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An exploration of teachers' perceptions of Syrian students in Turkey and implications for school social work

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Abstract
Low rates of school enrolment emerge as a significant problem among Syrian students in Turkey; however, enrolment in the school brings about new challenges not only for the Syrian refugee students but also for Turkish students and their teachers. In order to address this issue, this study aims to depict the perceived problems experienced by Syrian and Turkish students and their teachers. In the scope of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 primary and secondary school teachers to gather their perceived opinion on the issue. The findings are discussed within the context of school social work interventions.

Keywords
Education, refugee students, school social work, Syrians, Turkey

Introduction

The ongoing conflict and war in Syria is challenging the 'contemporary protection' status of the Syrian refugees in Turkey and brings permanent settlement into question. Refugees will need to be provided with the necessary humanitarian living conditions upon transition to permanent settlement. Fundamental rights such as security of life and property, nutrition, health,

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transportation and education, has been added to Turkey's agenda. However, not developing educational policies until 2014 has led Syrian children to miss out on educational opportunities and ultimately caused them to experience problems with their current schools (Kılcan et al., 2017). The UNICEF data show that, as of January 2019, there are 1.5 million Syrian children in the 0–18 age range, out of 3,594,232 registered Syrian refugees (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018). Among them, the number of Syrian children of school age is 870,000 and it is estimated that 380,000 children have never been to school. Yet, in accordance with UNICEF figures, the rate of in-camp children enrolled at school is 90.6 percent, while the ratio of matriculated children out of the refugee camps falls down to 26.3 percent (UNICEF, 2018).

Refugee children are often trained in programmes, that either follow the curricula of their own countries or the country where they have taken refuge (Özer et al., 2017). Both programmes operate in Turkey. As for the emerging educational crisis, Turkey has two main sources. The first is that of the Temporary Education Centres (TECs), which are defined as

> Arabic teaching educational institutions, both in and out of camps, covering primary and secondary education, established for refugees who migrated to Turkey, in order to further their incomplete education without losing grade either in Turkey, or when they return back to their own land. (Turkish Republic Ministry of Education [TRMoE], 2014)

In accordance with this definition, if Syrian children do not return to their home country in the following years, the TECs will become dysfunctional. Turkey's second main source is the 2014/2021 numbered circular (TRMoE, 2014), which paved the way for Syrian refugee students in getting an education at schools affiliated to the Turkish Ministry of Education. Although this situation is considered as a positive development, Çoşkun and Emin (2016) reported that the number of students enrolled in public schools (62,357) is quite low, compared to that of the number of students in the TECs (248,902). According to the statistics released by the Ministry of Education, the schooling rate of Syrian students as of 2018 is 63 percent (TRMoE, 2018). Considering the pre-war period, the Syrian people are said to have higher levels of education compared to those of other Arab countries, and 76.9 percent of the population above 10 years of age are literate (Paksoy and Karadeniz, 2016: 789). It is possible to speak of a non-educated period, in the context of Syrian children, even before coming to Turkey. Since the number of refugees has exceeded the estimated figures and the duration of asylum has been prolonged, need for education policies have significantly increased (Seydi, 2014).

Syrian students' inability to follow the courses in public schools with the Turkish curriculum (Seydi, 2014) and the schools' inability to determine Syrian students' academic levels – mostly due to language barriers – are among the main reasons for the low enrolment rate of Syrian students (Mültecilerle Dayanışma Derneği [MDD], 2015). Due to the fact that children do not have an obligation to be able to speak Turkish before school enrolment (UNHCR, 2017), there are problems and communication barriers between students, teachers, administrators, and parents, especially at public schools (Akpınar, 2017; Aydın and Kaya, 2017; Kılıç and Toker Gokce, 2018; Levent and Çayak, 2017; Taskin and Erdemli, 2018).

Moreover, problems such as adaptation (Çoşkun and Emin, 2016), other students' negative attitudes and behaviour like exclusion, marginalization, peer victimization towards refugee students were reported, causing children to be estranged from the school environment, and ultimately leave school. In another source, it is stated that Syrian children are exposed to discrimination and exclusion and that the attitude of other students towards Syrian students is the main cause of that situation (İstanbul Bilgi University [İBU], 2015). Moreover, parents' choice to send their children to work (MDD, 2015) to create additional income is a negative factor for schooling of Syrian children.

Educational problems among refugee students also stem from the psychological issues that war experiences cause. Post-traumatic stress disorders and depression are very common among refugee children all around the world (Aydın and Kaya, 2017; Eruyar et al., 2018; Hodes, 2019; Murray, 2019). Research shows that Syrian students in Turkey have high levels of depression (49%) and post-traumatic stress disorder (35%) and 25.8 percent of them suffer from psychosomatic symptoms like headache, stomach ache, and pain in their hands and arms (Erdoğan, 2015). Traumatic experiences affect all aspects of Syrian childrens' lives, and education is one of these. However, studies report that there is lack of adequate psychosocial support for Syrian students who had experienced a war environment (Aydın and Kaya, 2017; İBU, 2015; Levent and Çayak, 2017).

Problems of compliance with school rules (Levent and Çayak, 2017; Taskin and Erdemli, 2018), integration and motivation problems (Kılıç and Toker Gokce, 2018), lack of parental visits to the school (Kılıç and Toker Gokce, 2018), lack of basic self-care skills, and unfulfilled needs (Mercan Uzun and Bütün, 2016) are among other challenges reported by teachers and school administrators in the literature.

This literature review regarding Syrian students in Turkey shows that most of the studies were structured within the framework of educational sciences and the problems were generally addressed in a single dimension. However, the educational problems regarding Syrian refugee children are an issue that should be evaluated both in the context of social policies at the macro level, and in the context of social work at the micro level. The social work perspective allows for a holistic assessment of this schooling problem and brings culture, family, social policies and social services into the picture. Therefore, this study aims to explore the challenges experienced in this education process through the eyes of teachers within the context of school social work.

Method

Research model

This research study is conducted as a case study, which provides an in-depth understanding of a 'case' or bounded system (Creswell, 2002). Case studies help to understand an event, activity, process or one or more individuals and their mutual interaction with the situation (Creswell, 2002). A case study helps to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of teachers regarding educational problems that Syrian and Turkish students experience. For the case study, we appointed a typical school in a central neighbourhood of Ankara, where the majority of the students are Syrian. The fact that 75 percent of the students attending the chosen school are Syrian and none of the teachers speak Arabic makes it an interesting case in terms of potential areas of conflict. Moreover, since the school provides both primary- and secondary - level education, it is possible to examine different opinions from both education level teachers, which provides a variety of opinions. The perceptions of the teachers are crucial since they are expected to play a mediatory role between Turkish and Syrian students while performing their academic responsibilities. The focus of the interview was the 'perceived' problems stated by the teachers since they play a key role in the delivery of education and their viewpoint is essential in order to address educational problems.

The study has been conducted with the three main research questions given below:

- How do the teachers evaluate the adaptation/harmonization process of Syrian and Turkish students in the classroom, in the school and out of the school?
- What are the general attitudes and behaviours of teachers towards Syrian students?
- How do the teachers evaluate the policies of Turkey concerning the education of Syrian refugees?

Theoretical framework

In this study, the ecological approach of social work is used since the issue of Syrian students and their teachers have multidimensional problems. In this approach, the problems can be analysed multidimensionally with in the understanding of 'person in environment'. According to this approach, a person can be understood with in the aspects of the physical and social environments and the relationship between them. According to this approach, individuals develop and adapt to interactions between all aspects of their environments (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2006). The problems experienced by both Syrian refugee students and their teachers are evaluated with ecological evaluation indicators such as family factors, cultural factors, environmental conditions, resources, opportunities and self-care patterns (Derezotes, 2000). Bearing these dimensions in mind, the researchers prepared interview questions to address the main research questions indicated earlier. These interview questions included the state of families being involved in the education process (family factors), self-care patterns of students, cultural factors that hinder or support the adaptation/harmonization process of Syrian and Turkish students, cultural factors that affect the attitude of students towards each other, the state of resources (physical and human) that facilitate the education and harmonization process, and possible opportunities for policy regulations.

Participants

During the 2017–2018 spring term, the interviews were conducted with 13 Turkish teachers, from a school (primary and secondary) located at Altındağ district of Ankara where Syrian refugees are highly populated. The participants were determined in accordance with the snowball sampling technique, a non-random sampling technique in which the researcher starts with a case, and then, based on the relevant information gathered thereon, moves on to new cases and repeats the process (Neuman, 2007). After explaining the scope and objectives of the research study to 19 teachers, 13 of them volunteered to participate in the study.

Data collection tools

The data of the study were collected, with a semi-structured interview form, consisting of eight questions, prepared in accordance with the objectives of the study. The questions were prepared based on the literature and the information obtained through a pilot scheme with two teachers. Pilot interviews were not included in the analysis.

Data analysis

Taking on a descriptive analysis method, data are analysed in accordance with the previously determined themes as well as the emerging themes during the interviews. The analysis of the data was carried out in four stages: building a framework, processing data in accordance with the thematic framework, identification of findings and interpretation of findings (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). An ecological approach and research questions were used for building a framework. All the interviews were transcribed and selective coding was done according to the pre-determined research questions, and open coding was done for emerging themes. For illustrations, direct quotations are selected.

Findings

General findings show that almost all of the teachers have negative remarks regarding Syrian students. A few teachers think that teachers,' and parents' hard work can solve Syrian students'

problems, but enormous workload and burnout constitute an obstacle for that. As a result of the analyses, six main themes were identified: (a) Perceived Problems of Syrian Refugee Students, (b) Perceived Relationship between Syrian and Turkish Students, (c) Social Activities to Promote Social Cohesion, (d) The Difficulties Encountered by Teachers, (e) Desired Support and Resources and (f) Teachers' Views on Education Policies

Perceived problems of Syrian refugee students

The teachers stated that Syrian refugee students frequently experienced problems related to language, compliance, culture, self-care and violence.

Language problems. The language problem is stated to be a major obstacle to the communication, socialization and adaptation of Syrian students. In addition to communication/adaptation problems, the teachers stated that the language barrier was an obstacle for developing a sense of belonging and psychological well-being:

> They don't feel that they belong to the class since they don't understand the language. This leads them either to acquire only Syrian classmates or become introvert and reluctant. (27 years, Primary School Teacher)

> The fact that both the students and the parents can't speak Turkish strains us in terms of communication. (31 years, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher)

> I have a Syrian student in the class who can speak and understand Turkish. He helps me with the translation, but the classroom size is thirty, whereas the capacity is twenty-five. In this case, I can't pay enough attention. (29 years, Primary School Teacher)

Problems with compliance at school. One of the teachers' main complaints was the problem of compliance with Turkish schools and school culture. Having no former school experience was given as the main reason for this perceived problem:

> Since they lack a school culture, they have difficulty in complying with school rules. For example, they stand up and wander around during lecture. (32 years, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher)

> Since they could not attend school in their own countries because of the war, they can't comply with school rules. (37 years, Social Studies Teacher)

Culture. The teachers also stated that cultural differences between Syrians and Turks limit opportunities to find and build on shared values and interests, which constitutes an obstacle for compliance. The teachers stated that some cultural codes such as the mixed-gender education system and particularly discrimination based on gender and religion present an obstacle to interpersonal communication and hence integration:

> They are experiencing compliance problems due to lack of participation in the mixed education system in their country. This compliance problem is worse particularly with male students. (31 years, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher)

Self-care issues. During the interviews, teachers were usually complaining about self-care issues of Syrian students:

> They've never had training on hygiene issues. (37 years, Social Studies Teacher)
>
> They've really insufficient information on hygiene, and this is a big problem. (30 years, Physical Education Teacher)

Violence problems. The teachers stated that the most frequent and intense phenomenon observed regarding the Syrian students was violence and peer bullying:

> They are constantly fighting, both in and outside the classroom. (32 years, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher)
>
> They are constantly insulting and being violent against each other. (25 years, Science Teacher)
>
> Children are extremely violent . . . (37 years, Social Studies Teacher)
>
> Children have a tendency towards violence. Each one is belligerent, rude and very noisy. (33 years, English Teacher)

Perceived relationship between Syrian and Turkish students

Considering the relationship between Syrian and Turkish students in the classroom, teachers reported that social exclusion, social isolation and violence were the main issues that frequently arise in the school.

Social exclusion and social isolation. The teachers stated that living in the same neighbourhood triggers the conflict between Syrian and Turkish students. Negative comments from Turkish families about Syrians are reflected in Turkish students' behaviour, resulting in prejudice and hatred towards Syrian students. Teachers also reported that Syrian students either demonstrate a tendency towards violence or isolate themselves due to the social exclusion imposed by Turkish students:

> Turkish students always treat them badly. In fact, they (Syrian students) aren't belligerent students but they don't want to socialise since they're excluded [by Turkish students]. (29 years, Primary School Teacher)
>
> Turkish children, usually affected by the negative attitudes of their families, don't socialize with Syrian students and feel disturbed about them. (37 years, Social Studies Teacher)
>
> Successful and compliant Syrians students aren't subject to exclusion. In general, incompatible and belligerent ones are excluded. (33 years, English Teacher)
>
> Syrian students, if they are few, feel a sense of exclusion in the environment. But when they are crowded, they feel strong and engage in conflict with the Turkish students. (26 years, Turkish Teacher)

Violence. The following statements of the teachers indicate that the relationship between the two groups in the school consists entirely of conflict along with serious peer bullying:

> So far, I haven't encountered any positive behaviour between the two groups of students. They're constantly in friction, fighting, insulting and swearing at each other. (32 years, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher)

> Students, usually express nonacceptance in the form of mutual insults and fight. We encounter problems such as not letting each other in the toilet, hustle and bustle during canteen, fight at school, not allowing to play ball in the garden. (37 years, Social Studies Teacher)

Social activities to promote social cohesion

The teachers stated that they have not been organizing sufficient in-class or extra-curricular social activities to promote social cohesion and to improve the relations between Syrian refugee students and Turkish students. Furthermore, some teachers reported not having planned any activities at all due to burnout, which is further discussed in the next section.

Even though the teachers expressed a lack of in-class and extra-curricular activities, they also stated that the activities they have organized have been successful in contributing to harmony and empathy between the students. Cooperation activities between Turkish and Syrian parents, empathy activities for Turkish students, supportive services provided for Syrian students to solve their language problems, and in-service training on the adaptation of Syrian students for teachers and administrators were among the activities reported by the teachers:

> Syrian students were happy to be included in social activities. Activities were organized within the scope of school-mosque brotherhood project, November 24th Teachers' Day, and the boxing course. (37 years, Social Studies Teacher)

> I organized joint activities in the classroom and assigned them common tasks during these activities. In particular, I have conducted empathy-related activities. For example, my Turkish students who once didn't want to sit side by side in my class, now share their desk with Syrian classmates. (26 years, Turkish Teacher)

> We tell Turkish students that we must learn to live together without racial discrimination, that they have a tendency to fight because they come from a war environment and we have something in common because we are all Muslims. (32 years, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher)

> We organized parent–teacher meetings for both Turkish and Syrian families, where we told them about school rules and sanctions to be applied in case of non-compliance. The counselling service organized a game project within the scope of compliance activities. (37 years, Social Studies Teacher)

> Language teachers were assigned at school, in order to teach Turkish to Syrian students. In addition, 40 hours of inclusive training was provided to the teachers and administrators of our school regarding the Syrian students. (30 years, Physical Education Teacher).

The teachers also stated that the language barrier also constituted an obstacle for organization of social activities to promote harmony among Turkish and Syrian students:

> No activity is organized regarding both groups. (30 years, Primary School Teacher)

> As they are self-confident students, first they must be taught Turkish in a separate class and then continue their education. No activity can be implemented without ensuring this compliance. (27 years, Primary School Teacher)

> I haven't encountered any activity until now. (31 years, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher)

The difficulties encountered by teachers

Communication problems, lack of family responsiveness and fear caused by violence were problems stated by the teachers.

Communication. The biggest problem that the teachers reported encountering was the communication problem. They stated that classroom management was difficult especially due to language barriers. This situation also had negative effect on the motivation of other students in the classroom:

> They [Syrian students] don't speak our language, they speak Arabic all the time. Syrian students who can speak Turkish also prefer speaking Arabic, though. Since I constantly warn them about this, we can't progress with lessons. Mine and the concentration of other students is getting worse. (24 years, Math Teacher)

> We can't communicate. We're trying to explain everything through gestures, which takes a lot of time. If someone tells you something in a language that you don't know in any way, you may nod and ignore. We don't even give these kids a chance to nod, we say you'll learn it. How easy do you think it can be? (30 years, Primary School Teacher)

Lack of family responsiveness. Lack of responsiveness to their children's needs by families is reported as one of the challenges that teachers face when dealing with Syrian children. The parents are described as 'uninterested, indifferent and non-involved'. When a need to contact Syrian students' parents arise, the teachers stated that only one-sided communication could be realized with the elder Turkish speaking brother/sister who usually do not have parental responsibility. Teachers stated that families' lack of responsiveness may be due to the fact that they have too many children, have low socioeconomic levels, problems with adaptation and cultural differences. Communication problems with families render the teachers unable to cooperate with parents on the students' academic status. Teachers' statements indicate that the families of Syrian students only give support in terms of ensuring school attendance:

> Mothers are inadequate to discipline their children and to share problems encountered at school. Their fathers, on the other hand, never come to school. We observe that fathers, in particular, don't want to be addressed to by female teachers. (37 years, Social Studies Teacher)

> Families aren't interested in children at all, they just ensure attendance, that's all. (33 years, English Teacher)

Fear of violence. The teachers stated that they had fears of being a victim of physical violence as a repercussion of xenophobia and hatred between the two groups of students. The possible shift in the direction of violence towards teachers was causing anxiety among them and negatively affecting their status as an authority figure in the classroom and school:

> Because they are violent, we find it very difficult to establish dominance in classes where the majority of the students are Syrians. There are Turkish–Syrian conflicts in class or during breaks. We're so scared to have a big fight. Sometimes we're afraid that they're going to beat us, too. (26 years, Turkish Teacher)

Heavy workload and burnout. The teachers complained about their workload and stated that Syrian students are adding to this workload as they require extra effort by the teachers. The teachers stated that special dedication and resources need to be employed for Syrian students and that falls out of their job description:

> All students are treated equally as they should be, but since the Syrian students require much more attention, this situation makes the teacher very exhausted. (29 years, Primary School Teacher)

> Teachers should of course be embracing, but working with Syrian students is a huge burden on teachers. (30 years, Primary School Teacher)

> We also suffer from burnout and frustration due to the students' behavioural disorders, their general discontent and resistance to learning. (33 years, English Teacher)

Even though burnout was a common theme, it is noteworthy that some teachers were trying to make a difference through their personal efforts. In demonstrating special interest and positive discrimination towards refugee students, these teachers try to maintain equal educational opportunities for Syrian students as well as promote their psychological well-being:

> For the teacher, the student's race, gender, socio-economic level, religion should not be important. In this sense, he/she can't be expected to behave differently. (27 years, Primary School Teacher)

> We're trying to understand them. We do our best to make them feel good both at school and in the classroom. (33 years, English Teacher)

Desired support and resources

The teachers indicated that the language barrier is an urgent matter to be solved, which will also help to maintain compliance in the classroom and throughout the school. In order to maintain compliance, they suggested implementing certain sanctions and penalties. They also emphasized that the educational material had to be provided to both the students and teachers. Moreover, an alternative education system was suggested by the teachers.

Language education and orientation. Teachers think that Syrian students should initially receive Turkish language education before moving on to formal education. In addition, teachers stated an urgent need for orientation practice to promote integration:

> Sufficient language training should be provided for Syrian students before progressing on to secondary school. (33 years, English Teacher)

> Assistant teachers, such as interpreters, are needed. Communication is a major problem at the moment. (29 years, Primary School Teacher)

> When children first come to school, they should receive orientation and counselling service should provide adaptation activities. (33 years, English teacher)

Procurement of educational resources. As far as the physical needs are concerned, teachers stated that lack of educational material and stationery was a huge problem both for Syrian students and for teachers. They also indicated that public procurement is a solution to the problem:

> I had been working with Somali students before, therefore I make use of TÖMER's book on teaching Turkish to foreigners. Secondly, I make use of first-class reading books. But it's not enough. A teacher's manual is needed. (31 years, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher)

> Neither children have adequate stationery, nor does the school have sufficient sources to meet this deficit. As teachers, we try to give support. Sometimes we provide support from external sources, but it isn't sustainable. (29 years, Primary School Teacher)

An alternative system. The teachers emphasized a need for an alternative educational system or a classroom system tailored for only Syrian students, in order to improve their academic success and psycho-social well-being:

> Certainly I find it appropriate that Syrian children are taught in a separate class. Since they feel as if they are excluded in this way and they stir up problems. There should be a separate class or a separate school concerning only Syrians. (26 years, Turkish Teacher)

Sanction and punishment. Teachers believe that authoritarian attitudes and behaviours are necessary to ensure Syrian students' adaptation to school, and stated that some sanctions and penalties should be included in school regulations:

> I think that Syrian students who don't follow the rules should be suspended from school and this should be made into a rule. In return, a more disciplined and decisive regulation should be followed. Syrian families should be informed of these rules and these regulations should be applied seriously at schools. (32 years, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge Teacher)

> I punish them when they speak Arabic in class. They don't focus on the lesson when there's no sanction. There must be a general sanction. (24 years, Math Teacher)

Teachers' views on education policies

The policies regarding Syrian students were evaluated as 'insufficient' by all the interviewed teachers. The teachers stated that the existing problems within the current education system were exacerbating the situation with the enrolment of refugee students and negatively affecting the academic figures and values of Turkish students. The teachers indicated that they found it absurd to throw Syrian students into the Turkish educational system without any language training, and advised for a separate and segregated education system. Teachers also pointed out that the training seminars provided for them were insufficient and that the families of the Syrian children should also be incorporated into these programmes. They also underlined their remarks on the need for Turkish-language training and funding for harmonization activities regarding Syrian families:

> Teachers did not want to be assigned to classes with Syrian students. This problem was solved later, although we encountered a lot of problems among teachers regarding task sharing at the beginning. In fact, the opposition of the teachers was more directed towards the wrong educational policies related to refugee students. (37 years, Social Studies Teacher)

Discussion

In accordance with the results of the research, it is observed that many findings overlap with previously conducted studies in the literature. One of the major problems encountered by Syrian students in the education system is the language barrier (Akpınar, 2017; Duman and Snoubar, 2017; İBU, 2015; Levent and Çayak, 2017; Seydi, 2014). As a solution to this problem, The Turkish Language Courses (TLC) programme is being implemented in 83 Youth Centres covering 24 provinces in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports in cooperation with UNICEF. The

TLC component consists of two learning levels which are adapted based on Turkish-language educational sets accredited by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). However, establishing and expanding language preparatory classes for Syrian students by the Ministry of National Education with additional resources (i.e. extra teachers for language training) is an urgent need for both the academic success and social integration of Syrian students.

Social phenomena such as social exclusion, social isolation, marginalization and peer bullying also emerge as a perceived problem with this study, along with other studies (Çoşkun and Emin, 2016). However, the schools have no policies to tackle these social problems. With their personal efforts, some teachers take on responsibility to unite these two groups of students; however, it is not a sustainable solution given the teachers' academic workload. In order to address these social issues, professional help is required and schools can provide an entry route into mental health services (Vostanis, 2016). Social workers are able to help with conducting anti-discriminative and anti-oppressive social work interventions in schools with teachers, school managers, parents (Turkish and Syrian), and especially all students. The role of school social work includes identifying systemic and structural oppression and offering both macro- and micro-level solutions. Moreover, the social workers might organize social activities to help them develop a sense of belonging and improve their academic success and communication skills within the school.

In evaluating teachers' experiences, the sense of professional inadequacy (Erdem, 2017; Sağlam and İlksen Kanbur, 2017) and the sense of individual inadequacy arising from the limitation of economic resources (Mercan Uzun and Bütün, 2016) emerge as two of the main struggles that teachers frequently encounter. Not being able to meet the basic needs of students, such as nutrition and clothing, causes the loss of teachers' motivation in the context of education and disrupts the flow in the hierarchy of needs. In this respect, school social workers can be helpful in terms of the maintenance of economic and physical resources as they can take on a role for mobilizing resources. School social work aims not only to improve students' potential in terms of resilience and development, but also to improve the quality of the environment (Germanin, 1999).

Moreover, social workers at the schools not only focus on the issues experienced by the students, but also are able to help teachers and other staff at the school (Openshaw, 2008). Social workers might support teachers who have to fulfil extra obligations such as providing psycho-social support and they might help teachers in ensuring classroom adaptation, as well as inform them on the effects of migration, experiences of war, post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic triggers.

Although not frequently underlined in the literature, another issue that has come forth in this study is the pattern of violence. The teachers stated that the violence already experienced by the Syrian students, as a consequence of the war environment in their own country, and the violence mutually encountered with Turkish students disrupts the educational process. The fear of being a victim of violence by teachers reveals the extent of the violence that goes beyond traditional cultural patterns such as respect for teachers. This multidimensional phenomenon of violence calls for a multi-dimensional and systematic intervention, which can be accomplished through social work interventions. Since there are no school social work services in Turkey, the problem of violence remains untouched. Standard 15 of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Standards states that 'School social workers shall be trained in and use mediation and conflict-resolution strategies to promote students' resolution of their non-productive encounters in the school and community and to promote productive relationships' (NASW-), 2002, Standard 15). Moreover, classroom interventions performed by social workers include behavioural observation and specific behavioural management plans (Openshaw, 2008). The school social worker can work with teachers to establish behavioural contracts, which may help with perceived behavioural issues and compliance problems. Individual therapy interventions at schools also include counselling, art therapy, game therapy, music therapy, relaxation and mindfulness exercises, and cognitive and behaviourist therapy (Openshaw, 2008; Yohani, 2008).

Another issue that arises in this study is the self-care issue. The teachers indicated that both lack of material resources and lack of knowledge about hygiene, as well as cultural differences, create a perceived gap concerning self-care issues and lead to social distance between Syrian and Turkish students. Even though the teachers claim that the difference between Syrian and Turkish self-care practices is an issue for Turkish students and families, it is clear from their discourse and gestures that teachers are also discontent with the self-care practices of Syrian students. This situation also creates a problem for social cohesion, and school social work practices can play a mediating role between students, teachers and other staff.

One of the outstanding yet underestimated findings revealed by this study is the teachers' call to cooperate with the students' families in order to eliminate the problems regarding the educational life of Syrian students. According to teachers' remarks, Syrian parents only give support in terms of their children's school attendance because these parents know that in Turkey not sending children to school is a crime with a penalty, and also it is known that Syrian parents are reluctant to send their children to school because of their expectation to return back home when the war is over (MDD, 2015). Moreover, these economically disadvantaged families force their children to work in order to support the family economy (Akpınar, 2017; Çetin, 2016; Tarlan, 2016). However, parental involvement is a key element for academic success for the students (Bačáková, 2009). The teachers' pointing out the lack of family involvement in the education process emphasizes the need for school social work services which can work as a bridge between families and school (Openshaw, 2008).

Even though the teachers seem to be well aware of the trauma and difficulties experienced by the Syrian students, they are still unable to free themselves from their prejudices against Syrians. Along with self-care issues, teachers' remarks on Syrian families' having too many children, fear of violence, desire for segregated classrooms and education show the discriminatory attitudes towards and labelling of Syrian students. The non-empathic and unprofessional attitude by the teachers reflects that of the general Turkish population. Many studies show that Turkish people at first consider having Syrian refugees in Turkey as a humanitarian act, even a religious duty; but over the years, with insufficient integration and adaptation efforts, they have developed negative attitudes (Deniz et al., 2016; Erdoğan, 2015; Karasu, 2016; Kaypak and Bimay, 2016; Syrians Barometer, 2019). The mounting xenophobic sentiments towards refugees started to be considered as a global epidemic that needs systematic intervention (Martell et al., 2017; Yohani, 2008). In this respect, fighting against stigma, prejudice and negative attitudes requires multi-dimensional intervention practices, and school social work can take on this task to promote social harmony between the students and teachers. 'Impacting the culture and climate of the school' is defined as one of the missions of social workers at school (Openshaw, 2008), and this might be realized through education, training, raising awareness and increasing social interaction (Dupper, 2003).

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that perceived problems of violence, discrimination and peer-bullying that eventually lead to social exclusion and isolation of Syrian students. Communication problems with Syrian students and their families due to language barriers and cultural differences exacerbate the situation, as reported by the teachers. The physical problems mostly stem from the lack of economic resources transferred to educational materials. Taking into consideration the prior experiences, traumas and problems encountered in the country of asylum as of the school-age, refugee children, it is observed that the perceived problems do not have just a single dimension and that this issue requires precision, and a holistic approach.

This need for a holistic approach calls for the urgent integration of the school social work model into the Turkish education system. An integrative school culture should be established with the participation, collaboration and support of not only Turkish and Syrian parents, but also students, teachers, social workers and administrators. In order to ensure systematic changes in schools for children with trauma and immigration experiences, school social work practices should be implemented and expanded. School social workers can fulfil an important function with mediation skills in assisting students, families and schools through school–community cooperation. The presence of school social workers is crucial when working not only with Syrian refugee children but also Turkish children, their families and teachers.

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