

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTION PROPOSALS OF SYRIAN CHILDREN HAVING EDUCATION OF PRE-SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Focus, group interview technique, was used as a qualitative research method in order to reveal the problems and solutions of the Syrian children who received pre-school education. The mothers of 14 children who lost their father in the battle and go on to study at Nihat Suzan Sipahi Nursery School with the support of Ufuk Sector and six teachers teaching these children were included to this working group. The interviews were held in two separate sessions under the presidency of moderator and the two observers, as well as the mothers and preschool teachers. Interviews with the Syrian parents were conducted through an interpreter, and open-ended questions were asked to participants after the purpose of the interview was explained. The scope of the questions consisted of the emotional problems of Syrian children, the cultural differences, problems encountered in the adaptation process of the school and the education process and solution proposals. Data from interview questions was analyzed using content analysis. According to the obtained data; It has been revealed that Syrian children have experienced emotional and behavioral problems, have not received any support to overcome these problems, their cultural characteristics have been ignored in the education process, children were good at problem solving and academic skills, but had a very limited level of learning Turkish.

Keywords: Syrian children, Pre-school education, Migration, Immigration

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines include complete descriptions of the fonts, spacing, and related information While immigrants are regarded as people who voluntarily leave the country they live in order to reach better living conditions, forced migration is defined as people having to leave their homes and go to safe areas for many reasons, such as natural or man made disasters and wars (Hazan, 2012; Ünal, 2014). However, a refugee is seen as a person who leaves his country because of force majeure (Ünal, 2014). According to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, the United Nations Migration Authority (2017) defined refugees as " a person who has a right to fear about suffering persecution due to his race, religion, nationality, being a member of a certain social group or political opinion, and separate from his country and do not return or refuse to return". According to Hurley, Saini, Warren and Carbery (2012), refugees are people who were territorialized because of violence, natural catastrophes, and the reasons that lead physical-emotional distress to persist for a long time.

Unal (2014), according to the statistics of the Global Migration Report released by the United Nations at the end of 2013, reported that the number of international migrants on the World was increasing year by year, reaching 175 million in 2000, 221 million in 2010 and 232 million in 2013, compared to 154 million in 1990. The arrival of migrants escaping from the civil war in Syria to Turkey has been continuing since 2011. According to the data obtained from the General Immigration Authority, in 2012, 14.237 people took refuge in Turkey from Syria. The number of refugees living in Turkey was reported to be 2,749,733 in April 2016

and 3 million in January 2017 (Akpınar, 2017; Duruel, 2016). According to AFAD (2013) report, it was stated that the rate of children among Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey was relatively high and the rate of children between 2-6 years was 16.5%. There are 72 Syrian immigrants in Turkey. Most of the Syrian migrants in the border provinces such as Gaziantep, Hatay and Şanlıurfa are spread all over the country. This has made Turkey the home country of the world's largest refugee population (Doğan & Karakuyu, 2016). Akpınar (2017) states that since 1990 the rapid change in the Middle East has turned Turkey into a country that faces an immigration corridor and migrant problems.

The phenomenon of immigration and emigration has social, political and economic determinants in terms of both emigrating and immigrating countries and societies are faced with the positive or negative consequences of this phenomenon in one way or another (Ünal, 2014). In this context, international migration and the problems caused by it have come into prominence with the globalization since the second half of the 20th century (Deniz, 2014). Individual or mass migrations throughout history have shaped the world's current population distribution, social, political, economic, cultural structures and developments of societies (Ünal, 2014). Migration causes individuals with different backgrounds to live with language, religion, tradition and cultural differences, and problems of cultural adjustment among these individuals (Aksoy, 2012). Somersan (2004) noted that with migration, ethnic and cultural differences were intertwined, and that the social, economic and political dynamics of the world were affected and changed. Immigrant people attach their cultural and effective differences to different ethnic and cultural structures and this raises an important issue of harmony in both communities (Deniz, 2014).

Children are among the most vulnerable sections of the refugee population. The horror and fear of the war environment is more frustrating for children and many refugee children and families are lost in trauma, violence, uncertainty, instability, cultural and social change, and are living with the potential loss of family members. It is often not possible to improve the physical and psychological damage that these events have on children. Poverty, psychological-social traumas resulting from deep emotional injuries caused by the loss of relatives and separation from their relatives can occur and the children are mostly deprived of education (Bilgin, 2014; Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Krakouer, Mitchell, Trevitt & Kochanoff, 2017; UNICEF, 2004). Thus, at a time when the need to acquire a new language and adapt to a new culture has come to the forefront, the struggle to protect the sense of social and psychological stability, refugee children and young people are potentially at risk of developing learning difficulties and behavior problems (Hamilton & Moore, 2004).

There are two important points in the compatibility of immigrant children. These are socio-cultural and psychological integration. Socio-cultural integration can be achieved by going to school, dealing with school activities, making friends and communicating and talking and understanding the language of the country where they live and psychological integration can be achieved through social support, life satisfaction and sense of belonging (Berry, 2005). Immigrants' fitting into the society they come to is an important event. The school also plays a very important role in the adaptation of refugee children. Adaptation is a process that reduces the level of conflict and disagreement between the individual and the environment and at the same time develops new attitudes as a result of the cultural reconciliation process, that is, it changes the members of the host community as well as newcomers (Şekerci & Sirkeci 2015; Ward & Kennedy, 2001; Berry, 2005).

Education is primarily an important route to rehabilitate children or adults to regulate the daily lives of the Syrians, to protect them from the trauma of war they have experienced (Duman, 2016). Differences such as lifestyle, language and culture are important and

troublesome in the adaptation process. For this reason, one of the most important issues to achieve adaptation is education, and schools play a critical role in the integration of refugee children into society and in the development of their sense of belonging (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Yolcu, Anodal & Coşkun, 2016). As a result, while the outbreak of Syrian asylum seekers brings a number of social, economic and political risks, the continuing education of asylum seekers is crucial both in terms of their own future and contributions to Turkey and Syria (Duruel, 2016).

Seydi (2014) points out that children and their education are influenced by the conflicts in Syria and Syrian children were deprived of educational opportunities before coming to Turkey because of the fact that schools have been closed since March 2011, when the conflicts began, thus the need for education of asylum seekers has increased. In his work with the Syrians living in the camps, Akpınar (2017) notes that 17% of children aged 6-11 years do not attend school, while 31% of Syrian children living outside the camp go to official Turkish schools.

In the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan of the Ministry of National Education, the education of asylum seekers in Turkey has been discussed and it has been stated that efforts will be made to ensure the adaptation of asylum-seeking students to the education system. Thanks to the Temporary Protection Regulation, which went into effect in October 2014, Syrians have had an access right to health, education and social assistance services. In 2014, by the circular no. 2014/21, Syrian children were provided with educational services in the schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education or in Temporary Training Centers (GEM) established for Syrians (Duruel, 2017). In recent years, intensive efforts are being made to ensure that Syrian children benefit from schooling and educational opportunities. However, on the other hand, the content of education comes to the forefront with Syrian children's schooling. Are the teachers and other children in the class ready to teach the Syrian children?

Hoot (2011) notes that thousands of children have been displaced to refugee camps as a result of conflicts in many parts of the world, resulting in resettlement in safe countries. It is thus emphasized that children are beginning to receive training in the classes of teachers who have little or no knowledge of their specific needs and in countries where they have little or no knowledge of languages. Sinclair (2002) has also stated that the school is an important element in the refugee child's recovery process, psychosocial development, and acculturation to the new environment, which also presents special challenges for schools. One of the main tasks that the refugee child faces when s/he comes to a new country is to adapt to the new school environment. However, managers and teachers do not have enough knowledge about the educational arrangements for refugee children to adapt to the school successfully. It is suggested that schools should put in some extra effort in order to meet the new students in an appropriate way (Hamilton, 2004; Rutter, 1994). According to different researchers, although some countries have sufficient experience to meet the specific needs of refugee children, many education systems do not have special support systems that will help refugee students adapt to their new school (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen & Frater-Mathieson, 2004).

As you can see, the refugees have many problems in the field such as economic, social and cultural. Among the refugees, the children are the most affected. The deprivation of their education process completely or partly will cause them to face more important and serious problems in the coming years (Er & Bayındır, 2015). For this reason, the pre-school education process of the Syrian children in the province of Gaziantep, which received a lot of immigration, was dealt with in this study and the problems that they experienced during the

education process and the solution proposal was tried to be examined in the context of cultural differences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study aimed at examining the problems faced by Syrian children who receive pre-school education and solutions was carried out by focus group interview technique from qualitative research methods. Qualitative research is a research design in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview and document analysis are used and the researcher analyzes a situation, often a program, event, action, process, or one or more individuals in depth (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2013). The following questions have been searched in the research conducted for the purpose of examining the problems which Syrian children of pre-school face and solution proposals:

1. How are the children's mental states and their condition of taking support when they first start the school?
2. What are the effects of socio-cultural differences?
3. What are the problems and solutions in the adaptation process to the school?
4. What are the problems and solutions in the education process?
5. What are the suggestions for the education of Syrian children?

Purposive sampling method focus, a qualitative research method, was used in the study in which group interview technique was used. The working group formed the mother and six teachers of 14 children who were accommodated in the Ufuk Association, lost their father in the war and whose entire maintenance and training costs were covered by the association. These children continued their pre-school education for a year. Mothers participating in the study are between the ages of 25-35 (12) and 36-44 (2). 3 mothers are college graduate; 3 mothers are high school graduate; 7 parents are secondary school graduate and 1 mother can only read and write. The majority of the mothers have 3 children. Six teachers, including 2 male and 4 female, were included in the study. All teachers have a bachelor's degree and are between 25 and 30 years old. Teachers have more than one Syrian child in their classes and 4 teachers have previously worked with children in Syria.

Instruments

The interviews were conducted in two separate 40-minute sessions with the mother and pre-school teachers under the presidency of moderator and in the presence of two observers. Audio recordings were made with the permission of the teachers and these recordings were turned into a written document, which was read and signed by the teachers and reliability was ensured. Interviews were held with the help of two interpreters in the Ufuk Association and interviews were recorded by two observers at the request of their mother. After the purpose of the interview was explained to participants, open-ended questions prepared beforehand were directed to the teacher and mothers using the same expressions and phrases, attention has been paid to the active participation of all teachers and mothers. The data obtained from the questions of emotional problems, cultural differences, adaptation to the school, the problems they encountered during the education process, and the interview questions formed within the framework of the solution proposal of Syrian children were subjected to descriptive and content analysis.

Data Analysis

In this context, the answers given to the questions in the focus interview form and grouped in the direction of objectives were made ready for descriptive analysis by getting into the related

indexes. The findings obtained in this context were discussed and interpreted in the light of the literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings resulting from focus group interviews were discussed under the following headings.

Table 1. Mother and teacher views on regarding getting support and mental conditions when they first started the school.

Children's present mental state when they start school	
Mother (N: 14)	Teacher (N: 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They had difficulties not only because of the school, but also because of coming to Turkey. • They had great difficulty, but it was good for them to play at school, on the street and in the park. • The younger ones were not impressed a lot, when they lost their father. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are very emotional. • They are quiet and introverted. • They cry easily. • They are angry and aggressive.
The situation of getting support	
Mother (N: 14)	Teacher (N: 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have not received any support. • Teachers in association helped. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have not received support. • There was no counsellor. • We were educated for the education of Syrian children, but it was not enough.

According to Table 1, the mothers stated that their children had significant difficulties in coming to Turkey and starting to study, and that the younger children were less affected when their father died, but the older children had more important problems. Teachers have stated that children are very emotional, introverted and silent, that they cry quickly, and that some children have burst of anger and aggressive behavior. The two male teachers explained the emotional state of the children in the form of "I think they always hug me and do not want to leave because they have not their fathers". Mothers and teachers stated that Syrian children had not received support for the mental problems they were experiencing. Teachers pointed out that there were not a counsellor who would guide them at school.

Refugee children face difficulties in migrating to a foreign culture, new school and community, as well as poverty and language difficulties experienced by their parents. Behavioral difficulties, social withdrawal and difficulties in peer relations are also at greater risk due to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety (Hurley et al., 2012; Morantz, Rousseau & Heymann, 2011). Negative psychological problems are more prevalent in children who are violently intertwined in the warfare in their countries, children who get used to violence or even have made it a way of life (Bilgin, 2014). Kirişçi (2014) suggested that the resolution of the traumas stemming from the displacement of Syrian children would require substantial funding. Syrian children would require substantial funding. Akpınar (2017), in his work, found that 52 per cent of refugee women needed psychological support for themselves or their relatives. For this reason, Syrian children need emotional support before and during the period of education.

Table 2. Mothers and teachers views on the effects of socio-cultural differences

What are the effects of socio-cultural differences?	
Mother (N: 14)	Teacher (N: 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The differences in food culture affected negatively. • Our children are being excluded because they are Syrian. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences in food culture • Differences in eating culture.

As regards the effects of socio-cultural diversity, mothers and teachers view the difference in food culture as an important problem. As regards the effects of socio-cultural diversity, mothers and teachers consider the difference in food culture as an important problem. Mothers stated that their children were excluded because of being Syrian. However, teachers stated that the culture of eating of Syrian children is also different and that they have problems in eating food with tools such as spoon and forks. The socio-cultural characteristics of a community are the main features that distinguish that community from other communities at the same time.

Akıncı, Nergiz and Gedik (2015) focus on cultural elements in the integration of different cultures by emphasizing "Societies are a wide network of social systems and associations that contain different groups and cultural items. In this context, the immigration factor must be a tool that attempts to make the migrated area a livable place by taking this diversity of the society into a framework and that integrate the relationship between the individual and society ". Pre-primary education institutions, which are important social institutions for Syrian children, should also be able to create experiences that integrate these cultural characteristics.

Table 3. Mothers and teachers' views on problems and solutions in the process of adaptation to the school

What are the problems and solutions in the adaptation process to the school?	
Mother (N: 14)	Teacher (N: 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He was very happy to start the school, he did not have any problems. • He did not want to go to the school, and had great difficulty. • He did not want to stay alone without the other Syrian children. • They were excluded from the class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They had a language problem • They have had too many problems. • Turkish children did not embrace them and did not accept them as a friend. • Syrian children communicated with each other, and they did not want communicate with other children. • Without Syrian children, they did not want to stay in class alone. • Parents did not want Syrian children.
What did you do for the children to adapt?	
Mother (N: 14)	Teacher (N: 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We did nothing • Teachers in these schools told the children about the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I informed the parents, I said that these children had no father, and they told their children this situation. • I attended the seminar of National Education for Syrian children, but there was no information for us. I could not benefit. • No information was given about these children. It was only said that their father died. • I did not receive a support from a counsellor. • I did class activities to introduce the children. • I held meetings with the parents, explained the situation of the children, and they supported us. • I often had a talk to the children that they should not have excluded the Syrian children.

However, the findings of the study suggest that teachers do not have enough knowledge and awareness about cultural differences and that they have not tried to remove even the differences in food culture. At the end of the interview, mothers demanded that their children should be given more support for Turkish culture, traditions and lifestyle. This suggests that mothers are making more efforts to reduce cultural differences.

When Table 3 is examined, it can be seen that the mother of the children have not experienced a lot of problems during the adjustment to the school, and the teachers have stated that the children have more problems with language problems and acceptance by other children in the class. Almost all of the teachers tried to overcome the problems which other students in the class have with their parents by explaining that the Syrian children had no father. They have stated that they have not received any help from the Directorate of National Education and guidance teachers for the education of Syrian children and that the education given by the National Education Directorate is not suitable for this age group children and is useless for them.

Hamilton & Moore (2004) indicate that refugee children experience numerous experiences of loss that contribute to the psychological, emotional and social resettlement process due to their traumatic situation and experience from their homeland. The effects of these experiences and traumatic transitions are even more challenging for children and young people entering a new culture. Şekerci and Sirkeci (2015) also point out that these children are also faced with trauma and conflicts in the countries they migrate to and they are often forced to live apart from their families as well as their racism and discrimination. On the other hand, Tunç (2015) suggests that socio-cultural changes cause new environments to exist while migrants change socio-psychologically, and that the sooner the economic and cultural integration is achieved, the less the negative effects of psychological factors will be.

Table 4. Mothers and teachers' views on problems and solutions in the educational process

What kind of problems did you experience during the education process and how did you try to solve them?	
Mother (N: 14)	Teacher (N: 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We could not talk to the teacher. Mr. Feriz from the association talked to us. He told us of the things. They were singing in Turkish, repeating what they learned. They understand Turkish but they do not speak. They were happy to go to school, they changed a lot after school started. We had trouble with food. Things that our children eat were not included in their lunch The children in the class did not come near my children because of their being Syrian. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was a language problem. They understood Turkish, but they could not speak too much. They were constantly talking to each other in Arabic Syrian children only want to play and be with Syrian friends. When we separated their classes, they did not want to take place in that class. I did not bring Syrian children together if possible. I got them to talk to the other kids. They could communicate in Turkish. Their academic status was very good., even better than our children. They understood faster, and they were grasping easily .We could not get support from their mothers. None of them came to the school. We were calling association officials in very serious problems. The mothers were struggling for their children to speak Turkish at home. At the end of the year of education, they showed a very rapid development. They were happier, more confident and more well-adjusted. We had difficulty with food. The meals were different for them, they did not want to eat.

Research shows that teachers are unprepared to work effectively and culturally with these children. Preschool teachers need a coherent systematic approach that includes evidence-based practices to support positive social and behavioral development of children who have been placed (Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Hoot, 2011; Hurley et al., 2012; Sims, Hayden, Palmer & Hutchins, 2000; Waniganayake, 2001). Findings also show that teachers do not have a clear strategy and preparations for social adaptation, social and emotional support of refugee children.

According to Table 4, the mothers stated that their children did not have many problems in the education process, that they loved the school and learned little Turkish, but their children were being excluded and had problems with their meals. Even three mothers stated that their children did not know about Turkish food and that teachers did not support them. Moreover, most of the mothers expressed the exclusion that they lived in the form of "bad things about the Syrians are being spoken, Turkish children know the Syrians as bad and exclude our children". The lack of language in the teachers was a big problem and they said that Syrian children mostly communicate with their Syrian friends. The vast majority of teachers do not see Syrian children communicating among themselves and their limited communication with other children as a problem. Only one teacher expressed the following statement: "The children were talking more among themselves. They were not communicating with other children. So I took care Syrian children to be with other children. In a short time we have reached a level of adaptation and they started to learn Turkish fast.

An important issue that all of the teachers emphasized was about the academic skills of the Syrian children. Teachers have pointed out that Syrian children are better at comprehending and learning, even that they are better academically than Turkish children, and more skilled in terms of compliance and obeying the rules. At the end of the training year, although the children did not show much improvement in the language sense, they stated that they showed significant improvement in academic, social and emotional sense. The mothers also stated that at the end of the education period children are more comfortable but they can not make much progress in Turkish. Mercan-Uzun & Tüm (2016) have reached similar findings in their study with Syrian pre-school children and emphasized that the biggest problem of children is the language problem.

Table 5. Mothers and teachers' views on the proposal for the education of children in Syria

What are your suggestions for the education of Syrian children?	
Mother (N: 14)	Teacher (N: 6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turkish lessons can be given before school. More things can be taught in subjects such as Turkish traditions and behaviors. It is being mentioned that Syrian children are bad. That's why our children are excluded from the school. It can be told that children are not bad. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They need to learn Turkish before they come to the school. There must be an interpreter in the class. We should be informed about Syrian children and how we are going to give education. All Syrian children must be trained in one class.

It has been found that Syrian children who have access to education are faced with many obstacles such as language barrier, social cohesion problem, discriminatory attitudes towards Syrian children and behavior and lack of educators, lack of teaching materials and background problems (Emin, 2016; ÇOÇA, 2015). Kirişçi (2014) stated that a curriculum in Turkish, or at least an instructional program in which Turkish is dominant, is an extremely critical step in the way children, like adults in terms of participating in Turkish society. He also emphasized that Turkish language teaching or Turkish language education will produce positive cultural, legal, political and social consequences and that the inability to provide

Turkish language education can create a youth with serious problems in fitting into the Turkish society.

As shown in Table 5, the mothers stated that children could be supported in learning Turkish before the start of the school and other children's negative perceptions towards the Syrians should be changed. Cohen & Roper (1972) emphasizes that pupils should be in equal status and emphasizes that equality should be provided by teachers, rather than expecting this status to occur spontaneously. Children's regarding themselves as a worthy person and respecting differences are shaped by the attitudes and behaviors they face in the school as well as the family environment (Bulut & Sarıçam, 2016).

The mothers emphasized that many children can be given more education on issues such as Turkish traditions, culture and behavior. According to Akıncı and his colleagues (2015), the task of immigrants to integrate societies with different cultural characteristics is to be able to adapt to the society they live in and its culture without getting away from their own culture while the duty of the migrated country and the people living there is to prepare the correct infrastructure so that the integration can be carried out healthfully. In the study, the suggestion of the mothers of Syrian children to bring the socio-cultural characteristics of Turkey to their children in pre-primary education institutions shows that they are willing and open to social integration. Akşit, Bozok & Bozok (2015), found that immigrants struggled to send their children to the school despite all the uncertainties. Aksoy (2012) points out that the most important problems that the fact of international migration reveals are people who come from different cultures living together, coping with differences and overcoming communication barriers. In the study, while Syrian mothers regard cultural integration as an important issue, it is seen that educators' awareness of cultural integration is low.

Another finding from the study is that the teachers suggested that more Syrian children in the education of Syrian children should be supported in terms of language acquisition, given better education in a separate class, and more information on the education of Syrian children should be given to the teachers. Szente, Hoot & Taylor (2006) state that early childhood education institutions and schools are sometimes not well prepared to work with refugee children and families due to cultural language diversity, trauma experience and educational disruptions. Teachers have stated that they have received a short-term training in the education of Syrian children, but that the content of the education is very inadequate in solving the problems and supporting the children.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the study conducted to determine the problems faced by Syrian children who had pre-primary education and solution proposals, it has been seen that Syrian children experienced some social and emotional problems when they started school and that the most important problem in the education process was the language problem and being excluded by other children. Furthermore, it was determined that the socio-cultural characteristics of the children were not taken into consideration during the education process and that they learned Turkish at a limited amount at the end of the training period. In the light of these results, the following suggestions can be presented:

1. In order to support the education of the children of Syria, social cohesion and healthy social-emotional development, development of multifaceted intervention programs including teacher and family education, psycho-social support, cultural diversity and social environment supporting development,
2. Preparing for the psychological problems caused by traumatic situations of Syrian children, presenting counseling services,

3. The importance of multiculturalism in education process and the enrichment of education programs in this direction,
4. The organization of various cultural adjustment programs that teachers, families and children can participate in,
5. Teachers' being supported with in-service trainings so that they can develop methods and strategies that address social, emotional and cultural situations of refugee children, is important, as well.

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