugees. Toker Gökçe and Acar (2018) also stated that the language problem is the most important drawback in the education of Syrian students. According to Aykırı (2017); the failure of the students to understand what they read and communication issue are the two major problems experienced with Syrian students. Language difference is the underlying factor for both problems. This has also been clearly emphasized by the teachers. Regarding the language problem in the educational dimension, Erdem's (2017) study illustrated that the teachers experience problems with the analysis dimension of the educational content in relation with refugee students, and that the language shortcomings are considered the primary issue when presenting the refugee students with the educational content rather than taking their prior knowledge into consideration.

The participants were then asked "What do you think is the underlying reason for this language issue?" as a continuation of the first question to which SPS1, SPP3, SPP4, SPP5, and SPS8 coded participants responded by indicating that because of the large number of Syrian students they

do not need Turkish for communication and that they group among themselves and communicate with each other which leads to language problems. In this regard, it is possible to state that the formation of disconnected sub-cultures within the same school should be considered as the underlying reason for this issue: SPS1, SPP2 and SPS8 coded participants responded to the same question by referring to the delays in the integration of Syrian students. It was observed as a result of the study conducted by Istanbul Bilgi University Child Studies Department (2015) that Syrian children learn Turkish better when they start school at early ages for integration. The language barrier grows further as the age at which children start school increases and older Syrian children have to be registered at the classrooms of smaller children because they do not know how to read and write in Turkish. This may have an adverse impact on the subjective well-being of the students who are individual subjects in themselves and also may result in peer bullying. Therefore, the language issue and the current solution results in difficulties that should be coped by the Syrian children as well as the teachers and the other children in the same classroom.

### Opinions on Overcoming the Language and Communication Problem

The participants were asked: "How do you overcome the language issue at your school, how do you establish communication? What do you do to overcome this problem? Are these beneficial?" to which they suggested three solutions as assigning a translator, ensuring that there are Turkmen students in the classrooms as "child translators" and language courses. The participants stated that they use appointed translators at their schools in order to establish communication with the Syrian students and parents. The opinions of some of the participants on this issue are presented below:

*...we were appointed a Translator to overcome the language issue. These individuals [I mean one person] actually helped us to overcome this issue. (SPP2)*

*We have appointed translators at schools and we try to establish communication through them. (SPS7)*

*I actually think that our translators work very hard. We have language issues and we use the help of these translators intensively in order to minimize the language issue and establish communication between the teacher and the administration and the Syrian parents. (SPP3)*

It was observed when the opinions of the participants were examined that even though the translators play an active role at the schools some participants have indicated that the translators lead to a loss of time in communication and that they experience problems because the translators add their own interpretations. Moreover, it was also observed that the lack of any criteria and assessment procedure for translator selection led to the use of incompetent people resulting in the failure to establish the desired communication. Expressions similar to the participant opinions have been put forth by Emin (2016) as obtained from the administrators of the Temporary Education Center in Ankara

indicate that communication between Syrian children and teachers was established by way of the staff members which prevented the establishment of a healthy communication between the Syrian teacher-student and administrators. It can be put forth that the quality of the education environments is reduced due to the fact that translators are not selected from among educated people well-versed in pedagogy.

As a different method in overcoming the language problem, the participants said that they equally distribute Syrian students with a good level of Turkish between each classroom and that these individuals act as "child translators" partially helping in overcoming the language problems. Participant opinions on this issue were as such:

*We tried to distribute the Turkmen children equally to each classroom as 'child guides'. Actually these children worked more actively than the translators and the teachers started overcoming the problems in the classroom with the help of these children. (SPP3)*

*...there were various communication issues. We saw that there are Turkmen students among those who came from [Syria]. So we distributed them equally among the classrooms. We thought that these children can help the teachers as translators. (SPP10)*

It was put forth by Sarıtaş et al. (2016, p. 220) with regard to overcoming this problem that it was tried to make use of children who know Turkish in order to establish communication. A different method used for the integration of Syrian students to the Turkish education system was observed in another study as the placement of Syrian students who can talk Turkish next to the Syrian students who do not know Turkish (Şahin & Sümer, 2018). According to Aktay and Gültekin (2015) peer cooperation is a form of cooperation which is based on the development of new contexts by the peers within a socio-cultural context and establishing their own social environments through interaction. It is possible to state that through this type of cooperation individuals were able to reflect their own socio-cultural environments, actualize peer cooperation in different contexts in each community and acquire different experiences with regard to education as individuals representing the society. The participants put forth that language courses have been started at their schools by educators appointed within the scope of the project entitled Promoting Integration of Syrian Kids into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES). The opinions of various participants on this issue were as follows:

*...there are educators appointed for language education within the scope of PİCTES at the schools and we start courses to provide continuous education on the Turkish language so that these problems will end as soon as possible. These efforts are ongoing. (SPS1)*

*We have friends appointed within the scope of the PİCTES Project. These friends of ours provide special courses for students in 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade students who have not yet learned Turkish. (SPP2)*

It was observed when the opinions of the participants were examined that the school principals have stated that language courses are beneficial in the process of learning a

language. The participants put forth that language courses are started at their schools for all students and parents who demand it.

### The Problem of High Syrian Student Population

The question of, "Does the Syrian student population at your school have a balanced distribution for integration when compared with the general population of the school?" was directed at the participants during the interviews to which majority of the participants stated that they started registering Syrian students to Turkish schools following the obligation to do so put into practice by the Ministry of Education in order to ensure a healthy integration but they failed to meet the classroom quota of 30 % Syrian students and that the population of Syrian students exceeds the assigned quota which leads to problems. The opinions of various participants who indicated that the aforementioned issue leads to problems are presented below:

*We first decided to arrange the classrooms as 15 Turkish 15 Syrian students. But when registration was more than expected, 3-4 classrooms were mostly comprised of Syrian students in the 1st and 2nd grades. Every year we had 5 new 1st grade classrooms but this year we had to have 12. (SPP2)*

*...the number of Syrian students at our school is almost equal to the number of Turkish students and the number of Syrian students is higher than Turkish students especially in the 1st grade. (SPP4)*

*There are classrooms of 30 students which have up to 20 Syrian students. As I said, 80 % of the 1st grades are Syrian. This number may increase next year. (SPP5)*

It can be understood based on the participant opinions that the Directorates of National Education requested through the MoNE that the Syrian student population should not exceed 30 % in order to attain a balance in the classroom but even this percentage could not be met. It is also clearly understood when participant opinions are examined that despite the strategy of the MoNE (2016) to distribute students with weak Turkish language skills equally among the classrooms for overcoming the high population issue of Syrian students and to ensure that they learn the language through experience by integrating with their peers, the objectives have still not been met at the end of the 2 year process.

### Opinions on the Overpopulation of Syrian Students

The participants were asked, "What kind of activities did you carry out for the problem of the overpopulation of Syrian students? Were these successful?" to which all participants responded in a similar manner. The opinions of participants coded as SPS1 and SPP3 are given below:

*This year we had a lot of new registrations. When we looked at the 5th graders we saw that their [Syrian students] number is greater than that of Turkish students. Even though we tried to distribute the students evenly, we could not do so and so we tried a different method than the other schools. We made a separate classroom for Syrian students only. But I think this was not very*

*proper because we started coming across different problems about this issue. As an example, when compared with the intermediate grades of 6 and 7 where the number of Syrian students is less, we observed that their language developments are much slower. (SPS1)*

*Right now we have 14 classrooms only in 1st grade. We tried to equalize the number of Turkish and Syrian students in these 11 classrooms with relative success but when we opened 3 new classrooms after the recent registrations we had to make them all Syrian students because we would not be able to establish a balance there. And so the students in these classrooms lagged behind the others in both language learning and academic achievement. (SPP3)*

School principals put forth that they could not find any solution apart from opening new classrooms because the population balance would be disrupted if they distributed the Syrian students to all other branches. However, they also stated that they were faced with another problem when Syrian students lagged behind in learning Turkish.

### Enrollment Hinterland Problem at Schools

The participants were asked, "Do you experience problems at your school related with the enrollment of Syrian students?". Almost all of the participants stated that the Enrollment Zone application used during the enrollment of Turkish students includes some errors and that they experience problems because of this. The opinions of some of the participants on this issue are presented below:

*Our Directorate [MEM] stated that we should enroll everyone who applies. We did so but as I told you there were problems. Because of the overpopulation of Syrian students at nearby schools. But some schools have very few students because they do not enroll [due to obstacles put in place by their own school administrations]. (SPP5)*

*...we had the problem of hinterland that is enrollment zone issue at our school. At first, it was not a problem for Syrians because they could enroll at any school they want... why has this child come to us walking all that way. The school over there has told him that it is full. (SPP10)*

The participants stated that the overpopulation at their schools is because some of the schools do not enroll the Syrian students. The student who cannot enroll at these schools then goes to other schools which do not create any problems during enrollment. They have stated that this is the reason for the immense overpopulation of Syrian students at some schools. There is no consensus on the applied practices among schools with regard to this issue. While one of the schools tries to overcome the enrollment problem, the other school has isolated itself from this issue. Whereas the school principal who tries to solve the issue is faced with a different problem due to the increase of student population. It attracts attention that there is a lack of a clear practice and follow-up policy regarding enrollment zone and enrollment conditions.

### Opinions on the Solution of the Enrollment Hinterland Issues

Since all participants perceived the concept of enrollment as a hinterland that is an enrollment zone issue, they were asked, "How do you overcome the Enrollment Zone (Hinterland) issue that you are faced with? Are you successful with these solution methods?" Opinions of some of the participants are provided below:

*...what can we do? I do not think this is the solution to balance the Syrian student population. I mean it is not a solution to open up new classrooms at Turkish schools and to increase the student population in the classrooms from 30 to 50. I think new schools should be opened where Turkish and Syrian students are educated together but with more balanced numbers. (SPP4)*

*UNICEF or various other institutions provide relocation aids. These overpopulations can be shifted to other schools. Because the number of Syrian students is very low at some schools. I even think that these problems can be overcome by narrowing down the hinterland and shifting the students. (SPP3)*

It can be observed when participant opinions are examined that they cannot find a solution at the school level for this problem. As can be seen from the statements of school principals, this solution can be overcome through new practices to be developed by policymakers. All participants agree that this problem may be overcome by shifting the Syrian student overpopulation to other schools with a lower Syrian student population.

### Problems of Cultural Cohesion Among the Parents

The participants were asked, "Did you experience any cultural issues between the parents of the Syrian and Turkish students?" To which some of the participants responded as follows:

*There is a general reaction against the Syrians among the Turkish parents. At first, when the school started our Turkish parents did not want their children to be educated together with Syrian students. This caused a major issue. (SPP2)*

*...not ethnicity related but at first some Turkish parents said especially during the enrollment period, 'I do not want my student to be educated together with a Syrian student.' (SPP10)*

The participants put forth that even though at first there were no ethnicity related reactions among the Turkish parents with regard to the education of students together, they especially received reactions from Turkish parents and experienced administrative problems as a result. Similarly, Harunoğulları and Cengiz (2015) expressed in their study that a certain amount of time should pass in order for people from different cultures to come together and live in harmony and that it is inevitable for people with different cultures and languages to integrate as a result of immigrations leading to social changes and cultural cohesion.

### Opinions on Solving the Problems of Cultural Cohesion Among the Parents

The participants were asked, "What kind of methods did you implement for overcoming the problems of cultural cohesion among parents that you mentioned? Were they successful?" To which the participants responded as:

*...you do not want them at school but you are with them on the street. You rented your homes to them, you rented your store to them and you employed them as workers. So we said why not also at school? What would you feel if these things happened to you? and so we talked to the parents for long periods of time. They accepted afterwards and we did not experience any cultural or ethnic conflicts. (SPS8)*

*...we made the necessary defense. For example we asked them to display some empathy. We told them that these children need to be educated. That they would cause more problems to us again if they are outside and uneducated. We told them that we would live together. They were convinced and said, 'you are right'. (SPP10)*

As can be seen from the participant opinions, mostly discussions have been made with the parents in order to convince them. School principals have stated that they establish empathy by giving examples. What attracts attention here is that rather than a planned approach, individual initiatives are employed more frequently against the possible conflicts that may develop between the parents.

### Problems of Adaptation to School Culture, Discipline and Behavior

The school principals were asked, "Do Syrian students experience cohesion to school culture with regard to discipline and behavior?". Majority of the participants stated that the Syrian children have an inclination to violence and that even the games they play are related with fighting. The opinions of some of the participants on this issue are provided below:

*They have behavioral problems. I mean no matter how much you teach them they demolish the soap box in the toilets spilling the soap around. So sometimes you cannot understand what they are doing. We call in their parents and explain the situation to them. Useless, we could not find a solution. They are very ill-tempered, they fight a lot and they are aggressive. (SPP5)*

*...they display violent behaviors when playing games. One hits the other one and is hit in return. They play as they are fighting or they are quite bad at harming the school or using the teaching equipment. (SPP9)*

As a continuation of the question, the participants were asked, "What do you think is the underlying cause of such behavior problems of the students?" The opinions of one of the school principals on this issue are as such:

*I think these negativities are due to the fact that they are coming from a war zone, that there are many children in the families and so children are not valued as much, just like the approach we had 20 years ago, 'here is the child, do what you want with it' now they have the same approach. We examine through our guidance teacher*

*whether there is any violence in the families and we see that it is also quite frequent. We can see that the fathers resort to violence more which has negative reflections on the children. We also have a lot of orphaned children. I mean children who have lost their fathers during the civil war in Syria, there are about 40-45 such students. (SPP9)*

It was observed when the expressions of the participants were examined that majority stated because the children come from a war zone and because there are a lot of children in the households their desires and needs cannot be met and that some children have lost their mothers or fathers during the war or that there is domestic violence in the household leading to behavioral problems.

### **Methods Applied for Overcoming the School Culture Cohesion of Syrian Students**

The question of, "What are the methods you are implementing in order to overcome the problems related with the cohesion of Syrian students to school culture?" was directed to the participants to which they responded as follows:

*We are trying to overcome this issue through discussions with the families, we emphasize this in the classrooms and at school. (SPS7)*

*We call in their parents and try to overcome the problem through communication. We also contact them by phone and try to establish discipline in this manner. However, lack of discipline and obedience to the rules in general are still ongoing. (SPS1)*

It was observed when the expressions were examined that majority of the school principals stated with regard to the problems encountered that they contact the parents and tell them about the problem and that they carry out guidance activities with the students. The participants also stated that these problems are still ongoing despite all the measures taken and that they are trying to overcome these issues by continuing the guidance activities.

### **Academic Achievement Problem**

The participants were asked, "Do you experience academic achievement problems in classrooms with high Syrian student population?" to which majority of the participants stated that academic achievement is low for Syrian students because learning Turkish is a slow process leading to problems in understanding what they hear during classes. It has been put forth that the low academic achievement leads to failures in reaching the desired acquisitions in the planned amount of time and that the Turkish students in the same classroom are also affected from this and thus lag behind in the curriculum. The opinions on this issue are presented below:

*...we had to impede the Turkish children when we were trying to teach the Syrian children Turkish because they are all in the same classroom. So our Turkish students lagged behind in the curriculum. A striking example, I have been a teacher for the past 10 years and [a teacher working at the school] came to my room and started*

*crying. [As he cried] He stated his feelings by saying, "I feel remorse, I cannot give full academic achievement to these Syrian children. I focus more on Turkish children and so the Syrian students lag behind. When I do the opposite then the Turkish students lag behind and I experience the same problems. (SPP2)*

*...the classrooms are mixed, that is there are both Syrian and Turkish students so when they lag behind others are also affected. That is why 40-45 of our Turkish students preferred to be transferred to another school. (SPS7)*

Similar to the opinions of the participants, Taştan and Çelik (2017) conducted a study as a result of which it was reported that Syrian students who will start the 1st, 5th and 9th grades should enroll at state schools within the scope of compulsory education thus leading to problems related with teaching Turkish. Syrian students placed in mixed classrooms with either weak Turkish levels or with no knowledge of Turkish have to struggle simultaneously in two different tracks of learning. On the one hand they have to learn Turkish while on the other hand they are faced with the difficulties of learning courses such as life sciences, mathematics, physics, history which are part of the curriculum. It was observed that the assumption of, "The Syrian students will surely learn Turkish over time when they are mixed in with the Turkish students in the same classroom" did not work for 5th and 9th grade classrooms. Syrian students fail to keep track of the course content while they are struggling with learning Turkish. As a result, in some cases this may lead to isolation. Şimşir and Dilmaç (2018) carried out a study as a result of which they reported that the academic problems encountered by foreign students are failure to understand the course, literacy problems, not completing the homework, lack of attention towards the course and curriculum differences while the academic problems encountered by Turkish students are related with disruption in the flow of the courses, distraction during classes and academic level differences.

### **Opinions on the Solutions of Academic Achievement Problem**

The participants were asked about their opinions on how to solve the academic achievement problem. The opinions of the participant were as follows:

*The weight of this problem can only decrease or be eliminated when Syrian students overcome their language problems. In addition, the number of Syrian students should also decrease. (SPS7)*

*...I am quite pessimistic about this issue. How can it be, the number of Syrians increases every day and so there is no balance at schools. We have to teach the language to Syrian children. Perhaps this should be our priority. And for this we have to open up new language courses. We are already late, this problem should either be resolved now or both these children (Syrians) and our students will sink deeper. (SPS8)*

It was observed when the participant opinions were examined that the primary suggestion for overcoming this problem is related with the Syrian students learning the language and overcoming their problems related with comprehension.

Hence, it is indicated by the school principals that opening new and effective language courses may be an option for overcoming this problem.

### Financing Issues at Schools

The participants were asked, "Did you experience resource problems when the number of Syrian students at your school increased?". All of the participants stated that they had no allowance beforehand and that they had difficulties and now that the situation is even more critical with the increase in the number of students and that they cannot receive the required support and aid from the Directorate of National Education. The opinions of some of the participants on this issue are presented below:

*...we already had problems about this issue beforehand. And now the needs increased even further when Syrian students came. We experience difficulties in finding access to resources. We were told that the Ministry of National Education will help us but there is nothing yet.* (SPS7)

*As you know at the beginning of every year the schools are given a certain allocation with regard to stationary and cleaning supply requirement. We received this allocation but they were not enough when the number of students increased suddenly.* (SPP10)

The school principals stated that they experienced problems due to the lack of an autonomous budget of their own when the Syrian student population was not high at their schools. This has become an even more major issue with the enrollment of Syrian students and the need has increased even further with the enrollment of Syrian students especially regarding stationary and cleaning supplies. The participants stated that they cannot find any resources despite the increase of financial needs and that the Directorates of National Education either do not provide economic support at all or provide a limited support.

### Opinions on Overcoming the Financing Problem

The participants were asked, "So, how did you overcome the problem of finding resources to continue the activities of your school?". The participant opinions on this question were as follows:

*We receive very meager support within the scope of the PICTES project. We could barely finish 1 month if we were to use only the support provided by the Ministry of National Education. And so we end up meeting our own demands. We use the finances from the parent-teacher association accounts.* (SPP4)

*...since our school is used as a TEC in the afternoon, we can get some supplies as a result. We sometimes have to use our own resources or the resources of the parent-teacher association. And sometimes we join in with our own labor. As an example we will paint the school garden ourselves this weekend.* (SPP5)

*We receive support from UNICEF. We have no problems but I cannot say that it is enough. We founded the School Parent-Teacher Association but it is not active. I mean*

*we cannot run the school as a Turkish school. Meeting participation is generally low.* (SPP9)

The participants have indicated that they are trying to overcome the financing issues at their schools through the Parent-Teacher associations and projects related with the integration of Syrian students. They stated that they sometimes meet their own needs through laboring themselves when these options remain insufficient. Whereas the participant coded as SPP9 said that he cannot run the Parent-Teacher Association due to the fact that all his students are Syrian students and the lack of sufficient parent interest. When all these are taken into consideration, even though the school principals strive to overcome the financing issue, there seems to be no other effective solution other than the central government providing autonomous and sufficient budgets to the schools. However, it should be noted at this point that the schools have financing problems related with additional requirements as well. Main financing options related with personnel expenses and investment costs are met by the public budget. There is financing for the small current requirements of the schools. However, the fact that this requirement is not met centrally through a need based rational formula enabling the schools to make autonomous payments leads to the principals to consider financing as a problem.

### Personnel Requirement and Solution Suggestions

The participants were asked, "Are you experience problems at your school related with lack of personnel? If you do, how do you overcome this problem and what would be your suggestion to overcome this issue? The opinions of the participants on this subject are presented below:

*Of course, we are due to the increase in the number of students. For instance, we have no service attendant this year and there was no İŞKUR (temporary 9 or 6 month employee) employment this year as well. So we have problems about cleaning. We try to overcome the teacher requirement issue through waged assignments. Unfortunately, teachers do not like this because it is temporary. And sometimes they quit because they are fed up with the job. So both teacher and service attendant staff should be permanent, it would be more efficient.* (SPS1)

*Of course, we are experiencing personnel problems. As an example, we have many waged teachers at my school and we cannot ensure that they will continue working. Sometimes they suddenly quit and go which leads to problems about the education of the children.* (SPP2)

*We are and we especially need cleaning personnel. Those that are present cannot keep up with the job at hand. Some of the teachers are waged. They are devoted but temporary. Attendance (both teacher and student) is affected when they go. Teachers on permanent staff would be better.* (SPP5)

All participants put forth that the personnel requirement at their schools increased even further when Syrian students started their education. They indicated that they especially struggle with cleaning personnel related with cleaning, maintenance and repair services due to the increase in the



number of students. In addition, they also emphasized that the teacher requirement is tried to be overcome with waged teachers which leads to gaps in education because these teachers are appointed from every branch and they have attendance issues. The school principals indicated that teachers should be appointed as permanent staff members instead of as waged workers. They also set forth that service personnel employment cannot also be overcome with temporary appointments and that working with workers on permanent staff will be more efficient. The participant coded SPP4 also indicated in addition to the other requirements that they also need a principal.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Language is the biggest issue in the education of Syrian students. Hence, education which is mostly related with communication is significantly affected from the language problem. Many studies in the literature (Cin, 2018; Erdem, 2017; Levent & Çayak, 2017; Kiremit et al., 2018; Mercan Uzun & Bütün, 2016; Sarier, 2020; Sarıtaş et al., 2016; Tosun et al., 2018) one of the difficulties encountered in the refugee students studying in Turkey and perhaps seen as the most important of the language problem. In meta-synthesis study by Sarier (2020), it was concluded that refugee students had communication problems due to language problem, could not express themselves, had difficulty learning language, and resisted learning. This is observed as a multidimensional communication problem involving student-teacher, student-student, and parent-principal. Studies in the literature (Aykırı, 2017; Sarıtaş et al., 2016) revealed that Syrian parents also had difficulties in communicating due to language differences and parents were indifferent. It has been observed that the language and communication problems experienced by the students are mostly related with the fact that Syrian students do not need Turkish because of the large number of Syrian students at schools and that they communicate among each other's in groups. In addition, late responses of policy makers with regard to integration emerge as one of the factors preventing the resolving of the problem. The large population of Syrian students at schools attracts attention as another factor leading to problems. Even though the Directorate of National Education set the Syrian student quota at schools as 30 % and requested the school principals to act accordingly, the fact that Syrian students enrolled at the schools they want prevented the actualization of this quota. In addition, it can also be considered as a conflicting attitude by the MoNE to place a quota and to state that Syrians can enroll at any school they desire. It can be interpreted that it has not been possible to establish a relationship between the policy and implementation and that the results have not been followed up. The "child translator" practice for overcoming the language problem in the classrooms is significant. Even though it is a temporary solution, it is understood that it has enabled the resolution of an important issue in practice. Intermediation in the classroom by a student who knows both Turkish and Syrian Arabic may have significant contributions such as developing empathy among the students, improving language skills and contributions to

social life. The fact that child translators are used not only in teacher-student communication but also in teacher-parent communication is another clue regarding the effectiveness of the method. On the other hand, child translators should not be burdened with this responsibility. In addition, it can be said that there should be effective institutionalized policies to solve the language problem.

The fact that enrollment zones have not been taken into consideration during the enrollment of Syrian students has led to an increase in population at some schools. Some school principals do not accept enrollment using the quota in place for Syrian students as an excuse. It is observed clearly that these school principals act against the orders of authorities by taking initiative. Because while they have been able to isolate their own schools from Syrian students, such behaviors have led to a web of problems in other schools. As a result, the population of Syrian students has increased at certain schools and indeed it has reached 100% at one of the schools included in the study.

Various individual events have taken place between the Turkish-Syrian parents following the enrollment of Syrian students to state schools but an ethnicity conflict has not been the underlying reason of these incidents. The problems between the parents have generally been observed to be related with cultural disharmony, difference in hygiene understanding among the students and injustice related with the distribution of help to the students. These superficial differences have led to various problems experienced in relation with the students adapting to the school culture. These problems have been determined to emerge as behavioral problems which are thought to be related with the impact of the trauma since they came from a war zone, being subject to domestic violence and living with a crowded family resulting in lack of attention. Hence, the implementation of psychological programs can be emphasized in order to reduce the impacts of the traumas experienced by refugee students.

Syrian students have started their regular education with the curriculum of the MoNE, as there is no special curriculum for refugee education (Aydın & Kaya, 2019; Demir Başaran, 2020; Erdem, 2017; Ereş, 2016; Kardeş & Akman, 2018; Yavuz & Mızrak, 2016). When these students enroll in public schools, teachers do not adapt the course content following these students' needs and interests. Syrian students have started their education in accordance with the MoNE curriculum following their enrollment to state schools. It is observed that majority of these students have come from TECs who have not yet overcome the language and the resulting comprehension issues. Students have started receiving Turkish courses while these problems were ongoing thereby facing academic failure in measurement and assessment stages. This has led to a lack of interest towards the lessons. The Syrian students who have strayed away from the lessons have started causing distractions at classrooms. Decrease in the academic achievements of Turkish students is also observed since the classroom environment is not suited for teaching. This has led to a decrease in general academic achievement at schools. In the study of Sakız (2016), it was stated that most of the school administrators support the

education of immigrant children in separated environments, disrupt the flow of their schools and have negative attitudes towards their education in public schools.

It is known that primary schools experienced financial problems due to the lack of sufficient resource allocation from the central budget for meeting their small expenses (repair, maintenance etc.). The increase in capacity following the enrollment of Syrian students has further deepened this problem. School principals seeking additional budgets have resorted to using the Parent-Teacher Associations more effectively. Even though partial financing was found as a result, it was observed that the funds were still insufficient. As a matter of fact, Parent-Teacher Association could not even be put into practice at the school consisting fully of Syrian students. Even though it is indicated that aids from international institutions are distributed to the schools from time to time within the scope of various projects through Directorates of National Education, it can be understood that the authorities do not act in a just manner when distributing these resources. Relations between the authorities and school principals through individual affiliations or through unions are considered to be the underlying reason for this unfair distribution.

The need for teachers, service and technical personnel has also increased following the increase of the number of students at schools. The employment of temporary, waged and contracted personnel for overcoming this problem has failed to resolve the issue and has even further intensified it. Because temporary and waged personnel can quit their jobs whenever they want, it has been observed that school principals have experienced problems related especially to lesson integrity and attendance. Because employees in temporary status are devoid of any work security that has an impact on their loyalty to the institution, they can easily give up when they are faced with problems. Therefore, it is possible to state that it is required as an important policy to implement personnel regimes that will enable those working in the education of refugee students to have job security.

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