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THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON SYRIAN REFUGEES' ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to provide an overview of the effects of war on Syrian students' academic success. No one can deny the fact that wars have direct and indirect effects on children. Besides, no one can deny the fact that not only soldiers are targets in wars, but also children, women, and even old people are, who altogether make a society. In a war, social life ends, medical life ends, educational life ends, and worst of all, innocent lives end. As a result of these dreadful conditions, children terribly suffer from the effects of war, even if they achieve to survive. Being highly depressed their chance of becoming constructive individuals in the future declines. With all these in mind, we inquired the course grades of secondary and high school Syrian war victims studying in Adana city, Turkey. Furthermore, we applied a semi-structured interview in the mother tongue of the respondents, in our case Arabic language, to clarify the views of these war victims. Based upon a comparative descriptive research design, in order to see the effects of war on academic success, we analyzed Syrian students' course grades, which were scored before and after the war in Syria.

Keywords: Syrian Students, Academic Success, War Victims, Refugees, Internal and External Factors

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı savaşın Suriyeli öğrencilerin akademik başarılarına olan etkileri hakkında genel bir görüşe ulaşmaktır. Hiç kimse savaşın çocuklar üzerinde doğrudan ve dolaylı etkileri olduğu gerçeğini inkâr edemez. Bunun yanı sıra, hiç kimse savaşlarda sadece askerlerin hedef olmadığı, aynı zamanda beraberinde toplumu oluşturan

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ran çocukların, kadınların ve hatta yaşlıların da hedef olduğu gerçeğini de inkâr edemez. Savaşlarda sosyal hayat biter, sağlık hizmetleri durur, eğitim hayatı biter ve hepsinden daha kötüsü masum hayatlar son bulur. Bu korkunç durumlar sonucunda, hayatta kalmayı başarsalar dahi çocuklar savaşın etkilerinden çok ağır şekilde zarar görürler. Aşırı depresyon durumundan dolayı gelecekte yapıcı bireyler olma şansları düşer. Tüm bu durumları dikkate alarak, Adana, Türkiye’de öğrenim gören Suriyeli ortaokul ve lise öğrencilerinin ders notlarını inceledik. Bunun yanı sıra, savaş kurbanlarının görüşlerine açıklık getirmek için katılımcıların ana dilinde, yani Arapça yarı yapılandırılmış bir sormaca uyguladık. Karşılaştırmalı betimsel araştırma yöntemi kullanarak, savaşın akademik başarıya olan etkilerini görme amacıyla, öğrencilerin Suriye’deki savaştan önceki ve sonraki ders notlarını analiz ettik.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Suriyeli Öğrenciler, Akademik Başarı, Savaş Kurbanları, Mülteciler, İçsel ve Dışsal Faktörler

Introduction

It is generally not easy to measure educational services as they result in a way through transforming knowledge, skills and behaviors of the students (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis & Fitsilis, 2010). On the other hand, it is still the priority of the teachers to enhance the academic success of students. This success is reached by making a difference provincially, territorially, and globally, from the narrowest to the broadest extensions. Both scholars and instructors acted in discovering factors affecting the quality of academic achievement of learners. These factors or variables are both inside and outside the education setting that influence the learners’ quality of academic success (Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq & Berhanu, 2011). Recently, assessing students’ academic achievement has gained significant attention since it is a challenging issue in academic literature, and since student success is influenced by several determinants like psychological, social, economic, and individual factors. These determinants vigorously affect the learner performance, though they vary from individual to individual, as well as from country to country (Mushtaq, 2012). For its significance, several research studies have been conducted to diagnose and examine the various determinants that influence learner achievement (Mlambo, 2012). Two kinds of factors influencing the learners’ academic performance are considered: internal and external factors, which effectively touch the

learners’ success. Internal classroom factors cover learners’ proficiency, course program, class size, course books, class test results, learning equipment, homework, class environment, course materials, teachers, technological opportunities, exam systems; while external classroom factors cover extracurricular activities, family problems, financial convenience, social and other matters (Mushtaq, 2012; Kaya, 2015). Besides, there are many other researchers putting forward that academic achievement is influenced by several factors (Graetz, 1995; Portes & Macleod, 1996; Swart, 1999; Considine & Zappala, 2002; Kwesiga, 2002; Sentamu, 2003; Acato, 2006; Geiser & Santelices, 2007). With all these in mind, we inquired the course grades of secondary and high school Syrian war victims studying in Adana city. Based upon a comparative descriptive research design, we analyzed their course grades, which were given before and after the war. For this, we put forward the following research question:

What are the effects of war on Syrian students’ academic achievement?

More specifically;

Is there any significant difference between the course grades of Syrian refugees before and after the war?

Literature Review

In the globalized world of technology, education is known to be the initial step for every human action. It has a significant role in the improvement of human prosperity and is

associated with a person's contented stage and chances for a better life (Battle & Lewis, 2002). The students' performance owns a critical function in providing competent and skillful graduates who will be strong leaders and work force for the country hence initiating the country's economic and social enhancement. Academic success is one of the fundamental determinants regarded by companies in appointing workers particularly for the new graduates. Therefore, students have to try really hard to achieve good grades in the education process and to equip themselves for the coming chances in their future career, as well as to respond to the companies' demands (Alos, Caranto, & David, 2015). Several studies have been conducted to define and analyze various determinants that influence academic success (Mushtaq, 2012; Kyoshiba, 2009); their findings explain students' endeavors, education background (Siegfried & Fels, 1979; Anderson & Benjamin, 1994), families' education level and income (Devadoss and Foltz, 1996), age, motivation, learning preferences (Aripin, Mahmood, Rohaizad, Yeop, and Anuar, 2008), attendance in courses (Romer, 1993), and entry qualifications as determinants having a vital influence on the students' academic success in diverse settings. In other words, measuring students' academic performance has obtained high consideration in previous research, as well as the determinants of academic achievement such as personal, social, economic, psychological, and environmental factors which highly affect the student performance, but showing difference from individual to individual and nation to nation (Mushtaq, 2012). The student performance is not only affected by students' own virtues provided by the nature but also several determinants are contained. If we ask for a society economically and socially developed, we have to supply the students with a proper education opportunity (Danial, Nawaz, Aleem, Hassan). Those owning adequate fi-

nancial backgrounds are often more brilliant in their academic life than those having a weak financial background (Aghus & Makhbul 2002). For Graetz (1995), academic performance is heavily based on social economic position of families. Considine and Zappala (2002) state that parents who are socially advantaged, promote a high state of success for their kids academically and financially. Figuring out all the affecting factors at one shot is an intricate and hard practice. It depends on several opportunities and time for educational authorities to diagnose all these determinants first and then organize the education activities and strategies of teaching and learning. It also necessitates adequate training, managerial planning and competencies to operate such studies for discovering the devoting determinants inside and outside classroom. This practice of variable discovery should be given overall consideration and priority in order that instructors can form teaching strategies to make it certain that all learners are supplied with the opportunities to reach at their total possibility of learning performance. More study is required to discover the problem on larger samples from more dispersed geographical territories covering other learner, family, school, and peer factors (Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafiq, & Berhanu, 2011).

Significance of the Study

Many studies have been carried out to investigate factors affecting students' performance such as class schedules, extracurricular activities, class size, course books, homework, environment, technology, assessment systems, economy, family, and etc. However, there is almost no study investigating the effects of war on children's academic success. Therefore, this study is highly significant in terms of clarifying the effects of war on Syrian students sheltered in Turkey. Through carrying this characteristic, this study may be helpful for authorities and parents of the students. It might help authorities to design and im-

plement the policies to enhance these students' performance, as well as the quality of education by finding ways to raise students' motivation and rehabilitate students' approach towards learning, and developing educational procedures. Furthermore, the parents of these war victims can use the results of the study in responding to the students' problems.

Method and Procedure

The study was carried out through quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The grades of the students in diverse courses were analyzed, while a semi-structured interview formed by the researchers was employed to the students in their mother tongue Arabic. The interview was administered to 22 Syrian students while the school grades of 120 male and 85 female Syrian students studying at 23 Nisan Primary School and Mehmet Zahid Kotku İmam Hatip Primary School were investigated in the study. Thus the sample size for the study was

205 students (120 male and 85 female). These students were using their own curriculum and teachers from Syria and the courses considered to be compared were listed from the curriculum designed by the former Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic. Based upon a descriptive research design, this study involved the data analysis of descriptive statistics. In this sense, SPSS 20.0, a Statistical Program for Social Sciences was capitalized on to report refugees' school grades in numerical data. In order to analyze the data, grade percentages were employed as a statistical technique in order to find out the rate of course achievements.

Data Analysis and Results

The collected data were analyzed by applying descriptive statistical measure. That's to say, in this section, the results of the study and the findings were described based on the data obtained from the participants by means of the instruments.

Table 1

	School Grades in Syria before War						School Grades in Turkey after War				
	1 weak	2 passing grade	3 middle	4 good	5 very good		1 weak	2 passing grade	3 middle	4 good	5 very good
Foreign Lan- guage	%2	%12	%16	%25	%45	Foreign Lan- guage	%10	%16	%14	%21	%39
Arabic lan- guage	%4	%14	%19	%29	%34	Arabic lan- guage	%24	%19	%14	%19	%24
Religious Edu- cation	%1	%7	%22	%18	%52	Religious Edu- cation	%0	%2	%22	%21	%55
Mathematics	%22	%18	%20	%25	%15	Mathematics	%37	%20	%26	%5	%12
Social Studies	%4	%9	%12	%35	%40	Social Studies	%9	%18	%10	%25	%38
Science and Health Educa- tion	%18	%24	%22	%14	%22	Science and Health Educa- tion	%22	%28	%26	%8	%16
Music Educa- tion	%0	%0	%24	%28	%48	Music Educa- tion	%0	%0	%28	%22	%50
Physical Educa- tion	%0	%0	%0	%0	%100	Physical Educa- tion	%0	%0	%0	%0	%100
Art Education	%0	%0	%2	%44	%54	Art Education	%2	%2	%2	%42	%52

Academic Achievement of the Syrian Refugee Students before and after the War

Table1 shows the percentages of the students' grades scored in the courses of their own curriculum (Foreign Language, Arabic Language, Religious Education, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science and Health Education, Music Education, Physical Education, Art Education). Regarding the courses of Foreign Language Education (%25 good, %45 very good before war; %21 good, %39 very

good after war), Arabic Language (%29 good, %34 very good before war; %19 good, %24 very good after war), Mathematics (%25 good, %15 very good before war; %5 good, %12 very good after war), Social Studies (%35 good, %40 very good before war; %25 good, %38 very good after war), Science and Health Education (%14 good, %22 very good before war; %8 good, %16 very good after war), Mu-

sic Education (%28 good, %48 very good before war; %22 good, %50 very good after war), and Art Education (%44 good, %54 very good before war; %42 good, %52 very good after war), the grades are lower after war as it can easily be understood from the Table. In terms of the Physical Education course, the percentage of the grades is equal (%100 very good). However, the percentages of Religious Education course (%18 good, %52 very good before war; %21 good, %55 very good after war) are just slightly higher after the war compared to the percentages of the grades before the war.

Interview Results

As already discussed in the methodology above, interviews were implemented with 22 volunteer students. Compared to surveys or inventories, the interview can supply more freedom to present ideas freely and

completely. The interview data were recorded by the interviewers. 22 respondents volunteered to take part in the interview and they were let to use their native language Arabic. Their English teacher, who is Syrian as well, helped the interviewers to translate their speech into English. The interviewers tried to stimulate the interviewees to declare their perceptions appropriately. To present diverse views of the respondents, the data were tabulated accordingly under each question in the interview. The questions and some main comments were summed up and introduced in the Table 2. Furthermore, quotations, codes and frequencies from the answers of the participants to the interview questions were given in Table 2.

Table 2
Interview Results

Codes	Frequency	Quotations From Remarks of Students
1. school grades in Syria before war	16	<i>My school grades were all high.</i>
	4	<i>I passed all my courses successfully.</i>
	2	<i>My grades were not bad.</i>
2. school grades now in Turkey	14	<i>I am not good at my courses now, though I study.</i>
	8	<i>I am trying not to fail. I want to pass my class.</i>
3. school subjects being good at in Syria	14	<i>I was good at every subject, especially in verbal lessons.</i>
	6	<i>I was good at religious education and physical education.</i>
	2	<i>I was good at mathematics.</i>
4. school subjects being bad at in Syria	8	<i>I was bad at mathematics.</i>

	6	<i>I was bad at Science and Health Education.</i>
5. school subjects being good at in Turkey	12	<i>I am good at Religious Education, Music, Art, and Physical Education.</i>
	1	<i>I am good at mathematics.</i>
6. school subjects being bad at in Turkey	1	<i>I am good at Science and Health Education.</i>
	8	<i>I am bad at mathematics.</i>
	6	<i>I am bad at Science and Health Education.</i>
7. the reason of being unsuccessful at school	10	<i>I am afraid to be sent back to Syria.</i>
	8	<i>I still feel the war in Syria.</i>
8. teacher's help	20	<i>Our teacher always helps us.</i>
	2	<i>Our teacher motivates us.</i>
9. the effects of war on your school success	22	<i>The war destroyed my psychology and caused us depression.</i>
10. if the war has negative effects	22	<i>Of course, the war negatively affected us and gave us too much stress.</i>

By looking at Table 2, we can easily see that the students were more successful when they were in Syria. Yet, their success diminished upon escaping from the war in Syria. The results of the interview confirm the reported grades of students as well. The students are less successful in Turkey compared to their performance at the courses in their home country. As it was stated in the interview, the war negatively affected the performance of the students in their academic career. Additionally, the teachers assisted the students to overcome their stress caused by the war. To sum up, the interview results confirm the reported grades of the students.

Discussion and Conclusion

Students' academic success or learning performance is influenced by several determinants containing gender, age, students schooling, social economic status, residential environment of students, medium of instructions at schools, tuition trend, daily study hour, and accommodation. A number of researchers conducted thorough studies about the determinants committing to student performance at different study levels (Tahir & Naqvi, 2006; Erdogan, Bayram, & Deniz, 2008; Raychaudhuri, Debnath, Sen, & Majumder, 2010; Mbugua, Kibet, Muthaa, & Nkonke, 2012; Ali, Haider, Munir, Khan, & Ahmed,

2013; Nyikahadzoi, Matamande, Taderera, and Mandimika, 2013; Ali, 2013; Sangkapan & Laeheim, 2014; Hajizadeh, & Ahmadzadeh, 2014; Sibanda, Iwu, & Benedict, 2015). However, the traumatic situation of the children caused by the war and its effects on the academic success of war victims have not been studied extensively. A high number of children in Syria have felt the depression caused by the armed forces. These children have all faced the violence, insecurity, fear and loss and they have been forced to leave their country. Besides, they have all carried the history of numerous casualties. Most of the time, their depression is not apparent; instead it shows up as they attempt to become a member of the society. The psychological damage leaves children to carry the burden of their war-torn childhoods especially in their education process. Within our very specific study, by looking at the course grades of the Syrian students, we found out that the academic success of Syrian refugees has decreased in the courses like Foreign Language, Arabic Language, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science and Health Education, Music Education, and Art Education, but not in Religious Education course, which may be attributed to the fact that humans keep belief during hard times. Furthermore, referring to the Physical Education course, the grades before war were clearly the same as those after war, which may be attributed to the easiness of the course, as well as its relaxing stress-free characteristics. That's to say, children might possibly get out of their depression by means of physical exercises.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions in English

1. How were your school grades in Syria before war?
2. How are your school grades now in Turkey?
3. Which school subjects were you good at in Syria? Are you still good at them?
4. Which school subjects were you bad at in Syria? Are you still bad at them?
5. Which school subjects are you good at in Turkey?
6. Which school subjects are you bad at in Turkey?
7. If you are unsuccessful at your school subjects now, what is the reason?
8. Does your teacher help you overcome your

unsuccessfulness?

9. What are the effects of war on your school success?
10. Do you think the war negatively affected your success? How?

ملحق 2

اسئلة المقابلة باللغة العربية

1. الحرب؟ قبل المدرسة في علامتك كانت كيف
2. حاليا؟ المدرسية علامتك هي كيف
3. هل سوريا؟ في فيها جيدا كنت التي الدراسية المواد هي ما حاليا؟ فيها جيدا لازلت
4. هل سوريا؟ في فيها ضعيفا كنت التي الدراسية المواد هي ما الان؟ بها ضعيفا لازلت
5. تركيا؟ في بها جيد انت التي الدراسية المواد هي ما
6. تركيا؟ في بها ضعيف انت التي الدراسية المواد هي ما
7. الأسباب؟ هي فما حاليا الدراسية المواد في ناجح غير كنت اذا
8. هذا؟ النجاح عدم تجاوز في مدرسك يساعدك هل
9. المدرسة؟ في نجاحك مدى على الحرب آثار هي ما
10. كيف؟ نجاحك؟ على سلبا اثرت الحرب ان تظن هل

