



## Refugee Students Views about the Problems They Face at Schools in Turkey<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine secondary refugee students' views about the problems they faced at Turk schools. In this direction, the refugee students' views about methods and techniques the teachers used in the class; school culture, rules, interaction, problems they have with their school friends; and the support of their families were determined. Moreover, their views about the school subjects, content, gains and necessity of these subjects; their competence in using Turkish; and their previous education's effect on their current education were determined. In this study, qualitative research design was used. The study group consisted of the refugee students enrolled at two state schools in Elazig city center in 2017-2018 academic year, second term. Maximum variation sampling method was used in the study. In determination of school, whether there are refugee students or not at that school was considered. From each school eight refugee students were selected and totally 16 refugee students were included in the study. In determination of these students, the views of headmaster and deputies head of the secondary school and teachers were considered. Volunteer refugee students participated to the study. A semi-structured interview form, which was designed by the researcher was used for data collection. Six semi-structured questions were asked to identify refugee students' views about the problems they faced. These questions were reviewed by a professor and two assistant professors. The clarity of questions were negotiated with three secondary school teachers. With refugee students whom do not know any Turkish or English, the interview had through a translator. Study results revealed that refugee students have some problems at Turk schools because of several reasons like medium of instruction, courses contents, the lack of family support, school culture- rules, and methods& techniques teachers used. Several recommendations are offered based on the research findings.

**Keywords:** refugee student, refugee student education, education problems, education problem of refugee.

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## Introduction

Global refugee movements have developed since the end of Cold War. Refugee problem is getting increased both in Turkey and throughout the world. Political disturbances, repressions, wars have caused a huge amount of migration in the Middle East especially in recent years. People of this region migrate to other countries particularly to Turkey.

Turkey took refugees for the first time in April 2011 by following an unconditional “open door policy” toward Syrian civilians fleeing from the conflict (Ahmadoun, 2014: 1). Turkey is a pretty convenient crossover point because of its geographical position. On the other hand, Turkey becomes an ideal country for these refugee families because of its social, economic and political opportunities. However, when they come and settle into Turkey, some new and different difficulties start. Unal expresses that the number of these difficulties will increase day by day with migration that Europe Countries have already experienced , and cause some social, economic, cultural and political problems (2014: 85). These difficulties include starting to live in a new and foreign country. One of these difficulties is the education of their children. Refugee students take their education in Turkish schools and they face with many problems at their new schools.

Refugees are people who are obliged to leave their countries for a safer life (Guler, 2013: 102). The person who live in a foreign country instead of the country they have citizenship because of a valid fear cruelty stemming from their nationality, religion, relation, being a member of a social group and political views, and does not want to benefit from that country’s protection because of this fear is described refugee (Dictionary of Migration Terms, 2009: 43). Malkki (1995: 497) describes the occurrence of "the refugee" and "refugee studies" in two ways: first: by looking at the management of displacement in Europe in the wake of World War II, and secondly, by tracing an array of different discursive and institutional domains within which "the refugee" has been constituted.

The sustained civil war in Syria affects not only Syria but Turkey as economically, social and communal. Many families are obliged to migrate to foreign countries because of war and condition of life that war brings. The children who are obliged to migrate with their families are the most affected group from this situation. Some precautions have taken by Turkey to prevent their future from being affected this disturbance. One of the these precautions is providing an opportunity these children to maintain their education (Uzun & Butun, 2016:72). However, one of the most important proplem of syrian refugees and even maybe the most important one in the medium and long term is the opportunity of accessing to education for their children (Tunc, 2015: 55). In 2004, the 90 % of refugee children do not take part in any education system (Kartal & Basci, 2004: 289). This number has increased progressively with last events in the middle east, and refugees migrate to start to reside in Turkey for a longer time. Therefore, their children attend to Turk schools. Because of this developments Turkey has made some arrangements in refugee system as part of contacts with the european union since 2000s. (Unluer, 2015: 139). On the other hand, in recent years, it is possible to say that there is an increasing awareness of matter’s seriousness among relevant person about refugge education, and new solutions for the matter put into practice. In this regard, the number of refugees who attend a school as a result of the efforts made by public enterprises; international organizations; and non governmental organizations, has increased each passing day. This trend is an evidence about awareness of refugee education. However, relevant persons must make an effort more, and develop a cooperation for resolving the problem because there are 500 refuge children who cannot attend a school at present (Yavuz, 2016: 194). In emergency situations, the goals of The Convention on the Rights of the Child

can be more difficult realise but they cannot be ignored. Refugee parents are actually aware of the importance of education for the future of their children. Moreover, there are many advantages of education in emergencies (Sinclair, 2001: 52).

Most of the participants at this study are from Afghanistan. Education systems actually show us a country's economic, social and political history with their complex structure. Many education curricula and textbooks give some obvious clues about Afghanistan's unsteady political landscape (Spink, 2006: 15). In Afghanistan, education has three different categories. These are traditional, modern and Islamic education. Within the scope of Islamic education, there are school types: Mosque schools; Traditional madrasa, first level; Traditional madrasa, second level; and Modern madrasa (Karlsson & Mansory, 2002: 5). So, this refugee students have a great difficulty to adapt Turk schools. This situation causes many educational problems. Kanu (2009: 115) classifies educational problems of refugee students as academic, social, psychological, linguistic and economic needs. Difficulties in refugee education can be sorted as cultural differences, language, lack of knowledge about education supplies, psychological difficulties, living conditions, training cost (Lifelong Learning, 2018).

Even if refugee students may be enthusiastic about engaging with the regular academic and social practices within classrooms and schools, they face some problems related to language and literacy based on curriculum content and pedagogical strategies (Naidoo, 2010: 52). Refugee children have some disadvantages interaction at school, and language barrier is one of these. Most of the time, lack of medium of instruction (Turkish language) skills make their education life ineffective (Seker & Sirkeci, 2015: 129). Schools have a critical importance in developing sense of belonging and getting oriented of refugee students (Taylor & Sidhu 2012: 39). This study focused on the challenges faced by refugee students.

The aim of this study is to determine secondary refugee students' views about the problems they faced at Turk schools. In this direction, the secondary refugee students' views about:

- methods and techniques the teachers used in the class;
- school culture, rules, interaction, problems they have with their school friends;
- the support of their families were determined. Moreover, their views about:
- the school subjects, content, gains and necessity of these subjects;
- their competence in using Turkish;
- their previous education's effect on their current education were determined.

### **Method**

In this part, you can see the study model, the study group, data collection, data analysis and the information about validity and reliability. In this study, qualitative research design was used. From the qualitative research designs the case study was used. The most important opportunity of case study is that it provides the opportunity of investigating several case intimately. In this method, the factors which affect a specific case are investigated in holistic view (Yıldırım & Simsek, 2006).

The study group consisted of the refugee students enrolled at two state schools in Elazığ city center in 2017-2018 academic year, second term. Maximum variation sampling method

was used in the study. In determination of school, whether there are refugee students or not at that school was considered.

From each school eight refugee students were selected and totally 16 refugee students were included in the study. In determination of these students, the views of headmaster and deputies head of the secondary school and teachers were considered. Volunteer refugee students participated to the study. The language of interview was Turkish. However, bilingual students (the ones know Turkish and Persian) helped and translated students' views during the interview

Table 1 The Demographic Informations of Refugee Students

Hometown	Migration reason	Reason for preference Turkey	Residence duration	<i>f</i>
Afghanistan	-	-	-	14
Iraq	-	-	-	1
Azerbaijan	-	-	-	1
-	War	-	-	13
-	Education	-	-	2
-	Family problems	-	-	1
-	-	Free education	-	6
-	-	Relatives	-	5
-	-	Social and Political convenience	-	2
-	-	Sympathy	-	2
-	-	Economic convenience	-	2
-	-	Private reasons	-	1
-	-	-	2 years	5
-	-	-	3 years	4
-	-	-	5 months	3
-	-	-	5 years	1
-	-	-	A year	1
-	-	-	6 months	1
-	-	-	4 months	1

14 participants are from Afghanistan, one of them is Iraq and one is from Azerbaijan. 13 of them migrated because of War, 2 of them migrated to have a better education, and one of them migrated because of family reasons. They prefer Turkey because of several reasons. 6 participants prefer Turkey to have a free education, 5 of them prefer Turkey because their relatives lives in Turkey, 2 of them prefer for social and political convenience of Turkey, 2 participants prefer Turkey since they take to Turkey, 2 of them prefer for economic convenience of Turkey, and one participant prefer it for a private reason. 5 of the participants have been in Turkey for 2 years, 4 participants have for 3 years, 3 participants have for 5 months, one participant has for 5 years, one has for one year, one has for 6 months, and another one has for 4 months.

A semi-structured interview form, which was designed by the researcher was used for data collection. Six semi- structured questions were asked to identify refugee students' views about the problems they faced. These questions were reviewed by a professor and two assistant professors.

The clarity of questions were negotiated with three secondary school teachers. During the interview, some descriptive names were made by researcher to make it clear. With refugee students whom do not know any Turkish or English, the interview had through a translator.

In analysing the data obtained, content analysis method was used in accordance with qualitative research design. Moreover NVIVO 10 programme was used to analyse data and model the case. To support findings, the quotations of refugee students were given.

## Findings

Refugee students' views for the question of **“what are your views about methods and techniques the teachers used in the class?”** were summarised in table 2.

Table 2 Refugee Students' Views about Methods and Techniques

Views	<i>f</i>
Smart Board	10
Visuality	9
Reading and direct instruction method	6
Writing	4
Learning by games	3
Comprehensive	1
Individualized instruction	1
Answer- question technique	1
Using internet	1
Giving examples	1
Instruction with details	1
Using black board	1

10 participants say that they undersand better when teachers use smartboard, and 9 of them say that they undersand better when teachers use visuals. 6 participnts express that they have difficulties in understanding when teachers use direct instruction method and read, and 4 for them have difficulties in understanding when teachers dictate. 3 participants say that they learn better when teachers use games. One participant expresses that methods and techniques the teachers used is comprehensive for them, One participant says that individualized instruction method is useful for them and another one say answer- question technique is a good technique to understand better. One participant says that when they use Internet they understand better, another participant says when teachers give more examples they understand better, and another participant says instruction with details is more comprehensive for them. Just one participant says that when teachers use black board, learning get difficult for them.

Some answers by participant Refugee students' are given below. While quoting, some abbreviations was used to identify participants characteristics. 'az' stands for Azerbaijan, 'af' for Afghanistan, and 'iq' for Iraq. When it came migration reason 'W' stands for war 'E' for education, 'F' for family. The numbers stand for residence duration.

*“I can understand very well when teachers use smartboard, pictures,or games to teach. However, it becomes difficult when writing or reading.” (S6-af-W-3y.)*

*“I am foreign therefore,I have difficulties in reading. So, I can understand better from visuals. My teachers and friends sometimes read but I cannot understand anything from them. I get bored. I can’t stand it.” (S9-af-W-5m.)*

*“I can understand better from smartboard and visuals. I do not understand anything from reading the book. Visuals are better for me.” (S10-af-E-2y.)*

*“We understand better from smartboard, visuals and Internet but sometimes do not understand from smartboard too because I do not know Turkish and understand writings on it.” (S12-af-W-2y.)*

*“We understand better from smartboard and visuals. We do not understand anything while reading.” (S13-af-E-5m.)*

Refugee students’ views for the question of **“what are your views about school culture, rules, interaction, problems you have with your school friends?”** was summarised in table 3.

Table 3 Refugee Students’ Views about School Culture, Rules, Interaction, Problems

<b>Views</b>	<b>f</b>
Good and hepfull friends	11
Unsuitable behaviours	8
Good rules	8
Too many and black letter rules	4
Time for reading ( a campaign in Elazig)	3
School equipments	2
Lack of communication	2
Too disciplined teachers	2
Lack of break time	2
Helpful teachers, managers and guidance service	2
Difficult exam	1
Informative and enjoyable school activities	1

11 participants say their friends are good and helpful. 8 of them say that their school friends have unsuitable behaviours, 8 of them say that the school rules are good and convenient for them, 4 of them say that the school rules are too many and hard for them, 3 of them say that time of reading is boring for them, they cannot understand anything from what they read. 2 of them say that school equipments are useful and amusing for them, 2 of them say that they have lack of communication with their school friends and teachers, 2 of them say that their teachers are very disciplined and furious, 2 of them say that the break times are too short, 2 of them say that teachers, managers and guidance service are very helpful for them, one participant says that exams are very difficult for them, and one participant says that school activities are very informative and enjoyable for them. Some answers by participant Refugee Students are given below:

*“I love my friends very much because they love me too and play games with me. School rules are good because it is forbidden to bring harmful things to school. Our teachers teach us how to read and write and do fun activities.” (S1-iq-W-2y)*

*“My friends are good. We play games. The break time is very short. Some of my friend are bad, they diss, swear and do not play with us. School rules are not difficult. I like education streets and football field. Education streets make learning easier.” (S2-af-W-2y)*

*“Some of our friends are good, they protect us when somebody diss us. The school is informative so I like it. School rules are good for us. Some of our friends diss us.” (S4-af-W-5)*

*“My friends sometimes are good sometimes are bad. School rules are very difficult. There are too many rules. Teachers are too disciplined. The break time is very short. I do not like time for reading (a campaign in Elazig). My friend are very snappish. However, I miss my school in summer holiday.” (S6-af-W-3y)*

*“Some of the students use slang words and this make me annoying. They become lover and I do not approve this situation.” (S8-az-F-2y)*

Refugee students’ views for the question of **“what are your views about the support of your families?”** were summarised in table 4.

Table 4 Refugee Students’ Views about the Support of Their Families

<b>Views</b>	<b>f</b>
Moral and material support	13
Lack of parent’s literacy	8
Can’t help in homeworks	6
Meet the needs	5
Helping in homeworks	5
Do not know Turkish	4
Lack of time (working parents)	2

13 of participants say that their families support them as moral and material, 8 of them say that their families cannot help in their homework since they are literacy, and 6 of them say that their families cannot help in their homework because of several reasons. 5 of them their families, especially their mothers meet their needs to support their education. 5 of them say that their families can help in their homeworks, 4 of them say that their families do not know Turkish, and 2 of them say that their families do not have enough time to take care of their education since they are working parents. Some answers by participant Refugee students are given below:

*“My family support my education life. They want to help us but they do not know Turkish. My father cannot help us because he works. He gives us pocket-money. My mother meets our needs.” (S2-af-W-2y)*

*“My stepfather works and help us for our education. He gives us pocket-money. My mother cannot help us in homeworks because she is not literate. She gives us advices for our education life.” (S6-af-W-3y)*

*“My family is not literate and they do not know any Turkish. They want me to attend school. They counsel and encourage me about my education life.” (S7-af-W-6m)*

*“They are able to support me just as moral and material because they are not literate.” (S11-af-W-3y)*

*“My all family support me. They want me to continue my education. They control my absenteeism.” (S12-af-W-2y.)*

Refugee students’ views for the question of **“what are your views about the school subjects, content, gains and necessity of these subjects?”** were summarised in table 5.

Table 5 Refugee students’ views about the school subjects, content, gains and necessity of these subjects

<b>Views</b>	<b>f</b>
Necessary	9
Unnecessary (Technology design lesson)	4
Necessary lessons- not lovely teachers	3
Incomprehensible and unnecessary	2
Unnecessary (Music)	2
Necessary (Mathematics)	2
Difficult and necessary	1
Necessary (Science)	1
Necessary (Social sciences )	1
Unnecessary (Turkish)	1
Unnecessary (Some movements in physical education)	1

9 participants say that all school subjects are necessary. 4 of them say that technology and design lesson is unnecessary because it requires handcraft and all students cannot be skilled equally. 3 participants say that all subjects are necessary but they do not love their teachers. 2 of them say that subjects are incomprehensible so, they are unnecessary for them. 2 of them say that music subject is unnecessary for them, 2 of them say mathematics is unnecessary. One participant says that the subjects are difficult but necessary, one says just science subject is necessary while another one say it for social sciences subject. One participant says Turkish subject is unnecessary for them, and another participant says it for some movements in physical education subject. Some answers by participant Refugee students’ are given below:

*I like my all subjects and all of them are necessary. My favourite subject is Mathematics. (S2-af-W-2y)*

*“I do not think Technology and design lesson is necessary for us because handcraft of some students are not so good therefore they cannot manage it. This stituation affects our marks in a bad way. Moreover, in Music lesson, we are not taught to play a musical instrument.” (S8-az-F-2y)*

*“I find music and technology design lesson unnecessary because there were not these lessons in our previous education system.” (S9-af-W-5m.)*

*“I find all lessons necessary just except technology design lesson because when we cannot succeed in it, we get bad grades. So, I find it unnecessary.” (S10-af-E-2y.)*

*“Technology design lesson is not necessary because it is difficult. I cannot be successful in this lesson because I do not understand anything. So, I get bad grades. I love Mathematics very much, I would like to be an engineer in future.” (S13-af-E-5m.)*



Refugee students' views for the question of “**what are your views about the your competence in using Turkish?**” were summarised in table 6.

Table 6 Refugee Students' Views about Their Competence in Using Turkish

<b>Views</b>	<b>f</b>
Good at Turkish	6
Just unknown some words	5
Speak and understand	3
Just a few words	3
Speak but not understand	1
Difficult reading	1
Speak but not be understood	1
Number	1
Just understand	1

6 of participants say that they are good in Turkish. 5 of them say they do not know just some words. 3 of them say they can speak and understand. 3 of them say they know just a few words, one of them says they can speak but cannot understand. One says they have difficulties in reading, one says that they can speak but cannot be understood. One says that they know numbers and one says that they can just understand. Some answers by participant Refugee students' are given below:

*“I can speak and understand very well. However, sometimes, I forgot the words. I cannot speak very fast and understand the ones talk very fast.” (S2-af-W-2y)*

*“I cannot speak or understand. I know few and far between words, and number.” (S5-af-W-5m)*

*“I can speak but the interlocutor cannot understand me.” (S7-af-W-6m)*

*“I understand and speak freely. Just, when it comes to reading, I have many difficulties.” (S10-af-E-2y.)*

*“Turkish is easier than my native language so, I find myself very sufficient in Turkish.” (S14-af-W-3y)*

Refugee students' views for the question of “**what are your views about the effect of your previous education's on your current education?**” were summarised in table 7.

Table 7 Refugee students' views about the effect of their previous education

<b>Views</b>	<b>f</b>
No effect	6
Getting used to school culture	5
Not prepare a substructure	5
Useful	4
Useful in mathematics	4
Helpful in writing	2
Useful in all lessons	1
Useful in science	1

6 of the participants says that there is not any effect of their previous education on their current education. 5 of them says their previous education help them in getting used to school culture. 5 of them say that their previous education do not prepare a substructure for them. 4 participants say that it become useful for their current education in every respect. 3 participants say that it redound mathematics subject. 2 participants say it is useful in writing and one says it is useful in all lessons. One says it is useful just in science lesson. Some answers by participant Refugee students' are given below:

*"It has been beneficial to my current education. When I came to Turkey, it was easy for me to attend a school. I got used to school here. Learning how to read and write became easier for me since I had been known it in Persian. I attended school until 4th grade in Afghanistan."* (S2-af-W-2y)

*"I attended school until 5th grade in Afghanistan. I learned just reading Quran, writing in Persian and numbers. There have not been any avail of these. I just got my hand in writing."* (S3-af-W-1y)

*"I attended school in Afghanistan just for 1st grade, but I could not complete it too. There have not been any avail of it. I just got used to school yhanks to it."* (S4-af-W-5)

*"Yes, it has been beneficial to our current education. I got used to school culture. My little sister and brother were impudent in Afghanistan, they became wellbehaved here."* (S7-af-W-6m)

*"The curriculum is not same, and the subjects in Afghanistan are absent here so, I fell behind in the many classes here. I am good just in Mathematics, the other subjects are too difficult for me."* (S10-af-E-2y.)

*"I attended school until 8th grade there. However, I started to study from 8th grade when I came here. I understand better since I study once again in same grade. Since and Mathematics subjects are good an same but the other subjects are absent, and do not match with any subject. I like subjects in Turkey, and I absolutely would like learn all of them."* (S12-af-W-2y.)

## **Result and Discussion**

Study results revealed that refugee students have some problems at Turk schools because of several reasons like medium of instruction, courses contents, the lack of family support, school culture- rules, and methods & techniques teachers used. Using smart board and visual equipments is more comprehensible for refugee students. However direct instruction method, reading and writing are uncomprehensible for them.

Most of refugee students think that their school friends are friendly and helpful. However, they have some difficulties in getting use school rules. Some of them says that their friends had unsuitable behaviours at the begining. Most of refugee students say that their families are supportive for their education in moral and economically but their parents are illiteracy. So they cannot help so much in their homeworks.

Most of refugee students think that all lesons are necessary for them especially math and science. A few of them think technology and design lesson is unnecessary for them. Half of the refugee students think they are good in Turkish and the other half think they are not sufficient in speaking and listening.

The half of the participants think the mathematics, science lessons in their previous education have a positive effect in their current education. The other half think their previous education does not have any positive effect for their current education. The main aim of education in Afghanistan is providing young people to be a real person, a real muslim and a real Afghan when they begin to work for the first time after graduation (Kazu & Gulecen, 2008: 30). Just this information may give information about the structure and content of Afghan education.

At the study of Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick and Stein (2012: 270), a literature review study, any relationship between refugee's previous formal education before displacement, and their psychological distress or behavioural problems has not found. So, it can be said the effect of previous education before displacement is particularly on their cognitive domain.

The ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers at study of Sidhu, Taylor and Christie (2011: 97) have more training and expertise for refugee students who are already literate in their mother tongue. However, they have a student population without mother tongue literacy. All participants in this study are literate in their mother tongue so, it can be said that teachers may have enough motivation to teach them how to read and write, and participants as well. In education, the language proficiency has an important role on education outcomes (Roxas, 2011: 4). Dryden-Peterson (2016: 141) characterizes three main barriers in refugee education, these are; language barriers; teacher-centered pedagogy; and discrimination in school settings.

Refugee students in this study have diverse migration and educational backgrounds, while some of them migrated to Turkey directly from their country, on the contrary the others migrated and stayed in the other countries before coming to Turkey. So, this situation affects their educational and psychological requirements. (Mace, Mulheron, Jones and Cherian, 2014: 991). To help refugee students: schools, teachers, parents and community must work collaboratively. Teachers must take care of these students ingeniously for their emotional and cultural needs (Woods, 2009:15). Teachers and guidance counsellors must mentor proactively to provide convenience for refugee students who have faced disruptions at the primary or secondary level (Shakya, Guruge, Hynie, Akbari, Malik, Htoo, Alley, 2012: 75). Seydi, (2014: 298) in his research about Syrian refugees, suggests that more studies should be done to sustain the process of refugee education, and take support of public.

The basis of multi-cultural education concept is based on emphasizing of the differences and all cultural groups are meritorious equally. In regard to this concept, studies can be done in schools, and students can be told about the culture of living together. The understanding of multiculturalism in the country is essential (Seker & Aslan, 2015: 99).

In education process, refugee students are wanted to have cultural, political, economical and other features of country that they live knowledge and skill. In this regard, education to be given is very important in integration to Turkish society. Moreover, it is a process of orientation for refugees to adapt geography, culture and values of the country they migrate (Kılıc & Demir, 2017: 162). At Brown's, Miller's and Mitchell's study refugee students are eager to engage with the academic and social practices within classrooms and schools in despite of dilemmas like language and literacy. So, the education to be given to refugees is very important and more improvements should be made. Several recommendations are offered based on the research findings.

-Orientation training can be provided for refugee students.

-Part time individualized education can be provided for refugee students.

- More vocational education can be provided instead of theoretic lessons.
- Teachers can use more visual materials and equipment in their lessons.
- Turkish preparation courses can be provided for these students before they enrolled Turkish schools.
- Part-time support education classes can be offered at refugee students' schools.
- A more quality, supportive and adequate counselling service can be offered for these refugee students.
- Informative and directive seminars about refugee student education can be given to teachers.
- Multilingual teachers can be employed for refugee students.

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