Attitudes, Social Acceptance, and Rejection towards Refugee Students: The Case of Düzce Province, Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes, social acceptance, and rejection levels of students towards refugee students studying at different education levels. The research was carried out in descriptive research design. It was determined that the students were not accepted by their peers, and as the education level increased, the social acceptance scores of the refugee students decreased and the social rejection scores increased. It was determined that refugee students were accepted mostly by primary school students, followed by secondary school and least high school students. It has been determined that especially high school students have lower social acceptance towards refugee students and higher rejection scores. It has been determined that there was a significant relationships relationship between students' social acceptance and rejection scores and their academic achievement and attitude scores.

Keywords: refugee student, attitude, social acceptance, rejection, inclusive education

Introduction

Throughout history, people have migrated due to economic and social reasons, especially wars, natural disasters, hunger, and poverty (Wickramasinghe & Wimalaratana, 2016). Migration is a short, medium, or long-term change of location in the region where people live due to religious, economic, political, social, and other reasons when the minimum living conditions disappear or the region's opportunities do not meet human needs (Dingle & Drake, 2007; UN, 2016). Societies have been influenced by each other politically, socially, economically, and culturally through migration (Bhugra & Becker, 2005).

The concept of migration is at the top of the agenda not only in the countries receiving immigration, but also in all geographies where globalization is felt or intensely experienced, and it is a phenomenon that affects all societies and communities and has positive and negative aspects (Czaika & De Haas, 2014). When we look at the migrating masses around the world, the most important part of the immigrants is economic migrants, followed by asylum seekers, refugees, and internally displaced persons (Hatton,

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2016). Refugees experience problems in the areas of accommodation, communication, health, education, and work in the country they settled (Bemak & Chung, 2021; Samara et al., 2020; Vogiazides & Mondani, 2020). In addition, the problems and difficulties arising from the daily lives of refugees increase their feelings of anxiety and depression, and this makes their economic and social adaptation difficult (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010).

According to the United Nations data, the number of forcibly displaced people in the world is approximately 80 million. Of these, 26 million are refugees, 46 million are internally displaced persons, and 4.2 million are refugees. Turkey, hosting approximately 4 million refugees, is the country hosting the highest number of refugees in the world (UN, 2019). More than 57% of the 3.5 million registered Syrian refugees who came to our country live in the provinces of the border region, and 43% live outside the region (Erdogan, 2020). According to the Migration statistics of the General Directorate of Migration Management (2017) and the Düzce Governorship Ancient Center data, there are approximately 12,000 immigrants in Düzce. Of these, 5,400 are Iraqi, 2,100 Syrian, 2,000 Afghan, and 500 immigrants from other nationalities. 926 of these immigrants are students and they are still actively studying in formal education institutions. (Ates & Ovalı, 2018).

Refugee students receive education at different levels under the Ministry of National Education in the same environment as their peers, based on the education curriculum at that level. In addition, education services and Turkish language courses are provided in 370 temporary education centers for refugee children (MoNE, 2018). Studies have shown that refugee students do not attend school regularly and it was determined that most of them could not access education (ERI, 2015), and they had education problems related to language and communication (Dromgold-Sermen, 2020). It can be said that these problems have negative effects on both refugees and schools, teachers, and students in host countries (Palaz et al., 2019).

Children under the age of eighteen, who make up most refugees, are children who experience psychological and behavioral difficulties due to trauma, have high depression and anxiety levels (Ceri & Nasıroglu, 2018; Yektas et al., 2021), have social acceptance difficulties, and are exposed to social exclusion (Bešić et al., 2020; German & Ehntholt, 2007; Nicolai et al., 2015). However, because of students from different cultures sharing the same educational environment, cultural conflicts, communication barriers, exclusion, negative attitudes, and some adjustment problems may occur among students (Dolapcıoǧlu & Bolat, 2019; Gümüs et al., 2020; Soomro et al., 2015). Therefore, understanding the thoughts and attitudes of people living in host countries towards refugees can contribute to the solution of problems arising from refugees or people living in host countries (Esses et al., 2017). Developing policies to solve the problems experienced by refugee students can contribute to the social acceptance of refugee students both by their peers and by society, as well as preventing negative attitudes and thoughts towards refugee students.

Peer acceptance is very important for students. It is known that students who are not accepted by their peers experience various problems such as not being able to social interaction and communication, difficulties in participating in activities, exhibiting problem behaviors, and exclusion from their peers. This situation negatively affects the academic and social development of students (Aktan et al., 2019). It can be said that refugee students, especially at school age, are exposed to problems stemming from migration and social disapproval.

Schools are important social support centers that enable refugee students to learn and socialize (Sullivan & Simonson, 2015; Thomas, 2016). Schools provide positive contributions such as protecting students' mental health, improving self-esteem and competence, social cohesion, and providing future success and job opportunities (Fazel et

al., 2016). In measuring social acceptance of students, measurement tools such as attitude scales, sociometric rating, peer preference, and list rating are used (Cillessen & Marks, 2017). Positive attitudes and a positive classroom climate can be effective in the social acceptance of refugee students in their classrooms and schools. The social acceptance of refugee students by the society they live in or the groups they are in contact with can contribute to their economic, cultural, and social cohesion.

When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that there are some studies examining the social acceptance (Erdogan, 2014, 2015) and attitudes of students studying at different education levels towards refugee students in Turkey (Ablak, 2020; Palaz et al., 2019). When the studies conducted in Turkey are examined, it can be said that the studies examining the social acceptance towards refugee students are limited and the studies on attitudes have increased in recent years, but they are not sufficient in quantity. Schools are important academic and social support centers that contribute to the integration of refugee students into society. Positive relationships between refugee students and their peers in the school environment may play a role in shortening social cohesion processes. In addition, determining the social acceptance, rejection, and attitudes of their peers towards refugee students studying at different education levels such as primary, secondary, and high school can provide important contributions to education administrators and policy developers for integration towards education levels.

Moreover, the findings of the research are likely to contribute significantly to the development of awareness of respect for differences among students as a requirement of inclusive education, and the creation of a positive school climate that will support tolerance towards different cultures and social acceptance. In addition, no research has been found in which the attitudes and social acceptance levels of students studying at different education levels towards refugee students are examined together. It can be said that this study is an important study in which different quantitative variables are discussed to obtain rich findings on attitudes and social acceptance towards refugee students and to contribute to the literature. In addition, it is considered that this research will make important contributions to the literature to develop policies for solving the problems experienced by refugee students and to ensure their economic, cultural, and social cohesion.

The aim of this research is to examine the attitudes and social acceptance levels of students towards refugee students studying at different education levels (primary school, secondary school, and high school) in Düzce Province, Turkey. The following research questions are in line with this aim:

1. What is the preference and rejection of refugee students regarding social acceptance by their peers?
2. Is there a significant relationship between students' academic achievement, attitudes towards refugee students, and social acceptance and social rejection scores?

Methods

This research, which examines the attitudes and social acceptance levels of refugee students studying at different education levels, this is a descriptive study, and it employs survey design. Descriptive studies are studies that aim to put forth the investigated subject or phenomena thoroughly (Büyüköztürk et al. 2014). Studies in survey design represent a past or current case as it is. The phenomenon, person, case, or object that is subject of research is explained as it is considering its unique context (Karasar 2016).

Sample of the Research

The study group of the research consisted of 1600 students studying at different

education levels in the central district of Düzce and having refugee students in their classes. The study group was formed through the easily accessible case sampling method within the scope of purposeful sampling (Suri, 2011). Attention was paid to the fact that the study group consisted of students who voluntarily participated in the research, was easily accessible, had refugee students studying in the classrooms, and was easy to collect data. This situation led to the use of purposeful sampling in the study. Some characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Characteristics of the sample

Variable		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	809	50.6
	Female	791	49.4
Refugee student in class	Yes	683	42.7
	No	917	57.3
Family Income Level	Low	265	16.6
	Middle	874	54.6
	High	298	18.6
	Very high	163	10.2
Type of School	Primary school	492	30.8
	Middle School	562	35.1
	High school	546	34.1
Distribution of students in classes with refugee students	Primary school	225	33.0
	Middle School	245	36.0
	High school	210	30.8
Mother Education Level	Primary school	419	26.2
	Middle School	481	30.1
	High school	641	401
	University	59	37
Father Education Level	Primary school	306	19.1
	Middle School	387	24.2
	High school	715	44.7
	University	192	12.0
Number of classes with refugee students	Primary school	13	36.1
	Middle School	15	41.7
	High school	8	22.2
Number of refugee students in the researched classrooms	Syrian	32	58.1
	Iraqi	16	29,0
	Afghan	7	12.7

Data Collection Tools

Attitude scale towards refugee students (ASTRS). To collect data on the quantitative dimension of the research, the "ASTRS" developed by Kilcan, Cepni, and Kilinc (2017) was used. The scale is arranged according to the 3-point Likert type and consists of one-dimensional and 24 items. 6 items on the scale are negative and scored in reverse. Among the items on the scale are "I am happy to see refugee students in my classroom", "I believe that refugee students will comply with the school rules" and "I think that refugee students disturb the school peace". Validity and reliability analyses of ASTRS have performed again on the data set of the current study consisting of 1600 people. In this context, the

Cronbach's alpha value of the ASTRS was calculated as .92. The validity of the scale structure of the MBI was examined by CFA. The validity of the scale structure of ASTRS was examined by CFA. The results of MBI's CFA fit indices can be summarized as follows: $X2/sd=2.64$, RMSEA=0.051, CFI=0.96, GFI =0.95, IFI = 0.92, CFI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.91, SRMR=0.062. These values are at the level of acceptable values according to the literature (Kline, 2011; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). It has been determined that the 24-item scale form of the MLAS is a valid measurement tool for the current research.

Peer preference form (PPF). PPF was used to determine the social acceptance levels of refugee students in the classrooms by their peers. Peer preference is one of the most widely used sociometric techniques, and members of a group are asked who they want and do not want. Individuals participating in the test are given certain choices. For example, they are asked to sit in the same row, spend time together, write three names they want to study and three people they do not want (Cillessen & Marks, 2017). To determine the social acceptance levels of the students towards refugee students, PPF was applied to 600 students, 200 of whom were at each level, in classes where the same number of refugee students from the same nationality were educated at each level.

Analysis of Data

First, descriptive statistics were made on the data, and it was checked whether the data were normally distributed. Whether the data groups showed normal distribution or not was determined by Kolmogrow-Smirnov and Shapiro Wilk tests (McKillup, 2012). Since the number of subjects participating in the study was over 30, whether the data groups showed a normal distribution was tested with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and it was determined that the results of the ASTRS were significant ($p<.05$). For this reason, nonparametric test techniques were used in the analysis. The reliability of the PPF was examined with the test-retest reliability method (Weir, 2005). The weighted end-of-term grade point averages of the students participating in the research, consisting of the average of success points of each course, were obtained from the school administrations. PPF was applied again under the same conditions and to the same study group one month later, and the re-correlation of the form was found to be .85 and statistically significant. After applying the forms, the acceptance and rejection scores of refugee students studying in classrooms were calculated. In calculating the scores, points were given to the 1st preference (3), the 2nd choice (2), and the third choice (1), in order of preference. The acceptance and rejection scores of refugee students in this way were calculated and interpreted (Cillessen & Marks, 2017).

Findings

The findings obtained for the sub-problems determined in line with the purpose of the research are presented in the following order.

Findings and Interpretation of the First Sub-Problem

To determine the social acceptance levels of students towards refugee students, PPF was applied to 600 students, 200 of whom were at each level, in classes where the same number of refugee students from the same nationality were educated at each level. The preference and rejection scores for refugee students are given below.

When the PPF preference and rejection scores of refugee students according to education levels are examined, as the education level increases, the social acceptance scores of the refugee students decrease, while the social rejection scores increase. It is seen that refugee students are mostly accepted by primary school students, then secondary school and least high school students. It can be said that as the education level increases, social acceptance of refugee students decreases, and social rejection increases. It is seen that especially high school students have lower social acceptance towards refugee

students and higher rejection scores. It is seen that two Syrian students in secondary school and three in high school are not accepted by their peers at all, and the rejection scores of these students are higher than other students. This may be due to the fact that students from other nationalities came to Turkey earlier than Syrian students and partially solved their language and integration problems.

Table 2
Preference and rejection scores for refugee students (RS) on peer preference form

Education Level	RSN*	Preference Score			Rejection Score		
		Sitting at the same desk	Spending time together	Studying together	Sitting on the same desk	Spending time together	Studying together
Primary School	1.(S)	14	9	6	11	16	19
	2.(S)	14	9	7	10	8	17
	3.(S)	6	11	11	12	15	20
	4.(S)	8	3	5	12	9	14
	5.(S)	10	7	5	14	11	13
	6.(I)	15	11	8	11	12	14
	7.(I)	11	13	15	12	14	15
	8.(I)	9	12	7	14	16	9
	9.(A)	17	13	9	13	12	14
	10.(A)	13	10	6	10	14	15
	Total	**117**	**98**	**79**	**119**	**127**	**150**
Secondary School	1.(S)	5	8	2	15	19	22
	2.(S)	2	5	5	15	16	24
	3.(S)	0	0	0	25	34	42
	4.(S)	4	4	2	20	21	29
	5.(S)	0	0	0	16	22	31
	6.(I)	4	3	0	17	11	20
	7.(I)	9	4	3	7	13	18
	8.(I)	6	6	3	18	25	20
	9.(A)	5	3	1	11	16	21
	10.(A)	6	6	3	8	14	16
	Total	**41**	**39**	**19**	**152**	**191**	**243**
High School	1.(S)	3	5	9	17	28	31
	2.(S)	3	5	3	17	30	23
	3.(S)	0	0	0	28	39	37
	4.(S)	**0**	**0**	**0**	22	24	50
	5.(S)	0	0	0	26	31	40
	6.(I)	**3**	**1**	**1**	15	25	23
	7.(I)	4	9	3	16	13	21
	8.(I)	**5**	**6**	**5**	8	9	15
	9.(A)	6	9	3	5	14	10
	10.(A)	5	3	0	6	12	16
	Total	**29**	**38**	**24**	**160**	**225**	**266**

*Refugee Students Nationality RSN=Syrian student; I=Iraqi student; A=Afghani student

Findings and Interpretation of the Second Sub-Problem
    The relationships between students' attitudes towards refugee students, social acceptance, social rejection scores, and academic achievement were given in Table 3.

Table 3

The relationship between attitude, social acceptance, social rejection, and academic achievement

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1.Attitude	49.2	9.5	1			
2.Social Acceptance	41.9	8.7	.42**	1		
3.Social Rejection	30.1	10.1	-.20**	-98**	1	
4.Academic Achievement	68.4	17.2	.58**	.71**	-.38**	1

**p<.01; *p<.05

It is seen that the students' attitude scores towards refugee students are above the average ($\bar{x}$ =49.2), while social acceptance scores ($\bar{x}$ =41.9) and social rejection scores ($\bar{x}$ =30.1) are close to each other. There was a positive, moderately significant relationship between students' social acceptance scores and their attitude scores (r=0.42, p<.05); a negative, low-level significant relationship between students' social rejection scores and their attitude scores (r=-0.20, p<.05); It is seen that there is a highly significant negative correlation (r=-0.98, p<.05) between students' social acceptance scores and social rejection scores. A positive and highly significant relationship between students' academic achievement and attitude scores (r=0.58, p<.05); a positive, highly significant relationship between academic achievement and social acceptance scores (r=0.71, p<.05); It was determined that there was a negative, low-level significant relationship (r=-0.38, p<.05) between academic achievement and social rejection scores.

Discussion and Conclusion

The following results were obtained in line with the findings obtained in this study, in which the attitudes and social acceptance levels of the refugee students studying at different education levels were examined.

Discussion and Conclusion of the First Sub-Problem

According to the results of the research, it was determined that the students' preference scores for refugee students were low, and their rejection scores were higher in general. According to this result, it can be said that refugee students are not accepted by their peers. The findings of this study coincide with the findings of the research on the lack of acceptance for refugees (Bešić et al., 2020; German & Ehntholt, 2007; Nicolai et al., 2015). Refugee students face negative behaviors such as bullying, exclusion, and racism by their peers, and are exposed to pressure due to their religious and cultural identities (Bešić et al., 2020; Maringe et al., 2017). Syrian students state that the social distance between them and their peers is too high (Erdogan, 2020). It can be said that factors in the failure to ensure social acceptance for refugee students, such as language and communication-related problems (Dromgold-Sermen, 2020), cultural differences of refugee students (Aktas et al., 2018), negative attitudes (Jones et al., 2016; Koc & Anderson, 2018; Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018), negative publications in the media against refugees (Bešić et al., 2020; Wolling & Arlt, 2016), perceptions that they are an economic burden to the country (Esses et al., 2013; Narlı & Ozascılar, 2019; Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018), pressures to abandon a cultural identity (Berry & Sabatier, 2010) and adaptation problems (Fazel et al., 2016; Fazel, 2018), which occur with the prolongation of the refugees' stay, are effective.

It can also be said that low acceptance scores and high rejection scores for refugee peers are an important problem for the academic and social development of refugee students. This situation makes it difficult for refugee students to adapt to school and

society and may also pave the way for the formation of an environment of cultural conflict among students. For this reason, the realization of activities that will develop respect for differences, tolerance, and sensitivity to different cultures among students in schools and that will prepare the ground for refugee students to participate in joint studies with their peers can improve students' social acceptance and attitudes in a positive way.

In the study conducted by Erdogan (2014), contrary to the research findings, it was determined that the acceptance rate for refugees was quite high. In the periods when the refugee flow was intense (2013-2016), the media's adoption of a broadcasting approach towards social acceptance as a reflection of the state's humanitarian policy and the perception of refugees as refugees in need of protection by the Muslim community played an important role in the emergence of a positive understanding of social acceptance towards refugees in the society (Narlı & Ozascılar, 2019). However, it can be said that the problems that arise with the prolonged stay of refugees and the increase in the number of refugees are effective in weakening the understanding of social acceptance in society and increasing negative attitudes towards refugees (Erdogan, 2014). It can be said that primary, secondary and high school periods are very critical age periods in terms of development in order for students to gain positive attitudes towards different cultures. For this reason, positive attitudes and social acceptance towards refugee students should be supported through learning environments and social activities in schools.

Social rejection towards refugee students causes students to experience feelings of loneliness, depression, and discrimination and decreases their academic performance (Berry & Hou, 2017; Fazel et al., 2016; Schachner et al., 2018). This situation complicates the adaptation process of refugee students and may even cause them to drop out of school (McBrien, 2005; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). In addition, individuals with social rejection are perceived as "less human" by the people around them (Beißert et al., 2019). Social rejection negatively affects the social and emotional development of adolescents who experience social rejection, practice social rejection, and witness social rejection (Abrams & Killen, 2014; Berry & Hou, 2016). Because adolescents who socially reject another person or observe intergroup social rejection may be prejudiced against people throughout their lives and maintain their exclusionary attitudes (Abrams & Killen, 2014). Policies should be developed to prevent refugee students from experiencing social rejection, to increase their social acceptance, and to ensure their integration into society.

Discussion and Conclusion of the Second Sub-Problem

It can be said that students have positive attitudes towards refugee students, but this positive attitude does not provide their social acceptance. These results coincide with the results of the research on attitudes and social acceptance towards refugee students given above. It has been determined that there is a positive, moderately significant relationship between students' social acceptance scores and their attitude scores. In this case, it can be said that as the attitude towards refugee students increases, their social acceptance will also increase. It has been determined that there is a negative, low-level significant relationship between the students' social rejection scores towards refugee students and their attitude scores. In this case, it can be said that as the attitude towards refugee students increases, social rejections will also decrease. Studies show that like our research findings, the increase in attitudes towards refugees accelerates their establishing positive relationships with their peers and their social acceptance (Titzmann et al., 2015).

In addition, positive attitudes and acceptance towards refugee students create a positive social atmosphere at school based on the positive interaction between groups (Gonultas & Mulvey, 2019). Negative publications in the media against refugees (Bešić et al. 2020; Wolling and Arlt 2016), perceptions that refugees are an economic burden to the country (Esses et al., 2013; Narlı & Ozascılar, 2019; Yitmen & Verkuyten, 2018) are among the factors that feed negative attitudes and the resulting social rejection. Negative

attitudes and social rejection towards refugee students cause students to experience social, psychological, and academic problems (Berry & Hou, 2017; Fazel et al., 2016; Schachner et al., 2018). This situation complicates the social and cultural adaptation of refugees (Schweitzer et al., 2005; Safak-Ayvazoglu et al., 2021).

Negative attitudes towards refugees pose a serious threat to the social acceptance of refugees and their integration into society. It can be said that social rejection and negative attitude towards refugee students pose a serious threat to the social acceptance of refugees and their integration into society. Giving students various duties and responsibilities in schools, doing group work and social activities that will ensure the integration of students, supporting refugee students who stand out with their talents and achievements as role models can contribute to the development of positive attitudes and social acceptance towards refugee students.

It has been determined that there is a positive and highly significant relationship between the academic achievement of the students and their attitudes towards refugees and social acceptance scores. In this case, it can be said that as the students' academic achievement increases, their attitudes and social acceptance towards refugee students will also increase. Likewise, it has been determined that there is a negative, low-level significant relationship between the students' academic achievement and the social rejection scores of refugee students. In this case, it can be said that as the students' academic achievement decreases, the social rejection of the refugee students will also increase. This can be explained by the fact that academically successful students have a high sense of empathy (Spinard & Eisenberg, 2009; Zorza et al., 2015) and have more positive social behaviors towards their peers (Algozzine et al., 2011).

However, it can also be said that because of sharing the same educational environment with students from different cultures, their feelings of empathy towards students from different cultures develop more (Chang & Le, 2010). It is seen that students with low academic achievement have high social rejection towards refugees. Studies have shown that students with lower academic behaviors have more problem behaviors (Barriga et al., 2002; Kremer et al., 2016) and this situation negatively affects students' communication and interactions with their peers (Dagdag et al., 2019). It can be said that students with low academic achievement have weak social relations with their peers and have problem behaviors that negatively affect their social acceptance of refugee students.

Implications

It is recommended that arrangements be made to improve the attitude and social acceptance towards refugee students.

- To narrate the living conditions of refugee students, the problems they experience, the conditions that led them to come to our country to the students and give place to empathy studies to ensure a positive attitude and social acceptance towards refugee students.
- To organize additional training and courses for the development of language skills in order the refugee students to be able to easily communicate with their peers.
- To plan and implement various activities in schools to provide students with values that support respect for differences, tolerance, empathy, friendship, and similar social acceptance.

Limitations

In this study, which examines the attitudes, social acceptance and rejection levels of refugee students studying at different education levels, the results of the research should be evaluated by considering the following limitations. First, the research is limited to the findings obtained with quantitative methods and data collection tools. A second

limitation is that the peer preference form, which is used as a data collection tool for social acceptance, is applied only in classrooms with refugee students. The third limitation is that the research group consists of students of a certain age. Because the attitudes and social acceptance towards refugees may differ according to the age periods of individuals (childhood, youth, maturity, old age, etc.).

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