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Teaching refugee students: An EFL teacher's perception of his pre-service education

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no potential conflict of interest in this study.

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Abstract

Migratory movements worldwide are accelerating, resulting in an increasing presence of refugee students in classrooms globally. While a considerable body of research addresses the challenges faced by these students, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the difficulties encountered by their teachers. In this study, I employ a narrative inquiry approach to explore the experiences of a middle school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher, casting light on his concerns and conflicts as a novice teacher, as well as his perception of the adequacy of his pre-service teacher education in preparing him to teach refugee students. The data collected through online and face-to-face semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes from the school environment indicate that the participating teacher lacks the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the needs of refugee students, and he believes his pre-service teacher education was insufficient in equipping him to teach culturally diverse students.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

The global increase in migration has led to a significant rise in the number of refugee students in schools. This demographic shift presents unique challenges and opportunities within the educational sector. This study focuses on a middle school EFL teacher in Ankara, Türkiye, examining his perceptions of how well his pre-service teacher education prepared him to teach refugee students. The primary aim is to address the gap in research regarding the preparedness of teachers to educate refugee students, as the majority of existing studies focus on the challenges faced by the students themselves.

The importance of this study lies in its potential to inform EFL teacher education programmes about the necessary components of effective training for teachers who work with refugee populations. By understanding the specific needs and challenges of these teachers, EFL education systems can develop more supportive and comprehensive training programmes that better prepare EFL teachers to create inclusive and effective learning environments for refugee students.

Theoretical Framework

Concepts

The study primarily draws on the principles of multicultural education, highlighting the significant implications of the increasing number of refugee students for teacher education programmes and schools. Multicultural education emphasises the appreciation of cultural diversity and the importance of cultural competence in teacher education. Despite the emphasis on cultural diversity in teacher preparation programmes, many pre-service and beginning teachers feel unprepared to promote cultural understanding effectively.

Literature Review

Research indicates that teachers worldwide often struggle to mitigate the challenges faced by refugee students in formal education. Studies have found that teachers, particularly novices, lack the key competencies required for intercultural education. This gap negatively impacts the educational experiences of refugee students. Furthermore, existing literature underscores the significant roles of identity, language, and culture in determining the academic needs of refugee students. Compared to other immigrant populations, refugee children are more susceptible to severe issues such as malnutrition, infections, bodily injury, neurological damage, and physical harassment. Access to education that fosters a sense of academic and socio-cultural belonging is crucial for refugee children, as it can provide them with a sense of normalcy and hope for a better future.

Methodology

This study employs a narrative inquiry approach, a qualitative research method that focuses on the collection and interpretation of personal stories to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences. Narrative inquiry is particularly well-suited for educational research, as it provides rich, detailed insights into the

complexities of teaching and learning in diverse contexts. By capturing the personal and professional stories of teachers, this method allows researchers to explore the broader issues within the education system and identify areas for improvement.

The participant in this study, Hakan, is a 24-year-old novice EFL teacher in his first year of teaching at a middle school in Ankara. The school is situated in a district with a significant population of refugee families, making it an ideal setting for exploring the challenges and opportunities associated with teaching refugee students. Hakan was selected for this study due to his unique position as a beginning teacher in a multicultural classroom, providing valuable insights into the adequacy of pre-service teacher education in preparing educators for such environments.

Data were collected through a series of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes spanned over six months, encompassing the 2023 Spring and Fall Terms. The semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in exploring various aspects of Hakan's experiences while ensuring that key topics were covered. These interviews focused on Hakan's background, his pre-service teacher education, and his experiences teaching refugee students. Questions were designed to elicit detailed narratives about his perceptions, challenges, and successes in the classroom.

The data analysis process began with the transcription of interview recordings and the organisation of field notes from classroom observations. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns within the data. This involved coding the data to highlight recurring themes and concepts related to Hakan's experiences as an EFL teacher of refugee students. The themes were then categorised and analysed in relation to the research questions and the existing literature on teacher education and multicultural education.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the participating teacher's pre-service teacher education is insufficient in preparing him to meet the needs of refugee students. Hakan's experiences underscore the critical need for enhancing English language teacher education programmes to include comprehensive training on multicultural education and the unique challenges posed by refugee students.

It is recommended that EFL teacher preparation programmes incorporate practical, hands-on experience with refugee students. This could involve partnerships with schools that have significant refugee populations, enabling pre-service teachers to gain firsthand experience and develop a deeper understanding of the needs of these students. These programmes should also include coursework on multicultural education, focusing on cultural competence, language acquisition, and trauma-informed teaching practices. Ongoing professional development and support for in-service EFL teachers are also crucial. Schools and educational authorities should provide regular training sessions and resources to help teachers stay updated on best practices for teaching refugee students. Mentorship programmes pairing novice EFL teachers with experienced ones can also offer valuable support and guidance.

By prioritising these areas, EFL teacher education programmes can better equip teachers to create supportive and effective learning environments for all students, particularly refugees. This approach not only benefits refugee students but also enriches the educational experience for all students, fostering an inclusive and culturally responsive classroom atmosphere. The study's findings highlight the urgent need for reforms in EFL teacher education to address the growing diversity in classrooms and ensure that all students have access to quality education.

Keywords: Teacher perception, Pre-service teacher education, Culturally diverse students, Refugee students

INTRODUCTION

The increasing presence of refugee students in schools worldwide necessitates that teachers adapt their practices to create supportive environments that mitigate the difficulties those students face when relocating to a country with a different language and culture. Both the newly arrived students and their families, as well as the teachers welcoming them, are profoundly affected by those migratory movements. Refugee students often face hurdles such as uncertainty, worry, a loss of attachment, and alienation as they integrate into new schools and households (Thorpe, 2011). Simultaneously, teachers witness rapid and dramatic

transformations in the socio-cultural dynamics of their schools and communities (Delpit, 2006).

Research underscores the significant roles of identity, language, and culture in determining the academic needs of refugee students (Damaschke-Deitrick & Wiseman, 2021). Compared to other immigrant populations, refugee children are more susceptible to severe issues, such as malnutrition, infections, bodily injury, neurological damage, and physical harassment (Neugebauer, 2013). Thus, access to education that fosters a sense of academic and socio-cultural belonging is crucial for refugee children. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO], 2011) reports that refugee children deprived of schooling are more likely to suffer abuse or mistreatment, leading to physical and mental disorders. Child labour and underage marriage are also common among refugees with limited schooling opportunities (UNESCO, 2011). Additionally, young refugees who lack access to proper education are at a heightened risk of radicalisation (Loewen, 2004). Schools can provide refugee children with a sense of normalcy (Naidoo, 2010) and hope for a better future.

Unfortunately, the existing literature (e.g., Jefferies & Dabach, 2014; Marx & Moss, 2011) indicates that teachers worldwide often struggle to alleviate the challenges faced by refugee students in formal education. Numerous studies (e.g., Arthur, 2005; Brunzell et al., 2016) have found that teachers, especially novices, are inadequately prepared to address the complexities of teaching students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including refugees. These teachers frequently lack the key competencies required for intercultural education (Keddie, 2012), negatively impacting their students.

In this study, I explore Hakan's experiences, a middle school EFL teacher in Ankara, Türkiye, highlighting his challenges and conflicts as a beginning teacher. He has observed significant demographic changes in his school and classrooms due to the influx of displaced people from Syria. His perspective is valuable because, as Freeman (1996) posits, "Teachers' narratives reflect the essential substance of their knowledge and thought processes" (p. 101). Most research on immigration and education focuses on the experiences of students and families (e.g., Tienda & Haskins, 2011), with less attention given to teachers' experiences and perceptions. By foregrounding the genuine teaching experiences of an EFL teacher in this narrative study, I aim to contribute to the emerging literature on immigration and education in Türkiye. I also emphasise the importance of "breaking the silence" (Jefferies & Dabach, 2014, p. 4) surrounding the challenges faced by teachers by seeking to answer the question of how

well Hakan, as a novice EFL teacher, perceives his pre-service teacher education as preparing him to address the needs and challenges of refugee students in his middle school setting.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, I primarily draw on the principles of multicultural education. The increasing number of refugee students has significant implications for teacher education programmes and schools. As the population of students from diverse cultural backgrounds continues to grow, the need to train teachers in multicultural education becomes more crucial (Banks & McGee, 2007). In multicultural education, teacher preparation programmes emphasise the importance of cultural diversity for all students and advocate the appreciation of cultural variety (McAllister & Irvine, 2000) for teaching and learning. Numerous studies underscore the importance of cultural competence in teacher education (e.g., Milner & Laughter, 2015; Sleeter & Owuor, 2011; Warren, 2013). However, pre-service and beginning teachers often feel unprepared (Cook, 2002) and lack the necessary qualities and skills to promote cultural understanding (Noguera, 2013). It is critical to focus on creating instructional spaces where these teachers can better learn about and employ multicultural teaching strategies to meet the needs of culturally diverse students, including refugee students.

Addressing critical issues such as exposing oppression and social injustice (Lenski et al., 2005) is also among the goals of multicultural education. Through the lens of multiculturalism, teachers can first restructure their classes, then the school environment, and ultimately society at large, fostering collaboration and harmony among people from different social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds (Kasap, 2020). Refugee students, with their unique past experiences, bring a different perspective to the classroom. Their presence highlights how power dynamics, socio-economic factors, and political dynamics shape education policies. Concepts such as class, ideology, power relations, and politics are not only abstract ideas in textbooks but become tangible realities in the classroom with the arrival of refugee students. If teachers view this situation as an opportunity rather than an inconvenience, they can help their students develop a deeper and more critical understanding of multiculturalism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educating Culturally Diverse Students

Providing education to students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds is a challenging yet essential task. Many refugee students perceive school as a sanctuary from the instability, chaos, and feelings of loss they may be experiencing (Coelho, 1998). However,

these same factors can also hinder their academic success. Refugee students often bear hidden, long-lasting emotional scars (Feuerverger, 2011) that impact every aspect of their educational lives. Being in a completely new school environment can thus be a daunting step. Behavioural issues in such students may stem from traumatic experiences they have endured (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008), manifesting as intense rage, non-compliance with school rules, age-inappropriate speech, poor concentration, disengagement, and reluctance to complete homework (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000). Unfortunately, teachers may not always connect these behaviours to the students' past experiences, leading to misinterpretations as mere disciplinary problems.

Teaching refugee students presents significant challenges for educators. A teacher's attitude towards these students is crucial in creating a safe and welcoming space (Frater-Mathieson, 2004). Attitude alone, however, is not sufficient. Strategies and pedagogies that are effective with local students may not work with refugee students (MacNevin, 2012). Factors such as lack of relevant training and insufficient preparation time (Roy & Roxas, 2011) leave many teachers ill-equipped to meet the psychological, linguistic, cultural, and academic needs of refugee students.

Research indicates that pre-service and in-service teacher training on how to educate refugee students is insufficient (Kovinthan, 2016). Many studies (e.g., Arthur, 2005; Kovinthan, 2016) report that current teacher education programmes have had limited success in changing new teachers' attitudes and skills regarding students from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Even programmes that use a multicultural lens often fail to adequately prepare teachers for the complexities of culturally diverse classrooms (Arthur, 2005; Kovinthan, 2016). Conversely, studies (e.g., Leavy, 2005; Ferfolja, 2009) show that teachers who complete programmes requiring direct experience with refugee students develop greater awareness of interculturality and advocate for a safe environment for these students, resulting in more positive teacher-student relationships.

Refugee Students in Türkiye

In this study, I use the term refugee students as an umbrella term to refer to: (1) students who are refugees themselves, (2) those born into refugee families in the host country, and (3) immigrant students who may not be officially recognised as refugees but have similar experiences. While acknowledging that not all immigrants or refugees face the same issues, it is recognised that forced displacement and its societal ramifications (Giani, 2006) commonly

impact these students. Refugee students are deeply affected by their parents' struggles with employment, education, healthcare, accommodation, social integration, and general welfare (Nathan, 2008). Their precarious social status is exacerbated by low levels of education, poverty, and cultural intolerance (Qin, 2009). The lack of opportunities available to these students often leads to emotional and behavioural issues. While refugee students strive to fit into a new educational system, their parents' adherence to their own cultural practices can create a cultural dichotomy, causing confusion for these students (Kajee, 2011).

The outbreak of civil war in Syria, with which Türkiye shares the longest land border, triggered an unprecedented wave of migration towards Türkiye. As of May 2024, according to the Presidency of Migration Management (2024), Türkiye hosts 3,114,099 registered Syrian refugees under temporary protection. Including recent refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Pakistan, and Lebanon, the total number of registered refugees increases significantly.

Among the many needs of refugee children, education holds significant value. Türkiye, a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, has made great efforts to provide free public education to all school-aged refugee children. The options available to these students include camp education centres, temporary education centres, and public schools. The latter option ensures that even children living outside refugee camps have access to education (Bircan & Sunata, 2015), allowing Syrian students to follow the same curriculum as Turkish students in the same classrooms. Despite these efforts, numerous challenges remain, including language barriers, insufficient school materials, inability to pay transportation fees, emotional trauma, and bullying (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

Recent Studies on Refugee Student Education in Türkiye

Recent literature on refugee student education in Türkiye highlights numerous challenges faced by refugee students and their teachers, with particular focus on language barriers, cultural differences, and systemic inadequacies. One study provides insight into the views of refugee students attending Turkish schools, revealing that language proficiency is a significant hurdle for many. Half of the refugee students reported difficulties in speaking and listening in Turkish, which directly impacts their academic performance and social integration (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018). Similarly, another study emphasises that Syrian students, in particular, struggle with Turkish as the medium of instruction, making adaptation to the

educational system in Türkiye challenging compared to other Arabic-speaking host countries (Celik et al., 2021).

Cultural differences further exacerbate the challenges faced by refugee students. Refugee students often experience discrimination and othering, which can lead to psychological distress and social isolation (Kılıç & Gökçe, 2018). They face difficulties adjusting to school culture and rules, which may be unfamiliar to them due to different educational backgrounds and cultural norms (Gomleksiz & Aslan, 2018). The lack of cultural competence among teachers can also hinder the educational success of refugee students, as teachers may not be equipped to address the unique needs of these students (Aydin & Kaya, 2017).

Systemic issues within the Turkish education system pose additional barriers to refugee education. The bureaucratic procedures for school enrolment can be daunting for refugee families, many of whom are unfamiliar with the process or face resistance from school administrators (Taştan & Çelik, 2017). The Turkish education system operates within a monolingual and monocultural framework, which lacks the flexibility to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of refugee students (Çelik et al., 2021). This rigidity is reflected in the curriculum and teaching methods, which are often not adapted to meet the needs of students with interrupted or different educational histories (Çelik et al., 2021).

In response to these challenges, several studies suggest strategies to improve the educational experiences of refugee students in Türkiye. Some researchers recommend enhancing teacher training to include cultural sensitivity and inclusive pedagogical practices (Gömleksiz & Aslan, 2018). Systemic reforms, such as adopting the criteria of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for refugee education, which emphasise access, integration, and quality of education, are also advocated (Çelik et al., 2021). These studies underscore the importance of a multifaceted approach that addresses language, cultural, and systemic barriers to foster the educational success of refugee students in Türkiye.

METHODOLOGY

Narrative Inquiry

In this study, I employed the narrative research method to examine and interpret the true stories (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) told by Hakan. Narratives are spoken or written texts that recount one or a series of events in chronological order (Czarniawska, 2004), often describing personal experiences and providing insights into people's identities and interpretations of their

surroundings (Creswell, 2007). This approach allowed me to delve deeply into Hakan's experiences as a beginning teacher working with refugee students, providing a rich, detailed account of his journey and the challenges he faced.

As a narrative researcher, I explored Hakan's stories of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) using various narrative techniques to understand the interconnected accounts of his interactions with refugee students. The narrative inquiry method facilitated an in-depth exploration of Hakan's personal and professional experiences, highlighting the complexities and nuances of teaching in a multicultural setting. This approach was instrumental in uncovering the multifaceted nature of his experiences and the broader implications for teacher education and practice.

Participant and Setting

I first met Hakan (a pseudonym) when I visited the school where he currently works to collect data for another study. Although the focus of that study was not specifically about teaching refugee students, during a focus group discussion, Hakan mentioned the issue briefly. His comment piqued my curiosity about his experiences as a beginning teacher. The intricate combination of circumstances that contributed to his impression of teaching refugee students became obvious and warranted additional investigation. Consequently, I contacted Hakan and asked him to participate in this study, and he consented to take part.

Hakan is a 24-year-old EFL teacher in his first year of teaching at a middle school in Ankara, Türkiye. The school is situated in a district with a significant population of refugee families, whose children attend local schools, including the one where Hakan works. Hakan graduated from an English Language Teaching (ELT) department at a state university the previous year. His education included a range of undergraduate courses such as Applied Linguistics, English and American literature, and pedagogical formation, as well as a practicum period where he observed in-service teachers and practised teaching under the guidance of a mentor teacher and a university professor.

Following his graduation, Hakan took the Public Personnel Selection Examination for Teachers and was appointed as an English language teacher. His first year of teaching coincided with working in a challenging environment where many students were refugees. These combined circumstances shaped his initial impressions and provided a unique context for exploring the experiences and challenges faced by beginning teachers working with refugee students.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

Data collection spanned six months, covering the 2023 Spring and Fall Terms with a summer holiday in between. During this period, I conducted four semi-structured interviews with Hakan, comprising two online and two face-to-face. I prepared a set of interview questions in advance to explore Hakan's experiences with teaching refugee students and his views on his pre-service education. However, I allowed for flexibility in the questions based on his responses at the time of the interviews. All interviews were conducted orally, and I transcribed the recordings myself to ensure accuracy.

I also visited his school twice, observing his classes and gathering comprehensive data on his interaction with the students. I also took field notes while paying close attention to general announcements on bulletin boards in the school corridors and class-specific pinboards. I specifically looked for signs of how the school addressed or recognised the needs of refugee students, such as through announcements or displayed student work.

Data Analysis

I employed thematic analysis to interpret the data collected from the interviews, field notes, and observations. This process involved several key steps to ensure a thorough and accurate understanding of Hakan's experiences and the challenges he faced in teaching refugee students.

Initially, I familiarised myself with the data by reading through the interview transcripts, field notes, and observation notes multiple times. This helped me to identify recurring themes and patterns related to the multicultural education context. I then organised the data into thematic categories, focusing on issues such as the specific challenges faced by refugee students and the adequacy of Hakan's pre-service education in addressing these challenges. To finalise the analysis, I synthesised the identified themes into a coherent narrative. This narrative provided a detailed account of Hakan's experiences and offered valuable insights into the gaps in his teacher preparation program.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I used multiple data collection tools, including the semi-structured interviews with Hakan, the observations in his classroom and the field notes I took while visiting the school. I also maintained a reflective journal throughout the data collection process to document my thoughts and insights. I conducted the analysis meticulously and iteratively to refine the findings. Finally, I corroborated the results with Hakan to confirm the accuracy and relevance of the conclusions I drew from the data.

FINDINGS

Interaction with Colleagues

I first present the story, “She was rolling her eyes while speaking.” as a foundation stone to further build on my understanding of Hakan’s first experiences as a beginning teacher.

Hakan: I was very excited on my first day. You know how hard it is to pass the exam (referring to Public Personnel Selection Examination). I had been waiting for that moment.

Researcher: You must have felt very happy when you learnt about the exam result. So, how was your first day at school as a new teacher?

Hakan: First, I went to the principal’s office. We already knew each other. I had contacted him several times to learn about the process and all. He welcomed me to the school, then I went to the teacher’s room.

Researcher: What happened there?

Hakan: There were a lot of teachers. Maybe eleven or twelve. They were all very friendly. One of them offered me a cup of tea. We had a quick chat before the lessons started. She already knew who I was because she had been the only English language teacher since September, so she was very happy that I would be sharing her workload from then on. She also told me unfortunately there were a couple of foreign students in all my classrooms. She was rolling her eyes while speaking.

Researcher: Why was she rolling her eyes?

Hakan: You know... because of Syrian and Afghan students. She told me as if the local students weren’t problematic enough, now they had to deal with refugee students.

(First interview, March 2023)

The teachers’ room is a vital space where educators frequently interact, share ideas, and collaborate on various tasks, thereby forming a community beyond their individual classrooms (Coburn & Stein, 2006). Within these communities, teachers create and develop their professional identities through their interactions (Horn & Little, 2010).

Hakan, a novice teacher, had never taught refugee students nor encountered similar situations during his pre-service practicum. The attitudes and opinions of more experienced teachers significantly influenced him, particularly regarding refugee students. Throughout the study, Hakan often referred to an impactful moment when a senior teacher expressed strong opinions about the challenges posed by refugee students. Before meeting those students, Hakan was

already exposed to two predominant views: (a) local students were problematic, and (b) the presence of refugee students exacerbated those problems such as increasing classroom disruptions and complicating teaching efforts. This interaction highlights that teaching refugee students involves more than classroom management; it also encompasses the broader school community.

Hakan's experience echoes Kovinthan's (2016) findings that current teacher education programmes are often insufficient in altering teachers' attitudes towards culturally diverse students. The experienced teacher Hakan encountered in the teachers' room held a decidedly negative view of refugee students, illustrating the pervasive influence such attitudes can have on new educators. This situation underscores the importance of addressing and improving teacher education to better prepare teachers for diverse and inclusive classrooms.

Researcher: What else did the other teachers tell you about the refugee students?

Hakan: Well... Many bad things. I was very excited to start my profession and teach the new generation. Suddenly, on my first day, I heard everyone complain about Syrians and Afghan kids being lazy and problematic students. They didn't pay attention to the lesson, they didn't do their homework, they often got into fights... Things like that.

Researcher: How did you feel when you heard these things?

Hakan: I mean... I was already expecting some similar problems. I was just surprised... You know, my colleagues were very quick to dump all this negative stuff on me on my very first day. What actually worried me was that they told me the refugee students and their parents couldn't or even didn't want to adapt to the local culture. They told me that some refugee students were even forming hostile groups around the school. I was shocked to hear that.

(First interview, March 2023)

The first conversation with an experienced EFL teacher, along with numerous interactions with other colleagues, seemed to have dampened Hakan's initial excitement for his first day at school. It was evident from his expressions how disheartened he felt while recounting his memories of that day and his early interactions with fellow teachers. Clearly, he had not anticipated encountering such negativity on his first day. Hakan had expected some challenges with classroom behaviour and homework, but the specific issues related to refugee students at this particular school concerned him the most. He was unprepared for the intensity and pervasiveness of the negative attitudes he encountered, which seemed to have overshadowed his initial enthusiasm for teaching in a multicultural classroom.

During my visits to the school, I had the opportunity to speak with some of Hakan's colleagues. I confirmed that many experienced teachers displayed pessimism regarding the demographic changes brought about by the influx of refugee students. My interviews with Hakan and casual chats with other teachers at the school reflected what Blackwell and Melzak (2000) reported: Teachers often misconstrue refugee students' non-compliance with school rules and reluctance to do homework as a lack of discipline. This further underscores the gap in pre-service training regarding the unique challenges faced by refugee students and the need for better preparation and support for teachers in such diverse educational environments.

Pre-service Theory and In-service Reality

The mismatch between pre-service teacher education and the realities teachers face in the classroom is frequently discussed in the literature (e.g., Farrell, 2012; Wasonga et al., 2015). Many novice teachers report a significant gap between their training as teacher candidates and their experiences as practising teachers (Mason, 2013). Hakan's situation is no exception. He often expressed how his in-service teaching experience differed from what he had learned during his pre-service education. In this part, I present key segments from our interviews that particularly highlight his views on his pre-service education and its impact on teaching refugee students.

Researcher: Tell me about your classes. What's a typical lesson like?

Hakan: Noisy! (He smiles.) The classrooms are crowded. A simple activity quickly turns into a chaos because the students get too excited and start shouting. I think they are not used to such activities.

Researcher: How about refugee students? Do they participate in the activities?

Hakan: They do, but it is difficult to put them in different groups with Turkish students. Syrian students like to be with other Syrian students, and Turkish students like to be with other Turkish students and so on.

Researcher: Have you ever experienced any difficulties specifically teaching refugee students?

Hakan: They all speak Turkish very well, but there are some cultural differences. The previous English teacher told me the male refugee students didn't want to communicate with her, but she was okay with the girls. She thinks it's because she doesn't wear a headscarf. The students from Syria and Afghanistan are sometimes very religious. Now, some female students are too shy to look at my face while speaking.

Researcher: And what do you do about it?

Hakan: Nothing. What can I do? I make jokes and act friendly, but it makes them even shyer.

(Second interview, May 2023)

During the interviews and my visits to the school premises, I learnt that the refugee students in this secondary school speak Turkish very well because they were either born in Türkiye or moved here when they were very young. Therefore, the language barrier issues frequently reported in previous studies (e.g., Ereş, 2016; Ünsal & Başkan, 2021) do not seem to exist in this particular school. However, as Hakan reports, refugee students experience adaptation problems due to cultural differences. Although local students seemingly do not change their attitudes based on the gender of their teachers, gender and some gender-related religious practices are important factors for some students from Syrian and Afghan families. When I asked Hakan how he addressed such issues, he simply replied, "Nothing, what can I do?" It is clear that he acknowledges the communication problems in his classes, yet he does not possess the knowledge or skills to deal with them. All he can do is smile and make jokes.

My observations in his classes and in the school corridors corroborate Hakan's statements. The classrooms are overcrowded; in some, I worried I would not be able to find a spot to sit without drawing too much attention from the students. Although teachers ask Turkish and refugee students to sit together, there seems to be a segregation in the seating arrangements. The same situation applies during break times: Turkish students prefer spending time with other Turkish students. The change in the attitudes of the refugee students towards male and female teachers did not escape my notice, either. As a male myself, I noticed that female refugee students tended to avoid eye contact with me, whereas all the other students were very curious about my presence. They constantly asked questions about why I was in the classroom, how old I was, whether I was a teacher, and so on.

Researcher: In one of our earlier conversations, you mentioned that some teachers told you refugee students formed hostile groups. Have you experienced or observed any hostility from such groups in the school?

Hakan: I haven't experienced any bad behaviour or hostility, but I saw many fights between students. Local students constantly make fun of refugee students, so they become a group and protect themselves. I think the other teachers misinterpret what's going on between the students.

Researcher: To what extent do you think your pre-service education is helpful in dealing with such situations?

Hakan: I mean... We learnt about classroom management, but I didn't learn anything about different cultural groups fighting. Sometimes the fights go off the rails. Then we have to call the parents. The students stop fighting, but then the Turkish and refugee families start fighting. Then we sometimes call the police.

(Third interview, October 2023)

In Türkiye, teacher candidates undergo pre-service education where they are instructed in classroom management and educational psychology. However, according to Hakan's observations, there is a notable absence of dedicated coursework aimed at providing insight into the diverse cultural backgrounds of students, their psychological dynamics, and the potential challenges they might encounter in an unfamiliar educational setting. Consequently, as Türkiye experiences increasing cultural diversity due to migratory trends (Aydın & Kaya, 2017), teachers, particularly those new to the profession, are finding themselves ill-equipped to address these social issues. This trend is also noted in other studies (e.g., Taşkın & Erdemli, 2018), highlighting a broader challenge for teachers facing similar diversity in other schools.

Feeling Unprepared

During our interviews, Hakan often referred to his practicum experience stating that the experience he had in the practicum school is not similar to what he is experiencing in his current working environment. In this part, I present the story "I encounter a new challenge every day."

Researcher: Tell me about your practicum experience in your pre-service education. Did you have any culturally diverse students, specifically refugee students in your classes?

Hakan: I did my practicum in a private school. There were no refugee students. All the students were local. I didn't notice any cultural diversity. They were all Turkish.

Researcher: What can you tell me about your lessons in the practicum school and your current school?

Hakan: Everything was usual in the practicum school. Here, I encounter a new challenge every day. For example, refugee students' parents usually don't show up for parents' meeting. The ones who do show up don't usually speak Turkish well enough to have a decent conversation. Another example is that in one of my classes, a student who came from Afghanistan suddenly started crying. I tried to calm her down, but she didn't stop, so I had to

take her out. Luckily, the school counsellor came and took her to her office. I went back to class and tried to continue teaching as if nothing had happened. Later, I learnt from the counsellor that the student lost her father when she was very young. She witnessed a lot of violence when she was a child while crossing multiple borders with her mother before reaching Türkiye. She still remembers those memories, so she has to use some pills to calm her down. I didn't have any students like this in my practicum school.

(Fourth interview, December 2023)

In Türkiye, teacher candidates undergo practical teaching experiences under the joint supervision of a mentor teacher and a university professor. Yet, akin to the disparity between their theoretical training and in-service teaching realities, novice teachers may encounter a disjunction between their practicum school and their eventual workplace (Çelik, 2008). When I prompted Hakan to reflect on his practicum experience, he promptly noted a significant contrast: "There were no refugee students." The absence of refugee enrolment, coupled with the school's private status, rendered everything, as Hakan articulated, routine. By "routine," Hakan did not imply the absence of challenges at the practicum school, but rather that all encountered issues were within expected parameters. Students and parents came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, adhering to established cultural norms in their interactions. However, in his current teaching environment, Hakan encounters a plethora of unfamiliar incidents unforeseen during his practicum.

As previously discussed (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Strekalova & Hoot, 2008), the traumatic experiences endured by some refugee students can profoundly impact their psychological well-being, subsequently affecting their social integration. Navigating such intricate circumstances and aiding these vulnerable students necessitates additional competencies and insights, unfortunately deficient in the current teacher education framework.

During my visits to the school, I took the opportunity to explore the premises, perusing announcements on bulletin boards in corridors and pinboards in classrooms. I sought any indication that the school acknowledged the presence of refugee students. Despite their significant numbers, all signage, announcements, and student displays were in Turkish and centred around Turkish culture. Indeed, during a break, I overheard students cautioning refugee peers against conversing in Arabic. When queried about this, Hakan disclosed that some teachers preferred refugee students to abstain from using their native language, with the observed behaviour likely emulating their instructors.

DISCUSSION

The examination of the factors influencing Hakan, his pedagogy, and his students offers an insight into the authentic narrative of an emerging teacher and the trials he faces in teaching refugee students. Delving into Hakan's narrative reveals the occasional sense of inadequacy experienced by novice teachers when teaching refugee students. The narrative underscores the clashes between an eager beginning teacher and his dispiriting colleagues, refugee students, and their parents.

The implications arising from the experiences of a beginning teacher highlight the necessity to better equip teacher candidates to teach culturally diverse students, especially refugee students. As posited by Marx and Moss (2011), the dwindling proportion of teachers and students sharing similar socio-cultural backgrounds necessitates a novel approach to teacher education, one that bridges this cultural chasm.

A potential avenue for reconceptualising pre-service teacher education lies in the framework of multicultural education, aimed at addressing the cultural tapestry within educational institutions. Multicultural education advocates for the notion that "all students, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, social class, and ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics, should have an equal opportunity to learn in school" (Banks, 2002, p. 3). As an enduring concept, multicultural education fosters a critical perspective on diverse identities, cultures, and belief systems, thereby enabling educators to cultivate inclusive and equitable learning environments for their charges (Martin et al., 2017). Against the backdrop of escalating migratory trends worldwide, the significance of multicultural education in enhancing student learning (Dee & Penner, 2017), student engagement (Cholewa et al., 2014), and school environment (Khalifa et al., 2016) looms ever larger.

Hakan's narrative serves as a warning call for pre-service teacher education programmes to reassess their curricula and practical training. Teaching refugee students is a complex issue that warrants nuanced treatment. By incorporating facets of multicultural education, teacher education programmes underscore the importance of educators' adeptness in instructing students from varied cultural backgrounds (McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Kasap et al., 2022), equipping them with a refined pedagogical toolkit to cater to the needs of refugee students and their families. Without a comprehensive comprehension of multiculturalism, educators may superficially introduce one or two units on different cultures into their lessons and erroneously deem this to be multicultural education (Ukpokodu, 1999). For this reason, teacher education programmes must ensure that educators are equipped with the knowledge

and skills requisite for seamlessly integrating multiculturalism into their overarching curriculum (Ooka Pang, 1995), rather than using isolated parts salvaged from global content.

CONCLUSION

Hakan's narrative serves as a poignant reminder of the imperative to consider students coming from diverse cultural backgrounds in the teacher education programmes. This study, therefore, addresses a critical gap in the scholarly discourse by delving into the beliefs and experiences of a novice teacher about teaching refugee students. It also augments our understanding of the dynamics within school environments, which encompasses the interplay among colleagues, local students, refugee students, and their parents. This nuanced exploration provides educators and policymakers with an opportunity to reassess their strategies and policies in devising and implementing school curricula.

By employing a narrative research approach to examine the influences shaping a beginning teacher's perception, this study casts light on the intricacies of teacher preparation for teaching refugee students. It serves as a warning for the enhancement of curricula and pedagogical practices in pre-service teacher education, thereby enabling teacher candidates to have a more inclusive educational experience for students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Against the backdrop of Türkiye's progressively diverse cultural landscape, it is imperative that teacher trainers and policymakers grasp the urgent necessity to adapt educational policies and practices to improve teacher education, consequently fostering enhanced student learning outcomes.

The present study also has limitations. As narrative research, it provides a deeply personal account from one teacher, which may not fully capture the range of experiences of EFL teachers across different contexts. Future research could build on this narrative approach by including multiple EFL teacher perspectives and exploring diverse school settings to provide a broader understanding of the challenges and solutions in teaching refugee students.

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