WHERE AND BY WHOM DO SYRIAN REFUGEE STUDENTS SIT IN THE CLASSROOM IN PRIMARY SCHOOL?

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine where and by whom Syrian refugee students sit in the classroom at primary school. Survey method was used in the study. The data were obtained using the structured observation form. The population of the study consists of public primary schools in the districts of Esenler, Zeytinburnu, and Güngören of Istanbul province. Six primary schools selected from this population using the random cluster sampling method constituted the sample of the study. According to the results of the research, 49.4 of the Syrian refugee students sit on the desks at the back and 52.3% sit on the desks next to the wall. According to these results, Syrian refugee students are usually densely seated in less desirable areas, not all over the classroom. In the study, it was observed that 24.4% of the Syrian refugee students sit on the same desk with a Turkish student. The rate of seating with Turkish students increases in desks back lines of the classroom and near the wall. According to the results of the study, Syrian refugee students sit in the classroom either with another Syrian refugee student or with students who generally exhibit undesirable behaviour or who are less academically successful.

Keywords: Refugee students, classroom seating arrangement, classroom seating arrangement of refugee students
Introduction

Turkey has become one of the countries with the most refugees in the world in recent years. That is because as the result of the geographical location, Turkey is a transit route between Asia and Europe. Also those fleeing from instability and civil wars in neighbouring countries are often taken refuge in Turkey. In fact, Turkey has met with refugees many years ago: since the 1950s, so many migrants and refugees have used the territories of Turkey to transit on the road from Asia to Europe or with the hope to settle. However, the first major immigration wave faced by Turkey was during the military operations by USA to Iraq in 1991. The second major migration wave occurred in the Syrian civil war that started in 2011. Syrian refugees more than millions have entered in Turkey in uncontrolled manner since the first years of this war. Hoping that the civil war ends soon, these refugees were taken to camps; however, Syrian refugees left these camps, scattered to all provinces of Turkey, and made a new life since the civil war was prolonged (İçduygu, 2012; Kara and Korkut, 2010; Topcuoğlu, 2012).

More than three million Syrian refugees currently live in Turkey (www.goc.gov.tr). However, there have not been major social problems yet. Local social problems that occur from time to time can be calmed for now with non-structural measures. However, it is accepted by all sections of the society that there is a refugee problem in Turkey still and it has the potential to lead to major social upheavals. The high number of refugees, the uncontrolled entry of refugees, the failure to take the necessary precautions in the hope that the Syrian civil war will end quickly, and the many uncertainties regarding the future make it difficult for refugees to establish a new life and integrate into the society (De Jong, 2000; Derezotes, 2000; Docquier and Rapoport, 2004).

Numerical data on Syrian refugees

According to the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Affairs General Directorate of Migration Management data, 3,624,941 Syrian refugees live under temporary protection in Turkey as of October 2020. While 59,543 (1.6%) of them live in camps, 1,419,022 (39.14%) of the rest live in cities with job opportunities such as Istanbul, Bursa, Izmir, Konya, Adana, and Mersin. 1,419,417 (39.15%) of the Syrian refugees reside in Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Kilis and Hatay, which are close to Syria and where Turkish citizens of Arab origin mostly live. The rest of refugees are scattered in other cities in Turkey. The ratio of Syrian refugees into Turkey's population is 4.36%. However, 21% of the Gaziantep population, 26% of the Hatay population, 76% of the Kilis population, and 20% of the Şanlıurfa population consist of Syrian immigrants (www.goc.gov.tr).

503,312 of the Syrian refugees are 0 to 4, 542,391 are 5 to 9, and 388,037 are 10 to 14 years old (www.goc.gov.tr). These data show that one-third (1,045,703) of Syrians more than 3 million in Turkey were born in Turkey as of October 2020. A total of 912,328 of the Syrian refugees are of the age that they should receive education in basic education (kindergarten, primary school and secondary school) institutions. All of them are registered with an educational institution and the majority attend schools.

Kindergartens in Turkey last for 2 years and students who are 4 to 6 may attend to kindergarten if they desire. Primary and secondary school are for four years, and children between the ages of 6 to 14 must attend primary school and then, without interruption, to secondary school. The number of students attending kindergarten in Turkey is approximately 1.63 million, the number of students attending primary school is 5.280.000, and the number of students attending secondary school is 5.702.000. Kindergarten, elementary, and secondary schools in the Republic of Turkey currently have around 12,602,000 students. The number of Syrian refugees at the age between 5 and 14 living in Turkey is 930.428. This data shows that approximately 10% of students in Turkey who attend kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools are Syrian refugees.

Opportunities for The Education of Refugees and Integration of Refugees into Society

Syrian refugees have been given a "temporary protection identity certificate" by the state of the Republic of Turkey. These people have been removed from refugee status and are of "temporary protected individual" status. With these documents, refugees can benefit from many opportunities available to citizens of the Republic of Turkey such as acquiring property, opening a business, receiving free health care in public hospitals, receiving cash and property assistance, and receiving free education in public schools (www.goc.gov.tr).

Nearly one million Syrian refugee children in Turkey attend kindergarten, primary school and secondary
school. Despite this, it is seen that the statements of Turkish official authorities, world leaders and refugee opinion leaders about Syrian refugees are generally on economic issues, and even the authorities of the participating countries sometimes use these refugees as a bargaining element in diplomatic environments. Important issues such as the education of Syrian refugee children, support for their development and integration into society are lost between everyday issues and domestic/foreign policy issues. However, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that compulsory primary education is a universal right (United Nations, 1989, Article 28). In addition, the right to education for refugees is also specified in the July 2010 resolution of the United Nations Human Rights Council and in Article 22 of the refugee status convention dated 1951 (UNHCR, 2010).

Close to a million Syrian refugees have already been born in Turkey and are studying in the same classes as Turkish children in schools in Turkey. It offers significant opportunities for the integration of Syrian refugees into society. However, studies carried out has concluded that these opportunities are not being used adequately (Doğutaş, 2016; Gürsoy et al., 2017; Kartal and Başçi, 2014; Yavuz and Mızrak, 2016; Seydi, 2014).

Refugees are disadvantaged people who left their place of residence due to the persecution, war, political or religious pressure in their own country, and because of the uncertainty of their future, social and economic difficulties, and traumas they have experienced, compared to other groups in their newly arrived society. Refugee children, on the other hand, are the group most affected by the process, but most neglected. Refugees need to be integrated into society in order to escape from a disadvantaged position. The most effective tool that can be used for the integration of refugees into society is education (Buz, 2003; Dalhouse, and Dalhouse, 2009; Roxas, 2010; Rousseau and Guzder 2008; Taylor and Sidhu, 2012).

In addition to facilitating the integration of these children into society, quality education to be given to refugee children provides benefits such as normalizing the lives of refugee children, regaining the hope they lost, improving their psychological state deteriorated as a result of the traumas they experienced, developing their own identities, developing their sense of belonging to the society or encouraging them to build their own future. In addition, with qualified education, refugee children can become their families' social counselors and interpreters. Thanks to education, it becomes easier for other students and society to recognize the culture of refugees and accept their differences (Atwell et al., 2009; Igoa, 2013; He et al., 2008; Mosselson, 2006).

There are many difficulties that prevent refugees from receiving quality education. Some of these difficulties may arise from the school environment, and some may be factors that prevent access to qualified education. In Turkey, for example, the problems of Syrian refugee children, such as the use of labour, beggars, sexual abuse or early marriage, have not been fully solved (Tüzün, 2017).

One of the main difficulties arising from school is that school staff and other students perceive refugee students as a homogeneous group and their over-generalization causes difficulties in the education of refugee children. Because the perception of refugee students as a homogeneous group may prevent them from identifying specific needs and giving them education sensitive to individual differences (Rutter, 2006). In some schools, refugee students can become vulnerable students who face bullying from radical students and employees at the school because of race, religion or different cultural characteristics (Harushimana, et al., 2013). In some cases, teachers’ negative prejudors regarding the cultural background or academic potential of refugee students can cause various difficulties (Betancourt et al., 2015). Another major cause of school failures by refugee students is poverty (Rutter, 2006). Refugees have been forced to leave most of their economic assets in their own countries as they cross into another country. Poverty prevents refugee students from accessing qualified educational institutions, digital facilities such as the Internet and computers, and even basic educational tools. When refugees emigrate, not only are they economically damaged, but children's education is also disrupted during this period. Because of these interruptions, refugee children lose their motivation and face extra difficulties starting re-education (Ferfolja et al., 2009).

The difference between the mother tongue of refugee children and the language spoken in the family and the language spoken in the classroom is another important factor that reduces the academic success of these children (CobbClark et al., 2012; Schneeweis, 2011). It is observed that some situations such as anxiety and depression that refugee students experience depending on their lives negatively affect the academic success of refugee students (Dinh et al., 2013). In addition, the difficulty of the curriculum processed in Turkey, expectations of poor performance and teachers who do not show the sensitivity required for refugee students to taste success can prevent refugee students from showing their potential (Kiang and Supple, 2016).
Various measures can be taken to improve the quality of education for refugee students: School workers and teachers must accept that each refugee student has unique experiences. Each refugee student should know that interests, needs, and expectations are different from others and offer education that is sensitive to individual differences. One mistake teachers and administrators make in schools is that teachers and administrators focus on the traumatic lives of refugee students and not pay enough attention to many problems such as poverty, exclusion, racism, difficulties with language, lack of preinformation experienced by refugee students (Rutter, 2006; Gahungu, Gahungu, and Luseno, 2011). For this reason, it is important to observe the refugee students individually from each angle and support them in the areas they need. Level classes can be created for these students, and the basic educational material needs of poor students can be easily met. With special courses, refugee students can overcome the language barrier in order to overcome negative situations such as compliance problems, inability to form friendships, timidity towards communication and participation in games, especially academic success. A large solution to the educational problem of refugee students may be possible with well-equipped teachers who will spend time directly with these students and provide extra support (Doğutaş, 2016).

Refugee students being integrated into society starts with being not feeling left out, solving the academic and social problems they face in the classroom, or overcoming the language barrier, integrating into the social structure of the class. One criterion for integrating into the social structure of the classroom, which can be used to observe the integration status of refugee students, is where these students sit and by whom they sit in the classroom (Nusche, 2009; Roxas, 2010).

It can give secret messages to students about where and by whom the student sits in the classroom. Students who are excluded, academically despair and disrupt the order of classes (sometimes for discipline purposes) are often placed away from the teacher and close to the back of the class. Studies carried out have found that the desks by the window and mid of the classroom compared to the desks by the wall and front desks compared to mid and back desks are perceived more positively by both teachers and students (Perkins and Wieman, 2005). In particular, back-line students often isolate themselves from teachers and other friends, develop negative attitudes towards in-class activities, and prefer individual activities, not groups (Tagliacollo et al., 2010). Especially for elementary school students, it is important by whom and where they are seated in the class. Students often think that the friend they sit by is of the same value in the eyes of the teacher. In fact, the students' self-perception may vary depending on where and by whom they sit in the classroom. Students can feel hardworking if they are seated with a hardworking student, and if they are seated with a lazy student, they may feel punished or lazy. Sitting together at the same desk or close is effective in starting and strengthening friendships. In other words, there is a strong relationship between physical distance and psychological distance (Berg and Cillessen, 2011). The seating arrangement in the classroom can also provide information showing how well students are socially integrated into the classroom (Benedict and Hoag, 2004; Nelson, 2002).

Purpose of the Study

In this study, it is aimed to determine where Syrian refugee students (SRS) sit in the classroom and by whom they sit in primary school. The results of the research are important because it is an indication of the extent to which the classes, where the integration of refugee students into society begins, fulfill this function.

Method

In the study, the survey method that aims to examine the events and phenomena in natural conditions was used. The observation technique was used to describe the events and facts (where and by whom SRSs were sitting in the classroom).

Population and Sample

The population of the study consists of public primary schools in the districts of Esenler, Zeytinburnu, and Küçükçekmece of Istanbul province. These districts were selected because they are densely populated by Syrian refugees. Six of these primary schools were selected using the random cluster sampling method. The probability that each subject or group in the population will be selected as a sample is the same in random sampling. In other words, elements or sets from the population are chosen randomly. In cluster sampling, not the elements from the population, but the clusters formed by the elements are selected (Patton, 2015). Two of the selected primary schools are in Esenler, two in Zeytinburnu and two in Küçükçekmece districts. In the research, 96 classrooms were
observed in total. It was observed that a total of 392 Syrian refugee students (SRS) attended school regularly in these classes.

Measurements

The structured observation form developed by the researcher was used in the research. While developing this form, the classes of the selected schools were examined first and the seating arrangement of the classes was determined. As a result of this review, it has been observed that

In all classes, students sit on the desks in pairs.
The desks are lined up against the teacher's desk (window side), in the middle of the classroom and adjacent to the wall with the classroom door.
There are usually four desks in each line.
Most classes have 3x4 = 12 desks in total.
Classes with less than 24 students also have at least 12 desks.
In classes with a class size of more than 24, three students were not seated on a desk, and desks were added to the back of the classroom according to the number of students.

In the observation form, each class is divided into 12 regions. In this distinction, the results of the studies in the relevant literature have been used (Benedict and Hoag, 2004; Berg, Segers and Cillessen, 2011; Burda and Brooks, 1996; Fisher, 2001; Hill and Epps, 2010; Ngware, et al. 2013; Perkins and Wieman, 2005; Tagliacollo, Volpato and Junior, 2010; Tanner, 2009; Unline, et al., 2010). In the studies on the seating arrangement in the classroom, it was observed that students and teachers perceive the desks as front, middle and back desks, and the middle lines as the back of the front and the front of the back. The observation form is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>DATE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OBSEVATION FORM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER TABLE</td>
<td>BOARD</td>
<td>DOOR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A LINE</td>
<td>B LINE</td>
<td>C LINE</td>
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<td>W</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Syrian ( )</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Syrian ( )</td>
<td>Syrian ( )</td>
<td>Turkish ( )</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Observer:

Application

The observations in the study were carried out between 06.01.2020 and 19.01.2020 at the end of the first semester of 2019-2020. The observations were made in the classroom environment by the observers who were given the necessary training by the researcher. No observations were made in the lessons held in the school yard or in the music, drama etc. activity halls of the school. Observations were made in the first lesson of the day. SRSs (9 students) who normally attend school regularly but did not come to school on the day of observations were also marked on the forms. However, the forms for SRSs who are enrolled in the school but never continue are not marked. After the forms were filled in, they were checked by the classroom teachers for reliability and collected by the researcher after the approval of the classroom teacher. If there are five consecutive desks in a line in the classroom, the third and fourth desks are evaluated together because their position in the classroom (as the desks in front of the back) is similar. If there are six consecutive desks in a line in the class, the fifth and sixth desks are evaluated together and the third and fourth desks together. It was observed that there were 7 desks in a line in 10 classes. In these classes, the sixth and seventh, fourth and fifth, second and third desks were evaluated together. By analyzing the observation forms with the help of computers, it was determined in which part of the class and by whom the Syrian refugees sit.
Findings

In this section, the data obtained from the observations are presented graphically and interpreted.

Figure 1. The areas where Syrian Refugee Students sit in the classroom.

Figure 1 shows the seats of SRSs in the classroom. Accordingly, of 392 SRS sampled, 5 (%1.2) sits in 1st area; 11 (%2.8) in 2nd area; 21 (%5.3) 3rd area; 51 (%13) in 4th area; 3 (%0.7) in 5th area; 9 (%2.2) in 6th area; 17 (%4.3) in 7th area; 69 (%17.6) in 8th area; 13 (%3.3) in 9th area; 26 (%6.6) in 10th area; 93 (%23.7) in 11th area, and 74 (%18.0) in 12th area. According to these findings, 194 (49.4%) of the SRSs sit on the three desk at the back. Again, 206 of these students (52.3%) sit on the desk next to the wall in the classroom. These findings can be interpreted as the seats of SRSs in the classroom are located not all over the classroom, but in relatively less preferred places, and the desks where they are seated are clustered in certain areas.

Figure 2. Number of Syrian Refugee Students sitting by Turkish students
Figure 2 shows how many SRSs sitting in each area sit by Turkish students and the ratio of this number to the total SRS included in the sample. Accordingly, 1 of 5 SRSs sitting in the 1st area (%0.2); 3 of 11 SRSs sitting in the 2nd area (%0.7); 5 of 21 SRSs sitting in the 3rd area (%1.2); 13 of 51 SRSs sitting in the 4th area (%3.3); 1 of 3 SRSs sitting in the 5th area (%0.2); 3 of 9 SRSs sitting in the 6th area (%0.7); 3 of 17 SRSs sitting in the 7th area (%0.7); 16 of 69 SRSs sitting in the 8th area (%3.8); 7 of 13 SRSs sitting in the 9th area (%1.7); 10 of 26 SRSs sitting in the 10th area (%2.5); 23 of 93 SRSs sitting in the 11th area (%5.8) and 12 of 74 SRSs sitting in the 12th area (%0.2) sit by a Turkish student on the same desk. According to these findings, a total of 96 SRSs (24.4%) were sitting on the same desk with a Turkish student. In addition, the rate of sitting with Turkish students increases relatively in the back row and near the wall. This situation can be interpreted as SRSs are not seated with students who are generally more successful academically and who do not disturb the classroom order, but who generally exhibit undesirable behaviors or who are less academically successful.

Discussion

According to the results of many studies conducted on refugee students, these students feel excluded as a result of the behaviors of their classmates and teachers willingly or unintentionally, and their integration into the society becomes difficult (Dryden-Peterson, 2015; McBrien, 2011). The findings obtained in this study, which examined where and by whom SRSs sit in the classroom, also confirm this determination. According to the results of the study, 194 (49.4%) of the SRSs are placed in the three desks at the back and 206 (52.3%) are placed on the desk next to the wall in the classroom. Accordingly, it can be said that the places where SRSs sit are clustered in certain areas where they are not distributed proportionally to all parts of the class and these students are seated in less preferred places. In addition, according to the results of the research, only 96 (24.4%) of the SRSs are sitting on the same desk with a Turkish student, while the rest are sitting with another SRS. The rate of sitting with Turkish students increases relatively in the back row and near the wall. Considering that these places are not preferred places in the classroom (Perkins and Wieman, 2005), it can be said that SRSs are generally seated with Turkish students who exhibit undesirable behaviors or who are less academically successful. These results match the study results, which concluded that despite all the efforts shown by the Republic of Turkey and non-governmental organizations, there are still problems in the integration of SRSs into the classroom environment and society (Doğutaş, 2016; Gürsoy et al., 2017; Kartal and Başçi, 2014; Seydi, 2014; Yavuz and Mizrak, 2016). Furthermore, these results can be seen as both one of the reasons and an indication of the challenges that SRSs face in academic and social fields in the classroom.

Schools are the first points of contact with the community of refugee students and institutions where they develop a sense of belonging to the community (Atwell, et al., 2009; Taylor and Sidhu, 2007). For this reason, many problems of refugee students, especially social integration, can be easily solved with small arrangements to be made in classroom environments. However, the solution of problems related to refugees such as employment, security, housing, etc. is so concentrated that the mood of an refugee student, who usually goes to primary school, does not attract the attention of most people, including their teachers or classmates (Cassity, and Gow, 2005; Miller, Mitchell, and Brown, 2005; Naidoo, 2011). For example, a 9-year-old 4th grader who was very successful in his/her classes committed suicide on October 4, 2019 because he/she thought he had been excluded from school. However, such tragic events that happen to refugee children do not occupy the country's agenda (İhtiyar, 2017). As it can be seen, elementary school students may experience great depression, albeit at a young age, but most of the community is indifferent to it. In the first place, it is up to the classroom teachers and classmates to help these students not experience such great depressions and to resolve them if they experience.

Refugee students are most afraid of being "other" (İşlık-Ercan, 2011). Desk friendship can be used to avoid or destroy this fear: Desk friendship is beyond class friendship. Students prefer to sit on the same desk as their best friends, help their friends the most during the course, share food at feeding time, and be confidant. Having a good desk mate solves the problem of "being the other" as well as making it easier to integrate into the social structure of the class through the companion. A refugee student can easily solve social and sensory problems that he cannot solve alone when he or she is a friend with another student who is a citizen of the country of refuge.

SRSs can be made close friends with Turkish students with arrangements that can be easily made in the classroom seating arrangement. This can make it easier for refugee students to overcome their fears of "becoming others" and to solve the academic or sensory problems they face. In this way, unwanted tragic events can also be prevented. Teachers with refugee students in their classrooms may be offered to seat them on desks in each area of the class and with the country's national students.
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SURİYELİ MÜLTECİ ÖĞRENCİLER İLKOKULDA SİNİFTA NEREDE VE KİMLERLE OTURUYOR?

Mustafa BAŞARAN

ÖZ


Anahtar kelimeler: Sığınmacı öğrenciler, sınıf oturma düzeni, sığınmacı öğrencilerin sınıfta oturma düzeni