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Perceptions of Social Workers in the School Social Work Project: The Need for Multicultural Education

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Multicultural education is the key to the development process of culture of living together, emphasising human rights. In the legal sense, the study underlines the importance of school social work practices in terms of ensuring Syrian children to have unrestricted access to education in addition to providing them with equal opportunity in education. In the light of those practices, the motivation of the study is to discover social work academics' perceptions of the path to multicultural education in Turkey and recommendations on how to integrate it into the current educational structure. For this purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten social workers who took part in the "School Social Work Project". The education structure in Turkey, the attitude towards Syrians, the problems experienced by Syrian individuals and their perspectives on education are summarized as risk factors that affect the participation of Syrian children in education. This study emphasises the importance of establishing cooperation with teachers and non-governmental organisations. With this cooperation, it seems possible to develop multicultural education by integrating the human focus of social work. Therefore, the use of development resources and social work resources together in the context of school social work practices will provide the change that will show the way to multicultural education. The findings point to recommendations such as ensuring family-teacher interaction, adding classes on culture of living together, and integrating non-governmental organisations systematically in the process of multicultural education.

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Introduction

Portera (2011) emphasises that education is an effective tool not only to maintain ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity but also to ensure equality and intercultural understanding and suggests that investment should be made in education to nurture and strengthen democratic culture in society through the transfer of values such as human rights, social cohesion and intercultural understanding. Chakravarty (2001) indicates that education should be culture-specific to reach every child and be inclusive enough to teach the value of diversity. In general, multicultural education refers to educational efforts that seek to instill more positive values about human pluralism and develop the learning potential of people (Mitchell & Salsbury, 1999). Within this context, it involves teaching individuals the skills necessary to transcend ethnic and cultural boundaries, to respect and understand others who are different (Totoricaguena, 2008).

Addressing multicultural education's complex and versatile nature, Banks (1993) lists five dimensions of multicultural education: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. Content integration requires teachers to use examples from various cultures to demonstrate their respective basic educational concepts, principles, generalisations and theories. The knowledge construction process helps them understand how implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and prejudices within a discipline are constructed and how these are influenced by racial, ethnic, and social-class differences of individuals and groups. Prejudice reduction, as another dimension of multicultural education, focuses on teaching methods and materials that can help students develop democratic attitudes and values, taking into account the characteristics of their racial (or other) attitudes. Equity pedagogy involves teachers' techniques and various teaching styles that improve students' academic success from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups. Empowering school culture and social structure refers to restructuring the school culture and organisation, which must be examined to create a school culture that empowers students with differences. Unlike the study by Banks et al. (1993), Penny et al. (2000) worked on the principles to be followed in multicultural education. One of those principles is the need to analyse verbal and non-verbal communication patterns between students and teachers to increase student participation in the learning process in multicultural education. Another principle is identifying and evaluating students' learning styles and teachers' teaching styles to develop effective teaching strategies. Other principles underscore the need to teach students critical thinking in multicultural education, understand the family culture in society, and use the community as a source of benefit (Sharma, 2007).

Multicultural education points to a process that permeates all aspects of school practice, policy, and organisation in maximising each student's academic achievement. It assists students in developing a positive self-concept by providing information about the histories and cultures of diverse groups. It prepares all students to work actively toward structural equality in organisations and institutions by providing the knowledge, dispositions, and skills to redistribute power and income among diverse groups (The National Association for Multicultural Education, 2021). When considered in terms of human rights, social justice, and social welfare as the basic components of social work, multicultural education stands out with an anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory attitude. In this sense, it is the basis of social cohesion to build mutual trust between people in society, strengthen social networks and emphasise solidarity and collective consciousness. On the assumption that children's education is a key to ensuring social cohesion, it is concluded that this can be achieved by instilling the culture of living together in children within the school environment.

The data as of 21.04.2022 of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) shows the number of foreigners with residence permit is 1.415.202 in Turkey. Moreover, as of the end of 2021, 29.256 individuals have applied for international protection in Turkey. Considering this picture as a relatively low number of individuals, 3.762.385 Syrian under temporary protection live in Turkey today (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2022). There is a significant number of children of educational age in this population. According to Ministry of National Education (MNE), as of January 2022, the population of foreign nationals within school age (5-17) is 1.365.884. The Ministry of National Education indicates that 82,3% of these children are Syrian (1.124.353) (The Ministry of National Education, 2022). These data convey that Syrian children are an essential study group in order to develop the idea of multicultural education in terms of diversities.

Migration and displacement, which are the contexts of spatial cleavage, create new living spaces and bring problems related to education processes such as non-schooling or adaptation issues at school (Gencer & Karagoz, 2016). Syrian children frequently encounter problems such as not being able to adapt to the Turkish education system and schools, especially in subjects such as language, curriculum, and culture, and being disconnected from the education processes (school dropout) in the education-teaching processes (Gencer, 2017a).

According to Gencer (2019a), children who are cut off from the education system due to poverty or cultural characteristics during those processes, or who cannot go to school, are likely to be exposed to exclusion, discrimination, poverty, and they sustain these across generations. It is necessary to enhance multidisciplinary perspectives on various social work practices to prevent social risks in this differentiated social structure. Education plays an effective role in preventing social conflicts and dissolutions that may be encountered in a multicultural social structure, ensuring social cohesion, integration, and social peace. School social work would act as a bridge between the educational structure and social cohesion. In Turkey, albeit partially, school social work and multiculturalism have been integrated with national education policies. However, the study by Watter et al. (2020), Dolapcioglu & Bolat (2019), Gezer (2019), Cicha & Krejci (2016), Joseph et al. (2012) indicate there is a need to explore and predict the views of direct practitioners on these two key points.

In this context, our aim is to develop suggestions on multicultural education from the perspective of school social workers. The following research questions will be answered through the current study:

RQ1. How are the views of the social workers working in the school social work project on the multicultural education structure?

RQ2. How are the opinions of the social workers working in the school social work project on the connection between multicultural education and social cohesion?

RQ3. How are the views of social workers working in the school social work project on the role of social work in multicultural education?

Methodology

Design and participants

The research was conducted using a descriptive phenomenological research design (Aksan-Eroglu & Ekiz-Ataser, 2018; Creswell, 2016; Ersoy, 2019) focusing on the participants'



experiences in conformity with the qualitative research procedure in which the experiences and perceptions of the participants are described. In compliance with the purposive sampling method, the research participants were selected among social workers and senior students in social work who carried out their professional practices in the schools listed in the "School Social Work Project" scope. This project was carried out under a joint protocol between the Konya Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Services, Konya Provincial Directorate National Education, and Konya Governorship in the 2017-2018 academic year (Alptekin et al., 2019). This project started as the first school social work practice in Turkey, lasted for three years, and ended in 2020. Because Konya is the ninth province in Turkey that hosts the highest number of Syrian individuals and as mentioned before, a predominant portion of Syrian individuals are children, we have often worked with Syrian children within this project's scope.

Six social workers working in the project and four social work students (four male, six female) who performed their professional practices in the schools within the project's scope agreed to participate in the study. Two social workers have master's degrees, and one has a doctoral degree in the social work field. In the project's scope, six of the participants worked at the secondary school level, while one participant worked only at the high school level, one only at the primary school level, and two at both secondary and primary school levels. At the beginning of the study, the information about all participants was obtained through The Turkish Association of Social Workers (SHUDER) Konya Branch Office. Before the individual interviews, the researchers contacted the participants by phone and informed them about the topic of the study; the participants were asked to fill out the voluntary participation form if they agreed to participate in the study. This form stated that written and audio recordings would be taken during face-to-face interviews, and video and audio recordings would also be taken through the program during the interviews made over Zoom. Before starting the study, permission was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of KTO Karatay University with the decision numbered 2020/03/06-46409256-300.

Data Collection

The research data were obtained by semi-structured interview method. A question pool was created in light of national and international sources through a literature search on Taylor and Francis Online, DergiPark, National Thesis Center, Google Academic databases (Olcoñ, 2019; Fonseca et al., 2019; Uzunboylu & Altay, 2021; Damgaci & Aydin, 2017; Sezgin & Yolcu, 2016; Yilmaz, 2016; Lobb, 2012; Daniel, 2008). The form was examined by academics who have completed their doctorate education in social work and sociology and have studies on multiculturalism, and it was redesigned in line with reviews. Some examples to questions include the following: "How do you evaluate the roles and effects of teachers and school administration on the educational process within the multicultural structure?",

"If you were asked to teach a group of students by enabling them to study together with different cultures and improving their social cohesion, what kind of path would you follow? Could you clarify by drawing the stages?",

"What social work approaches did you use as a guide in shaping your plan or work while working with Syrian children? In what way did you use those approaches?".

Seventeen open-ended questions were used in the interviews, which focused on school social work practices in shaping the multicultural educational structure and the contribution of those practices to social cohesion. The participants were interviewed via Zoom videoconference platform; the duration of each interview was between 45-90 minutes.

Data Analysis

The recordings obtained through Zoom were transcribed in Word software. The data were analysed using content analysis. The voluminous data obtained from the interviews were reduced to concepts and themes (Patton, 2018). The coding process was carried out independently by the researchers by using the open coding process, which was initially created with 79 codes. Views on each coding were shared, and a total of 28 codes were determined, concentrating on the process of creating themes. Some of the codes that emerged can be listed as follows: “family influence”, “language barrier”, “role of children in social cohesion”, “the importance of cooperation”. Subsequently, to carry out participant and peer review, the findings were shared with some participants and faculty members who have studies on qualitative research and multicultural education (Alaee et al., 2015). At the end of the process, four main themes prevailed in the research, and eleven sub-themes were created under these main themes to add depth to the subject. The Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) checklist (Tong et al., 2007) was used as a guide in all processes of establishing qualitative research procedures, obtaining, and reporting data.

Findings

Views on Multiculturalism and Syrian Children

Educational Problems of Syrian Children

Syrian children experience problems in the school environment can be expressed as language barrier, peer bullying, and marginalization. Although each factor that causes Syrian children to leave the school environment is dominant, the intertwined structure of these factors that reveals the cause-effect relationship is also mentioned. While the language barrier points to the lack of communication due to not knowing Turkish, it also describes the verbal expressions used for stigmatization due to the ethnic characteristics of the children.

It was also emphasised that the children’s language barrier has various consequences regarding discrimination (including exclusion), cultural labelling as “Syrian kids”, grouping and peer victimisation. Moreover, all participants stated that the children’s limited Turkish language proficiency hurts their self-confidence and academic achievement. They also mentioned that bullying and violent attitudes and behaviours toward their peers (i.e., maladaptive behaviours in the school environment) are mostly due to their inability to express themselves clearly. Noting that grouping in the school environment is associated with the language barrier, one of the participants reported that if the number of Syrian children is high in the classroom environment, labelling and exclusion are directed from the Syrian children to the Turkish children. For example:

... when we visited a few classrooms and asked questions, they just remained silent and smiled. What the children did in response to this situation was to simply label the group, saying ‘Teacher, they can’t speak to you’... So, Syrian children think they are not wanted, and they begin to band together... (P4)

From a different point of view, the marginalising speech in families is based on the fact that they lack command of the language spoken by the other community, which prevents effective communication and causes them to attribute different meanings. For example:



Firstly, and most importantly, we need to underline the language barrier. The second factor is social, that is, peer victimisation... whatever the child sees at home is what they mostly speak about. They also suspect that the others use bad language against them... (P3)

Regarding the language barrier, which is challenging for children and teachers and social workers during the educational process, a different conclusion was reached through the interviews conducted via an interpreter. This dimension of the language barrier that affects children more indirectly in terms of meeting needs and problems, although not directly as much as peer bullying and marginalization, is that teachers and social workers do not have a good command of the Arabic language. For instance:

... sometimes we experience cases like, for example, when the child makes a long, detailed statement, after which the interpreter simply reports it like 'he says he lost his mother.' So, you know, this would not be considered as a healthy conversation... We do everything by talking, and everything is canceled because of our interventions... There are mistakes in the meeting... They may ask leading questions... (P7)

The fact that the child, marginalized by her/his peers due to the language barrier, tries to defend herself again by resorting to bullying indicates the effect of the environment in which she/he grew up. Regarding children exposed to punishment, as a reflection of the oppressive parenting practices in their respective family environments, it was predicted that such children may lose their ability to defend themselves against injustices or peer bullying in the school environment as they are afraid of displaying inappropriate behaviours. In this regard, one participant stated the following:

... As I have observed in most of the families I have worked with, the Syrian family discipline involves too much punishment. Therefore, the children have a fear of being punished, especially at school. (P5)

The Effect of Families' Approach on Education

Some of the participants also emphasised that such attitudes are due to their cultural background. For instance:

... I have observed this in my cases, that is, there are children who do not continue their education as Syrian families do not have enough interest in their education...(P2)

Moreover, it was reported that girls are not necessarily expected to continue their education, which is partly due to the intergenerational transfer. There was also a concern among the families that their girls are vulnerable to certain dangers outside the home. Regarding the effect of families on school absenteeism, it was reported that boys are forced to work due to financial constraints and unsatisfied needs in their households. Conversely, there was a great emphasis on social work practices and ensuring school attendance and assisting families in meeting their needs according to the child's best interests.

... Those in Aleppo are primarily seasonal workers and families who make a living from agriculture, and they do not attend much education, regardless of whether they are men or women. Families could not make sense of this, especially when it came to girls' attendance at school. (P1)

Will Ayse come from school at eight o'clock in the evening, because she can stay for the school course, but she cannot stay out until very late. This is a girl... (boy) will go to work

if the family's economic situation is bad, the child is working on the weekend, (for the boy) such difficulties arise this time. (P9)

The perceptions of Turkish families towards Syrian children, as well as the view of Syrian children's families towards education, are called the factors that cause these children to move away from education life. Meanwhile, the statements regarding families that may be manipulative and oppressive towards their children and school management indicate that the infrastructure has yet to be provided for a multicultural society. For example:

... families usually do not want their children to be educated with Syrian children, I mean Turkish families... “my child will not be educated together with them”, they say. “Let’s take them to a different class or a different school...”. When there is such pressure coming from families, the school administration will naturally avoid educating them together. (P5)

In this case, families who believe that it is a risk to educate their children with Syrian children in the same environment are, in fact, indirectly supporting discrimination in education. For instance:

...The family seems to be outside of the school... But, in fact, they are too involved in it. For example, there are children labeling others in primary school. As a result, they will not get along but fight, you know what I mean... But the meanings they attribute to this issue are actually those that are carried from their homes... (P9)

The Key to a Multicultural Society: The Perception of Inclusion and Social Work

Based on their own experiences, social workers expressed their opinions that Turkey's current culturally diverse dynamic can provide benefits and convenience for a multicultural society structure. Additionally, the perception of “guests” (another discourse from the social and political perspectives) was reflected in the education system as quick decisions rather than permanent changes or policies.

... Maybe the advantage for Turkey, that is, the other side of the coin, is that we are people of the same geography. Our coexistence in a religious context will perhaps accelerate our process in this cultural context. (P7)

Some families may also be oppressive toward their children for various reasons such as psychosocial effects due to warfare, unhealed traumas, feelings of exclusion from society, cultural backgrounds and the high number of children in their households. Thus, the role of social workers in facilitating compliance comes to the forefront:

... to help them adapt to this society. On the other hand, there is this aspect: Such adaptation does not necessarily have to make them lose their own culture but help them preserve their culture in certain contexts as well as assist them in their efforts to adapt to this new life. (P7)

In addition, all participants reported that the path to adaptation and a multicultural social structure is in parallel to the role of social work based on anti-oppression and anti-discrimination, equality, justice and human rights, and the need to ensure that children receive education within a multicultural structure. Some participants also believed that creating a school environment in which children are allowed to develop and interact with others can play an important role in the perception of inclusion. For example:



... They can play games together. They may fight but will make up and get along five minutes later. However, the media has an influence and we adults do not let the kids resolve their problems on their own... Maybe if we did, then such problems would not occur... (P7)

Strengths of Syrian Children

Regarding language learning and social adaptation, it was observed that Syrian children who adopt the changing environmental conditions easier and faster than adults could indirectly help their families in the social adaptation process. For example:

... as fifth graders are much younger than seventh and eighth graders, they are much more representative of the childhood stage. Thus, it is easier for them to participate in the training. They are not as resistant to education and teachers as other adolescents, or to school discipline. They do not show resistance. This is their strength.... (P1)

One of the participants stated that Syrian children could express themselves through activities that do not rely on language, while another participant reported that games among the children are effective for developing their assertive skills. For instance:

I think their biggest strengths are sports activities. How can I explain... for example, when they participate in non-verbal activities, such as music, children are more successful since they are able to speak the 'same language' with their friends... (P7)

The Path to Multicultural Education

A Trial & Error Attempt: Separate classrooms? Same classroom?

Based on the participants' statements, the educational processes of Syrian children are implemented by a trial-and-error method rather than being planned and systematically integrated into national education policies. One of the methods is to separate the classes for the Syrian children, resulting in further segregation from the Turkish children. Conversely, some participants believed that the first group of Syrian children who started their education after settling in Turkey were separated because the aim was to facilitate their cohesion rather than cause their exclusion. Moreover, the fact that the timing of the classes and breaks for the Syrian children (created by the Temporary Education Centre (GEM), a platform in which Syrian children can take classes both in their mother tongue and Turkish language) differ from those for the other children has deepened the exclusionary attitude towards them. For example:

... These groups of children have never seen each other and thus, they are unfamiliar with each other... One of my students said, 'Teacher, I feel like I'm not liked in my school.' I asked, 'What makes you think like that?' The student replied, 'They put me in a different class.'... (P5)

In addition to the foregoing statements, it was pointed out that, in classroom arrangements, it is important to ensure a balance in the number of children included in different cultural groups, to make sure that they are educated together, and to prevent any imbalance in the number of children from a particular cultural group. For instance:

... If there are two Syrian children (in a classroom) among 40 students, then these two may be ignored... this can be done more easily with smaller groups. (P7)

The feeling of Alienation in Education

One of the basic components of the education system in Turkey is the curriculum in the Turkish language. As previously emphasised under another sub-theme, language education can be accepted as an indicator, not only in terms of social cohesion but also the continuity of academic life. In this regard, one participant stated the following:

... The data of the police revealed... that the risk of juvenile delinquency has greatly increased for Syrian children. Children with such tendencies at such a young age will become a menace to society when they reach adulthood... (P7)

It was also noted that a study plan that conforms with the language skills of Syrian children and the level of education they received in their home country would help them become academically successful. For example:

The child has not received any education in Turkey. It is impossible to adapt that child when they start directly from 6th grade, 7th grade, and 9th grade. (P2)

... There are currently Quran and Arabic classes. The Syrian students top the list in the Quran and Arabic language courses. It is quite normal, but their performance in other courses, especially in science and mathematics, is way too low. They also have many problems keeping up with the Turkish classes. This is another problem... (P5)

Our education is not geared towards them... those who have not mastered the language, anyway, are not in a position to attempt competition at all. Could this be a zero-lead start? Yes, maybe for them. (P4)

Transition examinations, which are another component of the education system used for success ranking in Turkey (such as high school and university entrance exams), were reported as one of the main challenges for the Syrian children in their educational transition. In this regard, the participants criticised the current education system and emphasised that it also leads to inequality for the Turkish students. They further stated that the education system, based on competition, does not offer the same opportunities to prepare for these examinations in terms of classrooms, private lessons, computers, preparatory books, etc.

Since our Turkish students have been in this education system from the beginning, it may seem like a typical situation for them to take exams and questions and go to private teaching institutions. But frankly, I think that a Syrian student is not very much included in this education system, does not go to private teaching institutions, or goes to school to pass his class. (P2)

Currently, the system in Turkey does not have an entire competition in competition, but there is no equality of opportunity. Since there is no equal opportunity, there is no entire competition between our Syrian children and Turkish children under current conditions. (P7)

Teacher as a Stakeholder

It was also reported that the development of the emotions, thoughts, and behaviours that teachers display towards children, within a framework of close, supportive and engaged relationships, will positively affect the children, both in psycho-social and academic terms. For example:

... when teachers approach children professionally and treat them more gently, they will be able to convince the school administration to look at the subject from a different perspective, regardless of how apprehensively they may react at first... (P5)



Another indicator of the teachers' role as the primary stakeholders is understanding, monitoring, and supporting their students in their development. Additionally, their close observations can help them provide quick and easy responses, especially to the students with cohesion problems or different needs. In this regard, one participant stated the following:

... Since the children are their own students, the teachers can communicate with them more often and give them guidance, and they can solve verbal or behavioral problems more quickly as they are already informed about the cause of the children's negative verbal or behavioral reactions... (P4)

Moreover, the prominent roles of teachers include planning various activities to enable the children to build closer relationships and distribute tasks and responsibilities among them, taking into account the multicultural structure. For example:

... There was a student, for example, who was a fifth grader... this kid was not gaining weight. Soon, the teacher noticed this situation... Later, he called the father several times to arrange an appointment with him. The father did not attend the appointment, but later called us to ask for support. For example, one time, we visited a family in which the biological mother was not present, but the father had a new wife... we found out that the stepmother could not prepare breakfast for the children, and then we talked to the stepmother... (P1)

School Social Work within the Context of Multicultural Education

Professional Interventions

It was also observed that the social workers carried out their duties at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels in the scope of the School Social Work Project, which mainly included individual interviews and training groups. Additionally, it was reported that the individual-based practices with children mainly concentrated on problems in which socio-cultural aspects, such as school absenteeism, forced labour, teenage pregnancy, etc., are deeply felt. Based on the intervention plans for such problems, home visits were included to collaborate with the families and children and make precautionary decisions. In this regard, the participants highlighted that the decisions under the Child Protection Law No. 5395 further strengthened their interventions. Furthermore, the participants stated that home visits are an important tool in terms of working with Syrian families, especially for the families in which the number of children and the rate of school absenteeism is high. For example:

He is the only child in the family who goes to school. It was a large family whose elder children were unschooled... We cooperated with the mother and made a plan. So, the child was at school until the end of the year, at least until I left... (P9)

According to the participants, group-based practices with the families generally focus on child neglect and abuse. Such practices carried out with the children tend to prevent peer bullying, ensure social cohesion at school, foster friendships, and maintain effective communication. Based on a case-specific example by one participant, it was observed that group-based practices are performed as a result of the observations made within the scope of school social work:

Children were playing football in the backyard of the school. I saw that they had excluded the Syrian child from the game. When I asked them why they did that, they told me that

they didn't include him because he was a Syrian student. That was when I decided to carry out group work. (P6)

In this respect, several pieces of training were organised for Syrian families, including sessions on privacy education and activities to strengthen cohesion and training on teachers' immigrant rights. Separate studies were also carried out with teachers to identify the problems and needs of Syrian children, while educational groups and activities for children were implemented in such a way to support cohesion among the children and with their teachers. Moreover, there have been efforts to ensure that all school children become acquainted. Syrian children, who are marginalised in other respects, are empowered through responsibilities assigned during the activities and games. In particular, the following example demonstrates one of the techniques used to identify the children's educational problems:

... Yes, we asked our teachers to fill out certain questionnaires about the children's levels, needs, family structures, socioeconomic levels... Then, we attempted to identify educational problems concerning the children... (P4)

Facilitators

At the regional level, the joint studies with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which aimed to support social cohesion and meet the needs of the children and families, was considered the basic element of multicultural education and social structure. Particularly for Konya, the NGOs primarily include the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) and the Turkish Red Crescent Community Center. In this regard, one of the participants stressed that the cooperation between NGOs and school social work shows that such organisations and different fields of social work (e.g., social work with immigrants and forensic social work) can coalesce. For instance:

... Support mechanisms... I have referred to non-governmental organisations so frequently... I mean, I benefited so much from their services that they were probably my most important support mechanism while working with foreign students. I worked in person with my colleagues... i.e. with ASAM, the Turkish Red Crescent Community Center... (P9)

The participants also considered the school administration as another facilitator, due to its influence on the teachers and families in terms of providing the support, media and tools for the social work carried out with the Syrian children. Moreover, the participants mentioned the importance of interpreters, especially for the children and families who cannot speak Turkish. For example:

An interpreter is definitely essential if they (the children and families) cannot speak Turkish. So, an interpreter is absolutely as important as a social worker. And it is definitely crucial for the interpreter to have at least a glimpse of what social work is, and know what he/she has to say and how to say it... (P5)

Strengths/Contributions of Social Work

In relation to the functionality of multicultural education, the participants reported that social work primarily requires the skills of advocacy, empathy, language use and effective communication in maintaining conversations and building trust relationships (particularly with children). In terms of the value of social work, they acknowledged that its emphasis on human



rights and equality and its stance against oppression and discrimination play a key role in eliminating the exclusionary practices that the Syrian children and their families face in society school environment. For instance:

Empathy and equality. These are critically important for the Syrian children. They are very unhappy being here. This is what I observe. They are ignored. People use so much verbal violence... (P3)

As social workers... we do not discriminate on the basis of language, religion, race and gender. So, first of all, we are supposed to be objective in this sense... I feel like all I am talking about is communication and trust, but that's because I think these aspects are particularly important... (P2)

Finally, it was observed that the studies employed various approaches, including a task-based approach, an ecosystem approach, a feminist approach, a solution-based approach and an empowering approach. In the studies carried out with the children, these approaches were preferred by the social workers, particularly with the aim of engaging their social environment and families, understanding their internal dynamics, and improving their social functionality. In this regard, one participant stated the following:

I use the solution-oriented approach a lot... We had regular scheduled meetings. I used this approach in my work with the family and the mother. I also definitely use the empowering approach... The systems theory is a must. In addition, I used the anti-oppressive practice a lot, especially while working with primary school students... For example, I would start a discussion on immigrant children and then the family would come and start talking about it... (P9)

Recommendations

In this study, the participants addressed the school environment as a significant area for ensuring social cohesion. Within this framework, the aim is to achieve intergroup dynamics and discoveries by bringing children, families and teachers together with the organised activities in this environment.

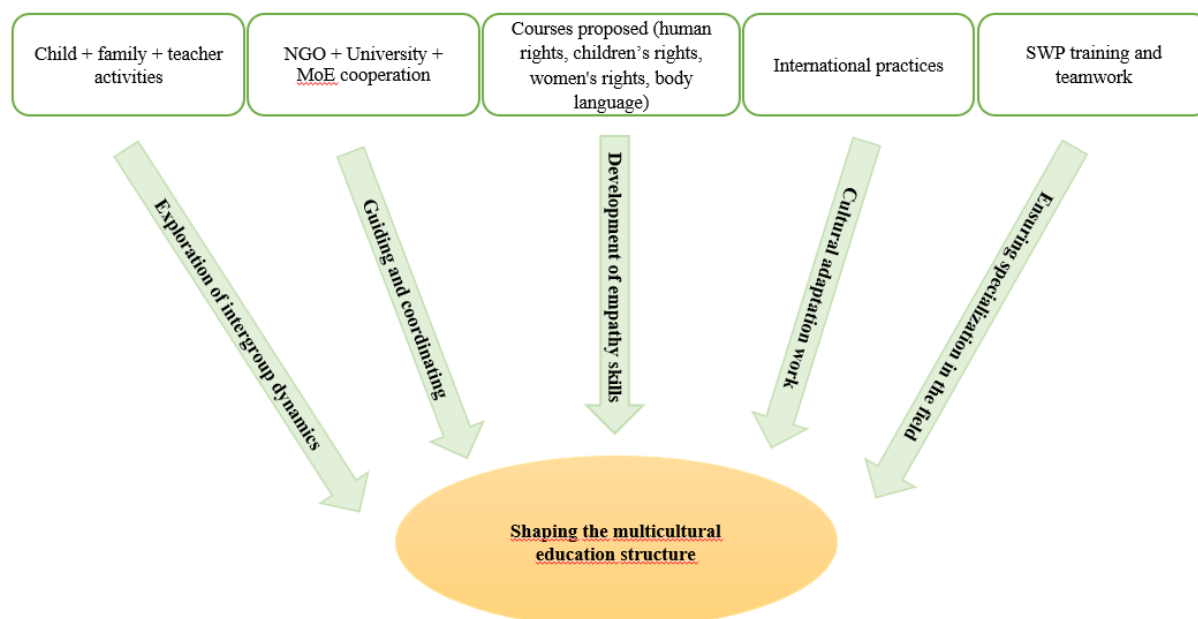


Figure 1. A Summary of Developmental Contributions of Participants' Recommendations

The participants, having mentioned that studies on social cohesion will remain insufficient if restricted to school environment, laid emphasis on the necessity to build a structure integrated with the education policies in Turkey. In this frame, there have been suggestions made by the participants that the Ministry of National Education, universities and NGOs should have guiding and coordinating roles. Given that child education is a key to the solution of numerous social problems, the suggestions are seen to include those regarding promotion of social cohesion not only through activities or case intervention processes and through the curriculum, which is among the tools of education itself. Additionally, there is an emphasis on the importance of providing training for teachers who are new to the profession or not familiar with working in schools where different cultural groups are concentrated (as well as all staff employed at the school). It is necessary to manage this process by structuring the scientific committees to establish the scientific background in this context.

... there should definitely be a course on subjects such as human rights, children's rights, women's rights.... (the course should teach them) that every individual is a human being, and being born in a different place or a different culture is not in one's own hands, not one's own choice, and therefore it is wrong to marginalise people on the basis of a concept that is not their own choice... (The course should address) multiculturalism or human rights and the concept of empathy, (and explain) how hard it feels like being unable to speak a language... (P7)

It is stressed that practical courses as well as theoretical courses will contribute to the development of interaction among children. The suggestions also include those addressing the need for courses that include communication, body language or various cultural activities that can be integrated with games, which are mainly used for interaction by children. It is described with examples that particularly the courses that are based on cultural activities and focused on learning the lifestyles, cuisines and culture-specific objects of different cultures play a role in integration. Additionally, there is an emphasis on the importance of providing training not only for students but also for teachers who are new to the profession or not familiar with working in schools where different cultural groups are concentrated (as well as all staff employed at the school) and establishing the scientific background through scientific committees to be constituted for the execution of this process. As specifically noted by a participant, it is understood that there should be experts from different professions in the school social work team, such as child development specialists, psychologists, and nurses. Another suggestion that will strengthen the multicultural education and social structure within the context of school social work is to include foreign language-based courses into social work education.

... I wish there was a child development specialist, or a psychologist. I wish there was even a nurse and we could work all together... we would achieve better outcomes, and handle cases from all perspectives. This is definitely needed... (P5)

In addition to the mentioned suggestions, the participants have also made contributions from various perspectives. In this sense, they lay emphasis on the importance of postgraduate education for social workers, who will work in field of multicultural education, to expand their knowledge, skills, and value acquisition.

...I think that ...a decent social worker free from anti-foreign or similar views is supposed to have received necessary level of knowledge which, I think, should not be limited to an undergraduate degree but also supported by at least a certain level of postgraduate education... (P7)



In particular, there is an example reported by a participant that, children studying at vocational high schools have the opportunity to earn an income through internship while continuing their education.

... the kid is expected to earn money.. When provided with financial support, for example, there is a proven increase in the child's school attendance. Because we had an accounting branch (at high school)... Instead of working at a local industrial estate for a monthly salary of 2000 TL one could work at an accountant's office for 2500 TL... (P7)

Discussion

This study aims to explore the experiences of social workers with regards to multicultural education and school social work through the example of Syrian children. For this purpose, we tried to reveal how the facilitating role of social work is shaped by the needs and problems of children in the field of education in the triangle of family, school, and child. In this context, it was possible to emphasize the importance of school social work in developing multicultural education based on the suggestions of social workers working with Syrian children.

In the study, one of the findings is the understanding of multiculturalism and the review of the current situation regarding the participation of Syrian children in education life. For multiculturalism to find a response in society, the members must have a tendency and awareness to recognize and understand different cultures. As the distance between society and immigrants increases, society is more likely to compare immigrants' living conditions to those in their home country to believe they have good living conditions. On the other hand, this situation may cause ignoring the events and traumatic stories, coping dynamics, and internal situations experienced before, during, and after migration. However, in the context of perception towards inclusion, it is a reality that sectarian and ethnic differences are ignored.

Even though the emphasis is on the familiarity between the two cultures, the effect of forced migration brings to mind the reference made by Bauman to Norbert Elias. As Elias expressed in his theory of the established and the outsider relations, the influx of outsiders always means a challenge to the lifestyle of the established population, regardless of how subtle the difference between newcomers and residents. The tension arising from the necessity to make room for the newcomers and the need for the outsiders to find a place for themselves pushes both sides to accentuate differences between them. Consequently, the differentiation is deepened, and outsiders are consigned to the position of "invader, settler" as the idea of the impossibility of integration spreads among groups (Bauman, 1999). Syrian families, where the importance of living together do not sufficiently understand, the problems experienced at the point of integration with society negatively affect children's participation in education. Within this context, it is witnessed that the experience of coexistence since April 2011, when the Syrians started to enter Turkey, has remained insufficient in terms of its reflection on the education policies. It is seen that the practices to ensure the access of children to school and their integration to education have been limited and temporary. Describing the perceptions aimed to be built with different discourses as a promotion problem, Boyraz et al. (2018) point to the marginalisation arising from the public concern and belief that Turkish people's needs and problems are ignored while unfair positive discrimination is reserved for Syrian individuals and resources are directly transferred to them.

The perception and feeling of "alienation" imposed upon Syrian individuals by the people of Turkey, which has the status of a receiving country, leads to stigmatisation and social exclusion

associated with prejudices. Families in Turkey can reflect those perspectives on Syrian children, indirectly leading to the exclusion of those children in the school environment by influencing the school management. Findings in the study, which point to the lack of policies for constructing a multicultural society structure, reveal that Syrian children are moving away from education with these elements. Furthermore, the discriminatory speech in the home against Syrian individuals is internalised by children, serving as a foundation for peer victimisation, social exclusion, and humiliation in the school environment. It can be claimed that it is possible to break this cycle, in the context of human rights, by understanding Syrian individuals' traumatic stories of civil war and migration and introducing their cultural dynamics. In particular, it is necessary to make inferences about the origins of the needs and problems of individuals by evaluating the psychosocial impact of forced migration from their living spaces due to war from a social work perspective. According to Berger and Weiss (2003), immigrants experience multidimensional social and emotional losses, and the society often fails to recognise them, thus resorting to different normative ways and rituals to cope with the problems experienced by immigrant individuals. In this sense, Turkish and Syrian families gathering by way of structured and systematic practices and sharing their experience through group dynamics directly bring to mind the school social work practices. In this regard, developing model proposals for multicultural education policies also point to the macro studies of social work.

Another prominent finding in the study is that the attitudes of Syrian families in focusing on gender roles affect children's alienation from academic life. Certain major social problems such as early marriage, violence, child labor and gender inequality in access to education are addressed. An observation is that the fundamental resources of social work are effective in the review process of socioeconomic statuses of individuals as well as cultural dynamics. For an established multicultural education structure, the culture at home and the culture at school should build mutually complementary elements (Huang, 2001). In this direction, the importance of social analysis, studies on women's rights, and legal basis such as preventive measures are emphasized in determining the family's needs.

Another theme formed within the scope of the study points to the lack of structured multicultural education practices integrated with education policies and supported by a policy basis. A failure to ensure effective engagement of Syrian children in education through the structured education practices integrated with education policies and supported on a policy basis will be detrimental to Syrian children's interaction processes with other children in the school environment and result in groupings among themselves. Such groupings are exacerbated by feelings of alienation and exclusion, leading to gang formation and peer victimisation. Developing the vision to carry out the education process within the framework of strategic and systematic plans and programs and accordingly doing systematic practices to eliminate social inequalities among students will strengthen multicultural education (Raihani, 2018). Besides, a failure to make arrangements in accordance with the language skills of Syrian children and the content of the education they received (if any) in their home country will also affect their academic success (Kanj & Khamis, 2021). The failure in effectively providing Turkish language education will cause a decrease in academic success and hinder communication (Nieuwboer & van't Rood, 2016; Tanrikulu, 2017; Sarmini et al., 2020). As a result of the lack of a solution to the language barrier, the exam-based education structure in Turkey causes Syrian children to fall behind in the competitive environment created by success ranking. This emphasis of the study shows the existence of trial-and-error attempts, not sustainable practices, of education policies for Syrian children, as expressed in the thematic map.

In the study, teachers and social workers are the two stakeholders who constitutes the basis for multicultural education structure. Teachers are addressed as the most important stakeholders in terms of identifying the needs and problems of Syrian children and organising appropriate intervention plans, while NGOs, school management and interpreters can be regarded as the facilitators in terms of finding resources in this process. Intervention plans addressing the children who are closely observed with their problems and needs determined by their teachers can be made in frame of social investigations, observations, and individual-based, group-based, and community-based social work practices. On the other hand, it can be said that the social worker undertakes the task of expanding the way to the multicultural society structure by supporting the social adaptation process as well as continuing the education life of the child. For social cohesion, aspects regarding the individual's autonomy such as individual initiative, sense of belonging, engagement are of importance (Fonseca et al., 2019). The multicultural school experience can ensure the development of these skills by teaching behaviours related to interaction through modelling. During the interviews to be conducted with Syrian children within the context of professional practices, the interpreter needs to have a good grasp of the language, the concepts of social work and its relationship with the legislation so that the dynamics of children can be made clear, and the right interventions can be planned. Additionally, the social worker needs to develop language skills related to different cultures as the emotional transitions may intensify between the client and the interpreter during the interviews conducted via an interpreter. Otherwise, the social worker remains in the position of only asking questions and passive listeners.

The last theme of the study emphasizes the proposals that emphasize the necessity of a structure integrated with school social work on the way to multicultural education. It can be stated that it is crucial for today's population profile in Turkey to integrate the framework of school social work, by which practices are carried out with a holistic biopsychosocial perspective in the triangle of child, family, and school, with multicultural education policies. Multicultural education promotes the development of democratic citizens, while education for democratic citizenship fosters pluralism, particularly in a society with diversity in cultural, racial, and political terms (Parker, 2003). Therefore, we recommend establishing field-specific policy committees that use scientific knowledge in planning and implementing the practices and include courses prepared with a multicultural structure in the curriculum. Besides, we emphasise the criticality of reviewing examples of countries that implement the multicultural education model, conducting studies to adapt such examples, and establishing cooperation between relevant institutions and organisations in regions densely populated by various cultural groups. These suggestions, which are prominent in the study, show the intersection of multicultural education and school social work.

Conclusion and Implications

In addition to immigrants' risk factors, social adaptation processes create compelling conditions. The way to strengthen the capacity of children to cope with these challenging conditions, which is one of the keys to social cohesion, is through education. In this context, the current study has reached a roadmap to strengthen multicultural education with school social work practices from a social work perspective. This roadmap, summarized in Figure 2, includes three basic steps. The first step is to define the risk factors, including the educational structure, migration conditions, and cultural dynamics of the migrating individuals. Considering micro, mezzo, and macro dynamics together, it should not be forgotten that macro indicators such as education policies are interrelated with micro indicators such as the psychological effects of

migration. In this context, the effects of multicultural education policies should not be overlooked in ensuring the participation of Syrian children in education.

In the second step, it is of value to operate the current change elements in the process leading to this educational structure in Turkey. Risks associated with traumatic experiences (such as exposure to war or related events) and obstacles such as problems with access to education are among the factors that may increase the probability of negative or insufficient developmental outcomes (learning, psychological health, etc.) for children. On the other hand, family support provided directly or through interventions has positive effects on the child's adaptation process and subsequent developmental outcomes (Sirin & Aber, 2018). In addition to the resources of development consisting of collaborations and facilitators, the own resources of social work are anticipated to strengthen social change and lay the groundwork for multicultural education. It is envisaged that the management of differences in social life will contribute to sustainable social welfare. Within this context, multicultural education is expected to have goals that will develop children's critical thinking skills and strengthen their ability to notice injustice and actively advocate against them (Ramsey et al., 2003). These elements of change refer directly to integrating professional practices of social work with environmental elements such as teachers, translators, and resources from non-governmental organizations.

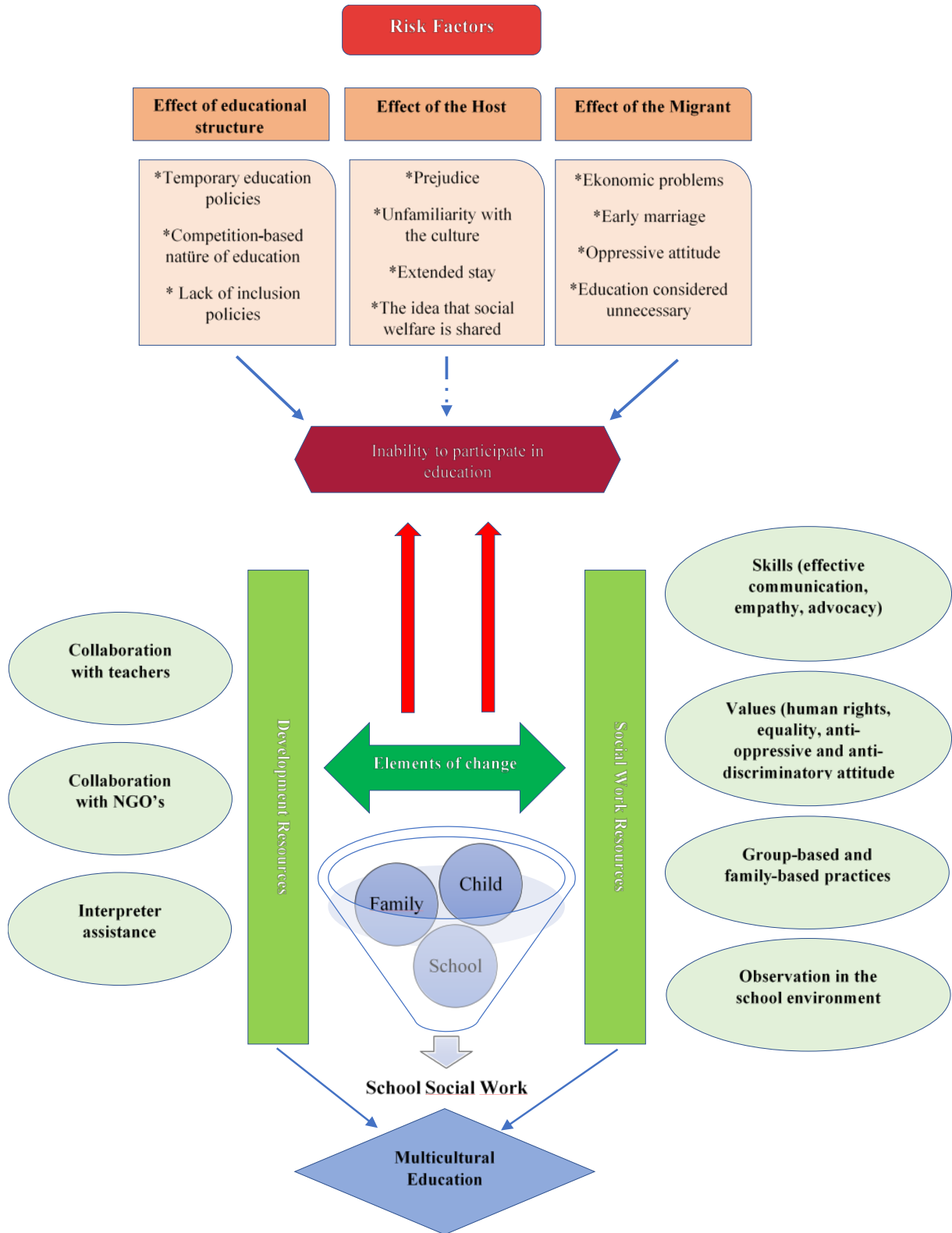


Figure 2. Suggestion for the Development of the Multicultural Education Process

School social work primarily addresses the children at risk, such as Syrian children who are under the influence of multiple problems (Karatas et al., 2016). Therefore, social workers work more intensely with such individuals who have difficulty adapting to or integrating with the society or are excluded and pushed out of the society because of their disadvantages. This is

since such individuals are in much more need of social justice and human rights; their humanitarian needs are higher than those of other people who are already integrated into society (Gencer, 2019b). School social work also emerges in terms of the need for professional occupational groups in schools to provide students with psycho-social support and service, solve their problems and develop protective-preventive interventions in the education-teaching process (Gencer, 2017b). The multicultural education structure reached in the last step shows both a newly reached point and an output. This new step, which will be achieved by following the previous steps, will become a fundamental dynamic of education policies. It will be named as an output that aims to have improving effects in terms of the field of education. School social work can be counted as a tool that undertakes advocacy, counseling, and problem-solving roles in this change. In the light of the information presented above, it is recommended for future studies that the effectiveness of group-based, individual-based and community-based school social work practices structured according to the dynamics of multicultural education should be assessed and incorporated into the literature as they can constitute evidence for change management in this process. Another suggestion is to determine the problems experienced by children within the scope of current education policies through direct interviews with children.

Limitations

The present study has several limitations. These affect the breadth of the findings obtained. The first limitation is that the study is only based on the opinions of social workers working within the scope of the project carried out in Konya. The structuring of the study with a descriptive methodology is the second limitation. Descriptive findings are pointed out rather than interpretive findings since interviews are conducted with experts who work collaboratively to solve problems and meet needs rather than individuals who experience the problems directly. In addition, although not directly related to the design and procedure of the present study, certain limitations mainly reflect the dynamics of the school social work project. In this respect, the first limitation is that the project lasted only three years, and the limited time prevented the big picture from being seen in terms of cultural dynamics, needs, and problems of migrant children. The second limitation affecting the work depending on the project is the lack of language competence of the social workers working within the project's scope. It isn't easy to fully understand the needs of the children since the experts who do not have a good command of the mother tongue of the immigrant children conduct their interviews in the presence of interpreters.

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