



# European Journal of Educational Management

Volume 6, Issue 3, 167 - 177.

ISSN: 2642-2344

<https://www.eujem.com/>

## Social Justice Leadership in the Refugees' Education: Insights of Teachers in Turkish Secondary Schools

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Received: May 16, 2023 ▪ Revised: August 7, 2023 ▪ Accepted: August 23, 2023

**Abstract:** The current case study examines secondary school principals' social justice leadership (SJL) based on teachers' perceptions. In the study, a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design was used to explore the teachers' perceptions regarding their principals' SJL at Turkish secondary schools. The data were reached through semi-structured interviews. 11 participant teachers were determined as participants of the study with the maximum sampling method. The collected data were analyzed with content analysis, and three themes were reached: limited social justice, inclusive perspectives, and holistic leaders. Based on the results, teachers think that principals have a limited SJL and inclusion enactment. The participant teachers think that SJL should have a holistic perspective, including parents and teachers while ensuring social justice at school.

**Keywords:** *Inclusive education, social justice leadership, Turkish context*

**To cite this article:** Akkaya, A., & Tabancalı, E. (2023). Social justice leadership in the refugees' education: Insights of teachers in Turkish secondary schools. *European Journal of Educational Management*, 6(3), 167-177. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eujem.6.3.167>

### Introduction

Differences and diversities that become more and more evident in societies with the increase of globalization and human mobility make themselves felt in the field of education and make it difficult to provide education to all segments of society under equal conditions. As one of those segments, displaced people such as refugees and immigrants get lack many basic human rights including education, because these are guaranteed by the citizenship of a state. Particularly, in the 21st century, it is a controversial topic of how the host countries act in educating refugees and what approach will be adopted for integration, multiculturalism, or inclusion. Achieving equality in education may seem like an educational goal, but for many developing countries, it is a big step towards achieving socio-economic equality and reducing poverty. To eliminate socioeconomic inequalities, attention should be paid to inequalities in education (Van Steenwyk, 2014). Turkey, as one of those host countries welcoming Syrian refugees, changed its policy towards Syrian refugees and started to activate new practices to integrate Syrian refugees, by desisting from the belief that they are going back to their countries. By changing the policy in 2016, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) took an important step to integrate Syrian refugees into public schools with local students and opened Turkish public schools to Syrian refugees. Syrian students already enjoy their rights to get an education by the year 2016 through domestic laws, but components of education may face some problems in practice. One of those problems could result from the nonpreparation of principals in schools with refugees. Diversity in cultural and linguistic terms can be some of the reasons for this (Lopez, 2003). However, school principals have big impacts on society through the education organizations where they work. Therefore, the fact that they emphasize social justice in education is critical. SJL is born from improving educational achievements and recognizing disparities against vulnerable groups in society (D. E. DeMatthews et al., 2016; Robinson, 2017; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011). Fraser (2012) defined SJL as "a leadership style that supports the effectiveness of the leadership practices of the person who will change the environment to bring everyone to the best and success even in the most hopeless situations" (p.14). School leaders that are concerned with social justice evaluate, criticize, and produce solutions to racial injustice and marginalization based on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disabilities, sexual identity, and other diversity types (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Theoharis, 2007).

Because of school principals' huge impact on reducing educational gaps, SJL for students, particularly refugees, has become one of the most appealing themes internationally. Some studies highlight the significance of SJL by putting forward that social justice leaders at school could transform schools notwithstanding the challenges they have to face

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(Theoharis, 2007, 2009). Other studies also put principals' school leadership, social justice, and inclusion perspectives and what school principals and other components of education management did to abolish inequalities in education in his study (D. DeMatthews, 2015; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). However, there are certain tensions and quandaries about whether the components of social justice such as scholars, school principals, and decision-makers can utilize effective methods to engage in SJL activities and policy (Sarid, 2021). Furthermore, despite the fact that there has been some research on SJL, there is a scarcity of studies examining the SJL practices of school principals toward refugees in education (Brooks, Normore, & Wilkinson, 2017; Norberg & Gross, 2019). Accordingly, the current study aims to examine the perceptions of teachers in schools with Syrian refugees on principals' perpetuating SJL practices. It is expected that this study would provide policy-makers, educators, academics, and school principals with insight into school principals' current understanding and experiences of SJL.

## Literature Review

### *Education of Syrian Refugees in Turkey*

Through the "open door" policy, Turkey welcomed about 1,7 million Syrian refugees under the age of 18 since the Syrian war broke out in 2011 (Directorate Migration Management, n.d.). By considering universal standards, Turkey legislated some regulations such as the law on foreigners and international protection in 2014, which determined the basics of the refugee and asylum arrangements in Turkey. Also, a temporary protection regulation was enacted in 2014 to arrange the responsibilities and rights of the people who are under protection for a limited time in Turkey (The UN Refugee Agency Türkiye, n.d.). According to this policy, the need for a comprehensive, well-structured policy on a legal basis has now become clear, and the General Directorate of the migration administration was established following the acceptance of Law No. 6458 on international protection for foreigners in May 2014. With the Temporary Protection Regulation, which constitutes the legal framework and sets out Syrians' legal status in Turkey, the right of education of refugees -other social rights - has been placed on a legal basis with a holistic and rights-based approach (Article 89-1 the applicant or persons and family members who have international protection status shall benefit from primary and secondary education services.). To provide education to Syrian refugees in Turkey, they were allowed to register in Turkish schools since the Syrian refugee crisis arose apart from "Temporary Educational Centers" (TECs) to educate them (Sunata & Abdulla, 2019).

MoNE has aimed to improve the standard of public schools by assigning public school buildings as TECs to cater to the huge arrival of Syrian children in collaboration with numerous organizations. More than one hundred high school buildings were given to secondary schools run by various MoNE organizations as collaborators in Adana, Ankara, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Hatay, and Kayseri in 2015. Turkish students also attended classes before midday in these provinces and refugees joined in the afternoon as part of the reform steps. Syrian teachers were willingly hired in these schools and the benefits of non-state organizations were earned. The course materials were updated depending on the program in Syria (McCarthy, 2018).

TECs provided education that does not have conventional connections between education and the nation-state causing an anomaly in the centralized education system. First of all, the program practiced in the centers does not follow socio-cultural ideals that will be passed on to future generations to lead to national social cohesion. Secondly, the Syrian teachers, administrators, and students are not residents of that region, which of course prevents them from being considered accountable to the Turkish State (McCarthy, 2018).

The standard of education of TECs is uncertain in terms of the structured national education structure, which lacks the sustainability of public schools. On the other hand, their existence has a theoretical influence. Schools run by non-state organizations are also a model for a proxy state in education, which relates to the expansion of foreign and national non-state players in the provision of social services to refugees, which should be offered by the state (Kagan, 2011, 2012). States have the responsibility to provide refugees with their human rights. This principle belongs to customary law, though, thus refugees' status is regulated primarily by national legislation pertaining to foreign nationals of the host country (Betts, 2009, 2011). Turkey, with the legislation in 2014, has been trying to perform integration of Syrian refugees into public schools with Turkish native students. On condition that refugee students supply a foreigner ID, it is possible for them to be registered at Turkish schools under Circular 2014/2132. However, it is a fact that monolingualism persists in the public education system in Turkey, accordingly; Syrian refugees cannot easily adapt to the education system. Even though there are some efforts by the local municipalities to get over this problem to some extent thanks to the language courses (Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish) not only for children but also for adults, education is a serious problem for refugees in Turkey. Another problem is class sizes because the number of students has boosted with the Syrian refugee registrations, especially in the provinces near Syria (Öztürkler & Göksel, 2015). This leads us to question the quality and justice in education for all students including Syrian refugees.

Even though there are opportunities for receiving education for refugees, many children are negatively affected by their harsh experiences (Banks, 2017). The fragile states where those refugees come from ask the host countries welcoming them to help to plan proper educational facilities for refugee children (Arar, Brooks & Bogotch, 2019; Sirin & Rorers-Sirin, 2015). At this point, it is an undeniable fact that discrimination, integration policies for refugee and migrant students, and refugees' right to access to education and the integration among different ethnic groups in society are

strongly connected (Banks, 2017; McCarthy, 2018; Norberg, 2017; Waite, 2016). Especially school principals have a social role in encountering refugee and migrant students at the school level. On the other hand, even though national and international policies and implementations show that inclusion is targeted for refugees, practitioners have to deal with some contradictions (Arar, Örucü & Ak Küçükçayır, 2019) as well as bigger societal worries and impacts (Brooks & Watson, 2019). To sum up, the problems policymakers in Turkey have to deal with in the process of giving education to Syrian refugees can be handled in three categories such as infrastructure and equipment, institutional capacity, and human resources (McCarthy, 2018). It is a fact that public schools have to get over the capacity problems existing and expanding with refugees' registrations. Another challenge about human resources is that school principals and teachers are deprived of enough experience in handling the uncommon influx of Syrian refugees. Yet, MoNE does not have enough educational quantity to deal with refugees in education effectively. Hence, while integrating Syrian refugees into education in Turkey, no matter what laws are legislated internationally and domestically, how much importance school principals give to integrative activities or programs on behalf of social justice is quite valuable to appreciate diversity among locals and Syrian students on a school basis.

### *Social Justice Leadership*

The most important factor guiding the management process is the school principal, whereas many factors inside and outside the school affect the management of educational institutions. Also, the importance of putting up with the current implementations in managing educational institutions is profound because conventional school management methods are not sufficient for the restructuring and development of current educational institutions (Wasonga, 2009). Accordingly, leadership caring for others has become prominent. One reason for this is that organizations have become complicated with norms and applications pursuing economic, social, political, and educational inequalities (Campbell, 2010). Furthermore, as the diversity of ethnicity increases among students, the necessity for equality in schools has become prominent (Skrla et al., 2011).

School principals have the most fundamental power in incorporating values including social justice and inclusiveness into education (Jansen, 2006). It can be shown as a common idea that the social justice issue, which has been recently examined in educational leadership, is about social learning opportunities (Arar, 2014). However, experts couldn't decide on the conception of SJL in the educational administration field. It is thought that a single definition will limit the concept (Fraser, 2012; Zhang et al., 2018). For that reason, many definitions have been done, but the common point of all is providing educational opportunities for each student (Fraser, 2012).

The focal point of social justice in education is marginalized groups' experiences and inequality of opportunity in education (Furman, 2012). While the general policies on this issue are determined by the higher documents, most school principals are in charge of the duty of ensuring social justice in schools. It is because social justice cannot be considered isolated from educational leadership practices (Bogotch, 2002). In educational leadership, social justice emphasizes ethical concepts such as justice, respect, importance, and equality in awareness of situations that may be disadvantageous including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and disability (Cambren-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). Fraser (2012) defined SJL as the leaders who believe that the world exists, as it is designed and that they must be activists in leadership behavior to provide opportunities for each student. School principals should have awareness of all covert and open oppression forms, aim at changing the dominant paradigm, and advocate marginalized and suppressed students' lives and education (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). School principals should develop processes that support justice, and equality, giving importance to all students and focusing on cultural factors that affect educational outcomes to integrate democratic society and social justice for the development of students (Wasonga, 2009). SJL includes an action-oriented view that emphasizes awareness about suppression, exclusion, and marginalization (D. DeMatthews, 2014; Furman, 2012). Accepting differences and creating a learning environment that respects them are among social justice leaders' tasks (Berkovich, 2014). According to Muzaliwa and Gardiner (2014), social justice leaders have certain characteristics;

- They believe that all students should receive education in heterogeneous groups.
- They use their knowledge and skills to put them into practice.
- They dream of a school where all students feel belonging.
- They can see the similarities between students and differences.
- Supports students who have difficulties at school.
- Does not defend its limitations, wherein the process is honest and determined to go further.
- Continuously improves himself on equality and differences that he thinks his knowledge is insufficient.

Theoharis's (2007) SJL definition points to marginalization in educational institutions. Accordingly, social justice leaders at school place ethnicity, class, sex, disability, and other historical and recent marginalized situations at the core of leadership practices. Unless deliberate steps are taken to provide egalitarianism and justice to change the school in favor of marginalized students, they cannot use the right to get education. Principals should be at the forefront of transforming the school into more equitable and fair places. According to Brooks et al. (2007), leaders who have developed a social

justice perspective are characterized in three ways. The first is that they are transformational public intellectuals, and they think that pedagogy in schools should focus on moral consequences. Another one is that they are bridge people. How principals make sense of their own experiences, what they do with these new understandings, and how others react to these practices affect the leaders' perception of the world. In this way, educational leaders become bridge people (Boske, 2014). Similarly, McKenzie et al. (2008) allege that social justice leaders in education have three goals;

- To increase each student's success at school,
- Make students prepared for life as critical citizens,
- To achieve these two objectives, which are to create inclusive and heterogeneous classroom environments that provide rich teaching environments for all students.

Briefly, social justice practices should support inclusiveness for marginalized groups. An inclusive school culture supports disadvantaged individuals and groups and develops the skills necessary for their equal participation in society (Berkovich, 2014). Awareness is another dimension frequently expressed in SJL definitions. Principals should see the inequalities in the school and find solutions for them. They should know how to use their knowledge, experience, and resources for inequalities (Zhang et al., 2018). It is among the social justice leaders' priorities to provide a culture where differences are respected and tolerant. Principals' fair approach is very critical to help students with different languages, religions, classes, cultures, and genders continue their education together without feeling excluded (D. DeMatthews, 2014; Fraser, 2012).

Goddard (2007), Leeman (2007) and Mahieu and Clycq (2007) resulted in that social justice leaders valuing multicultural schools has an important impact on changing the culture, the instruction, and the schools' priorities so that disadvantaged students can get education. Also, social justice leaders initiate and build a belonging atmosphere, contribute to students' achievement and efforts to integrate each student; and deal with inequalities (Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). Berkovich (2014), on the other hand, highlights the importance of activism and the power of social change in struggling with social inequalities for social justice leaders. However, they must be aware of inequalities among individuals first (D. DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014), and it is not so easy to realize unfairness at school, as each school has unique contexts, societal expectations, and cases (Bogotch, 2002; McKenzie et al., 2008). The limited literature on SJL has shown social justice-centered values and directions, fruitful leadership strategies, setbacks to school equality, and positive results reached (D. DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2007).

To summarize, the study aims to explore the secondary school teachers' perceptions of their principals' social justice enactment in the education of Syrian refugees. The study also focuses on SJL practices concerning refugee education and integration of them into the Turkish education system. The study was guided by the following questions:

- What are teachers' perceptions of their school principals' social justice leadership?
- According to teachers' perceptions and experiences, what are school principals' SJL practices?

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design was adopted to put forward teachers' perceptions of their school principals' social justice at Turkish secondary schools. Researchers who adopt the qualitative research approach can focus on their subjects within the abundance of content from rich aspects without generalizing the subject (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Hence, thanks to the qualitative approach employed in this study, the researchers can analyze teachers' perceptions through open-ended questions without generalization. According to Smith (2018, p.2), "phenomenology studies are organized according to conscious experiences from the first person point of view, along with the presentation of the relevant conditions of experience". The data is collected from the individuals who experience the phenomenon and a comprehensive description of the essential experiences for all is developed by the researchers (Moustakas, 1994). In the same line with those, in the current phenomenological study, we explored the secondary school teachers' perceptions about their principals' SJL in the integration of Syrian students at schools, thereby reflecting the nature of their particular interactions that involve the complexities of the past, the present, and the future (Creswell, 2007; van Manen, 1990). To state clearly, we had the mediator role between various meanings, combining their conceptions to put forward principals' basic perspectives.

### *Study Group*

The participants in this study were determined as 11 teachers. The maximum variation sampling method was chosen to determine the participants. In the maximum variation sampling, a small number of units or cases that optimize the diversity important to the study is selected by the researcher. The principle behind this is that the subject should be presented from all possible viewpoints, accordingly gaining better comprehension. This sampling method is also called heterogeneous sampling through which the researcher selects participants through a wide variety of the research topic (Bailey, 1994). The participants' demographics are given in the following table:

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Name	Gender	Education	Experience	Location
White	Female	Bachelor's	3 years	Şanlıurfa
Blue	Female	Bachelor's	7 years	Şanlıurfa
Violent	Female	Master's	7 years	Şanlıurfa
Red	Male	Bachelor's	3 years	Gaziantep
Yellow	Female	Bachelor's	4 years	Gaziantep
Green	Female	Bachelor's	6 years	Gaziantep
Black	Male	Bachelor's	4 years	Gaziantep
Gray	Male	Master's	3 years	Hatay
Purple	Female	Bachelor's	8 years	Hatay
Orange	Female	Master's	6 years	Kahramanmaraş
Brown	Male	Bachelor's	3 years	Kahramanmaraş

As seen in Table 1, the participants consisted of 7 female and 4 male teachers. 3 participants have a master's degree, while the others have a bachelor's degree. As for their experiences, they have various seniority periods.

#### Data Collection

To obtain the key data for this research, we prepared a semi-structured interview form. After examining the appropriate literature, we agreed on the content and flow of the interviews, which included both individual and focus group sessions, while constructing the interview form. Following that, we forwarded it to additional education professionals to assess the level, clarity, relevance, and applicability of the questions. To assure internal validity and assess intelligibility, we initially interviewed two experts in educational sciences and updated the interview form based on their input. Finally, we created six questions regarding the participants' perspectives of SJL. To ensure consistency and credibility, we triangulated our findings through focus group meetings with participants. Focus group meetings were designed to increase the credibility of member checking (Lincoln et al., 1985), and the experiences and insights of the participants were confirmed in two different group meetings with the same participants (3-4 participants volunteered for each). Individual interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes and focus group meetings lasted almost 30 minutes. We used digital means to do our interviews and before each meeting, we sent a consent form to inform our participants that they could end the interview whenever they want. We also addressed potential interpretations, implying that we used investigator triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). We could collect extensive data and hypothesize on several aspects of the phenomena (Neuman, 2013). As a result, we could apply multi-triangulation in the current study.

#### Data Analysis

During the data analysis process, we used a two-step analysis strategy (Saldana, 2009). To analyze the collected data through individual interviews and focus group meetings, we transcribed all the interviews. After reading and analyzing the data again and again to get a general insight, we identified the themes as limited social justice, inclusive perspectives, and holistic leaders.

In this study, we attempted to assure credibility by contacting the participants in the long term, asking them to confirm, and having long interviews with our participants. Furthermore, we examined the consistency of the data's findings to increase the data's credibility. In this regard, we checked the consistency of the findings with the literature review used in the development of the interview form continuously. Besides, we preferred to give direct quotations from the interviews to provide the credibility of the research. As for the transferability of the study, we explained each step of the research in detail. In this sense, we described the research design, participants, data collection tools and process, data analysis, and interpretation steps in detail.

### Findings

The data gathered from interviews revealed that "Limited Social Justice" was the most prominent theme among all participants when discussing SJL in secondary schools in Turkey. This theme comprised two categories: limited practices and ignorant attitudes. The second theme, "Inclusive Perspective," highlighted the importance of inclusion and equality for all students in education. This theme had two categories: showing respect and giving importance to equality. Finally, the study's last theme, "Holistic Leaders," comprised three categories: interacting with parents, leading teachers, and school as a community simulation. The findings show that school principals should adopt a holistic perspective to promote social justice. Teachers view the school as a microcosm of the community and stress the necessity that principals encourage parent participation and teacher engagement in promoting social justice.

#### Theme-1: Limited Social Justice

Three themes emerged as a consequence of the analysis. The findings show that virtually all of the participants believe that social justice practices are insufficient and that principals should do more. The majority of participants believe that their principals' SJL should be improved. The first theme, Limited Social Justice, is subdivided into two categories: limited practices and ignorant attitudes. Participants report that their principals have a limited grasp of social justice and that the social justice practices are insufficient. For example, one of the teachers who hold this opinion shared his opinions as follows:

*"Central applications from the ministry are carried out in our school, but the number of Syrian students in each school is not the same. Here students need more support. In this regard, our principal can receive training and contribute to the teachers. I am trying to do something myself, but it would be much better if we did it together with encouragement from the management." (Yellow)*

On the other hand, the participants emphasized the need for more to be done by the principals. One of the participants expressed her opinions as follows:

*"As part of Pices, we support students academically with extra lessons given after class. However, I am not sure if something is being done in terms of psycho-social support or adaptation and integration. The school principal should analyze the needs in this regard and should do what is needed." (White)*

The second category is formulated as the "ignorant attitudes" under the first theme. The participants emphasized the ignorant attitudes toward the Syrian students in their schools as follows:

*"Principals and teachers at school are doing something for refugee students, but I don't think it's enough. Students cannot talk comfortably; they cannot make friends at school. I think principals have more work to do. But after class, everyone leaves, and usually, no one seems to care much." (Brown)*

*"In fact, the principal ignores it when any situation with refugee students comes up in meetings or when there is a problem. We, the teachers, voluntarily support the students in a way." (White)*

In summary, the theme of limited social justice explores the insights and experiences of secondary school teachers as to their principals' SJL. The participants reported that their principals had a limited SJL approach toward refugee students at school. They also have some concerns about their principals' ignorant attitudes when there is a problem with these refugee students. Overall, the theme shows that according to the teachers' insights, the SJL practices by secondary school principals can be enhanced.

#### *Theme-2: Inclusive Perspective*

The second theme, Inclusive Perspective, demonstrates that participants value inclusion and equality in SJL. They believe that all students have the right to equitable participation in education. The theme is divided into two sections: expressing respect and emphasizing equality. According to the first category, participants give great importance to showing respect to refugee students rather than showing tolerance or accepting them. Some responses as to this category included:

*"When it comes to refugee students, I think that expressions such as tolerating or accepting are not correct. Something wrong or missing may be tolerated. In this context, diversity needs to be respected more." (Purple)*

*"Actually, we have to be tolerant, they came from war and are foreigners here. They also have the right to receive education, and we need to respect that. As a teacher, I try to do my best. When other students discriminate, I try to somehow integrate them." (Black)*

"Giving importance to equality" is another category reached under this theme. According to the category, a common view amongst the participants was that every student should have an equal opportunity to participate in the educational process and events that take place at school. Talking about this issue a participant said:

*"Teachers and principals have a lot of work to do in ensuring equality in education. For example, when some supply arrives at the school, we need to deliver it to the student who really needs it. We should not discriminate between students based on race, color, nationality and should attach importance to equality." (Gray)*

One participant stated more should be done to ensure equality among students from different backgrounds. The views of him are reflected in the following:

*"As educators, we need to provide our students with the necessary support so that they can exercise their right to receive education. Perhaps some may need more support so that all can enjoy this right equally. At this point, it is our duty to close the deficits of refugees." (Green)*

In summary, the second theme "Inclusive Perspective" highlights the importance of inclusion and equality in education. Participants believe that all students have the right to equal access to education and school events and then emphasize the importance of showing respect to refugee students, rather than simply tolerating or accepting them.

*Theme-3: Holistic Leaders*

The last theme of the research, "holistic leaders," contains three categories: interaction with parents, leading teachers, and school as a community simulation. The findings show that principals should enact social justice in schools from a comprehensive viewpoint. The participants perceive the school as a simulation of society, and they support the fact that principals promote parental involvement and staff involvement in promoting social justice in schools. Two of the participants emphasized the importance of integrating parents into this process by stating as follows:

*"The issue is not only the students, but we have to negotiate with the parents of the students. There is no parent, even though there is a language problem, we can't get along. Principals should definitely keep in touch with parents and involve them in the process while solving problems." (Green)*

*"The principal should keep in touch with parents to ensure social justice at school in some way by visiting them or inviting them to school." (Blue)*

On the other hand, the participants highlighted the importance of encouraging teachers to ensure social justice at school.

*"The person who will initiate social justice practices and encourage teachers at school is the principal. The principal should also encourage teachers and be meticulous about social justice." (Yellow)*

*"If the principal doesn't care, the teachers don't care either. The school principal can meet the teachers and talk, and discuss suggestions on what can be done. The principal cannot do it alone, and teachers do not make supportive practices if the principal does not encourage them." (Orange)*

The last category of the theme "school as a community simulation" explains the significance of a social justice leader for a community because the participants see the school as a reflection of the community. Talking about this issue an interviewee said:

*"School is a reflection of society. Therefore, it is very important that social justice is provided in schools first. At this point, school principals have a lot of work to do." (Black)*

One another participant stressed the importance of a principal's awareness about his/her role for the other actor including teachers and students by stating:

*"The principal's approach directly affects the approach of both teachers and other students. Since the principal's approach is also very decisive for others in the school, the principal must be aware of his role here and be a representative of justice." (Purple)*

The findings from focus group sessions support these themes by highlighting the need for more social justice practices and the need for more social justice perceptions to be validated. Participants believe that principals should be in charge of all aspects of education, including teachers and parents.

### Discussion

Analysis of the secondary school teachers' insights about principals' SJL is expected to contribute to a wider comprehension of how principals in secondary schools with Syrian refugee students perceive social justice, what kind of practices they apply, and what is expected from the social justice leaders to integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish schools. The findings of this study indicate that the vast majority of participants hold the belief that social justice initiatives by their school principals at secondary schools are insufficient, and they expect more proactive measures to be taken by school principals. Also, the current investigation found that principals' understanding of social justice is limited. The reason for this may arise from a result of the unpreparedness of principals to effectively manage a school with a refugee population, given the cultural and linguistic diversity that is likely to exist (Lopez, 2003). On the contrary, school leaders prioritizing social justice initiatives possess the capacity to effect significant positive changes in their schools, even in the face of significant challenges (Theoharis, 2007, 2009).

According to the findings, participants give importance to an inclusive attitude towards accommodating differences, ensuring equality among students, and respecting them, which constitutes their perceptions about principals' SJL. Furthermore, most participants have commented on the potential for their principals to improve their SJL skills in this regard for an inclusive school. Consistent with this, Theoharis (2007) alleges that social justice rests on a foundation of values such as respect, care, recognition, and empathy. Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) posit that social justice involves actively engaging in efforts to modify institutional and organizational structures in order to promote equity, equality, and fairness across a range of social, economic, educational, and personal domains. School principals should see the inequalities in the school and find solutions for them. They should know how to use their knowledge, experience, and resources for inequalities (Zhang et al., 2018). It is also one of the priorities of the social justice leader to provide a school culture where differences are respected and tolerant. School principals' fair approach is very effective in helping students with different languages, religions, classes, cultures, and genders continue their education together without feeling excluded (D. DeMatthews, 2014; Fraser, 2012). The existing literature provides consistent evidence that there is a notable absence of emphasis on equity-related concerns in programs designed to prepare individuals for educational

administration (Bell et al., 2002; Brown, 2004; Lyman & Villani, 2002; Marshall, 2004; Solomon, 2002). As such, based on the results of both the current study and the literature, it can be concluded that school principals have a pivotal role in leading the charge toward creating equal and just environments.

Further analysis shows that participants claim that SJL should include a holistic perspective including parents' and teachers' active involvement in perpetuating social justice at schools. In accordance with it, Sarid (2021) demonstrated that it is essential that consistent implementation of a particular social justice perspective is reflected across all areas of school practice including curriculum, pedagogy, and teaching practice. Accordingly, social justice can be ensured through not only leadership practices but also teachers' involvement in the process and their activities in class. As for family participation, similar to this study, the existing literature highlights the importance of parental involvement for an inclusive approach toward marginalized groups in school (Brown, 2004; D. E. DeMatthews et al., 2016). D. E. DeMatthews et al. suggest that principals, teachers, and parents can collaborate to meet educational requirements that would be challenging or impossible to provide by either group alone. They also suggest that educational leaders seldom aim to completely involve families, offer parents support structures and successfully encourage parents to participate in school activities. In addition, the participants of the study accept school as a simulation of society, and accordingly, it cannot be thought an isolated concept from human components like parents and teachers.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the results of the current study, SJL is still a kind of educational leadership more attention should be given. Principals' providing equity, respect, and an inclusive approach towards refugee students is emphasized by the participants. The involvement of family and teachers is seen as a significant component in ensuring social justice by the school principals in schools. Bogotch (2002) claims that social justice is a socially constructed phenomenon. Accordingly, it cannot be accepted as a separate concept from refugees' parents and teachers at school. Also, the nature and implementation of social justice policies will inevitably vary based on the ethical framework of the leaders involved, as well as the unique contextual demands of the educational setting in question (D. DeMatthews, 2015). These results reflect those of Arar, Örucü and Ak Küçükçayır (2019) who also found that principals worked based on the government's policies about refugees' education and they were not flexible enough to implement social justice. Parents' involvement will absolutely make the unique conditions of each student clear for principals. On the other hand, collaboration is needed for social justice, as principals have difficulty ensuring it alone (Brooks et al., 2007; Giles et al., 2005).

### Recommendations

The practice of SJL can be expanded beyond the principals' tasks into a wider community including other components of education including parents, teachers, and other state institutions. To do this, principals can get training or orientation on how to integrate parents and teachers to ensure social justice at schools with marginalized groups such as refugees. These training and orientation programs can include building trust and rapport for families, leadership approaches that promote family and community participation in school administration and decision-making in education, and encouraging teachers to help students identify their own challenges to academic and social inclusion.

For further studies, the participants and the school type can be varied including principals and students from elementary or high schools to gain a holistic insight and to see different perspectives towards social justice leadership.

### Limitations

Because a small group of teachers participated in this qualitative study cannot be considered generally representative. Nonetheless, it should be noted that its primary goal was to comprehend the enactment of principals according to secondary school teachers' perceptions. The study's importance is thus determined by the viewpoints expressed rather than the number of participants who expressed them.

### Funding

The authors received financial support for the research from the Coordinatorship of Scientific Research Projects, Yıldız Technical University.

### Authorship Contribution Statement

Akkaya: Conceptualization, design, data acquisition, analysis, writing. Tabancalı: Design, analysis, critical revision of manuscript, editing, supervision, final approval.

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