

“Everyone wants her child to be the nicest person”: Syrian mothers’ views on schooling of their young children¹

“Herkes çocuğunun Ahsen insan olmasını ister”: Suriyeli annelerin küçük çocuklarının okula gitmesine ilişkin görüşleri

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Abstract: Türkiye hosts approximately 3.5 million Syrian citizens under temporary protection status. Considering the effects of such a migration wave, Türkiye is one of the most affected countries by this situation. Many studies suggest that early childhood education can play a protective factor in the development of children at risk. Thus, it is important to examine Syrian children’s access to these services. In this phenomenological study, we aimed to understand the schooling of young Syrian children living in Türkiye regarding early childhood education services based on their mothers’ views. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 mothers. Barriers to reach ECE services, expectations from the educational services, information about how children spend their time, and concerns about social exclusion were the significant outcomes. All mothers agreed that they want their children to access early childhood education. Implications for researchers and practitioners working with immigrant children were provided. Also, findings were discussed within the scope of Berry’s acculturation theory.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Young Syrian children, Syrian mothers, Early childhood education, Enrolment to preschool, Schooling.

Öz: Türkiye, yaklaşık 3.5 milyon Suriye vatandaşına geçici koruma statüsü kapsamında ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Böylesi bir göç dalgasının etkileri düşünüldüğünde bu durumdan en fazla etkilenen ülkelerden birinin de Türkiye olduğu görülmektedir. Eğitimin, özellikle de erken çocukluk eğitiminin risk altındaki çocukların gelişiminde koruyucu faktör rolü üstlenebileceği yapılan birçok çalışma ile desteklenmiştir. Ülkemizdeki Suriyeli çocukların okul öncesi eğitime erişimine dair durumun incelenmesi önem arz etmektedir. Fenomenolojik yaklaşım benimsenerek yapılan bu çalışmada, Türkiye’de yaşayan Suriyeli çocukların erken çocukluk eğitimine ilişkin deneyimlerini annelerinin görüşleri ışığında ele almayı amaçladık ve 12 anne ile yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirdik. Araştırma sonuçları, okul öncesi eğitime erişimin önündeki engeller, okul öncesi eğitimden beklentiler, çocukların zamanını nasıl geçirdiğine dair bilgiler ve sosyal dışlanmaya dair endişelere ilişkin önemli bulguları ortaya koymuştur. Annelerin tamamının çocuklarının okul öncesi eğitim almasını istediklerini ifade etmeleri de dikkate değerdir. Bu bulguların, göçmen çocuklarla çalışan araştırmacılar ve uygulayıcılar için yol gösterici olacağı düşünülmektedir. Ayrıca, bulgular Berry’nin kültürleşme teorisi çerçevesinde tartışılmıştır.

Keywords: Küçük Suriyeli çocuklar; Suriyeli anneler, Erken çocukluk eğitimi, Anasınıfına kayıt, Okullaşma.

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GENİŞ ÖZET

Giriş

2011 yılında başlayan Suriye iç savaşı birçok ülkeyi etkilemiştir. Türkiye, çatışmalar nedeniyle ülkelerini bırakmak zorunda kalan neredeyse 3.5 milyon Suriye vatandaşına geçici koruma kapsamında ev sahipliği yapmaktadır (Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü [GİGM], 2023). Birleşmiş Milletler Mülteciler Yüksek Komiserliği'nin verilerine göre bu sayı ile Türkiye, dünyada en fazla mülteci barındıran ülkedir (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022). Böylesine büyük bir göç dalgasının ekonomik, politik, sosyal ve demografik etkileri düşünüldüğünde Türkiye'nin bu krizden en fazla etkilenen ülkelerden biri olduğu söylenebilir (Bircan ve Sunata, 2015). Göç eden bu kitlenin neredeyse yarısını 18 yaş altında ve temel eğitim çağında olan çocuklar oluşturmaktadır (GİGM, 2023) ve bu çocukların eğitim hakları yayınlanan yasal mevzuatlar ile güvence altına alınmıştır (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2014). Dolayısıyla eğitime erişimde yasal bir engel bulunmamaktadır. Buna rağmen bu çocukların okullaşma oranları beklenen değerin altındadır. Özellikle yalnızca 5 yaşa ait verilerin paylaşıldığı okul öncesi düzeyde, okullaşma oranları yüzde 30 civarındadır (Hayat Boyu Öğrenme Genel Müdürlüğü [HBÖGM], 2022).

Yalnızca ülkemizde değil, dünyada da eğitim hakkı evrensel beyannameler ile garanti edilmektedir ve yine dünyada da tıpkı ülkemizde olduğu gibi mülteci çocukların eğitime erişimleri kısıtlıdır. Yayınlanan veriler dünyadaki mülteci çocukların yüzde 48'inin eğitime erişimlerinin kısıtlı olduğunu göstermektedir (UNHCR, 2023). Oysa eğitim tıpkı beslenme, barınma ve sağlık hizmetlerine ulaşım gibi mülteci krizlerinde sağlanan insani desteklerden biri olarak görülmelidir (Sinclair, 2001; UNHCR, 2023). Çünkü okullar bu tür krizlere maruz kalmış olan çocukları silahlı çatışmalar, erken yaşta evlilik, çocuk işçiliği gibi çeşitli istismar türlerinden koruma potansiyeline sahiptir. Bunun yanında eğitim, insanların kendilerini gerçekleştirmelerine fırsat tanıyarak hem bireyleri hem toplumları daha dayanıklı bir hale getirme potansiyeline sahiptir (Due et al., 2016; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; UNHCR, 2023). Okul öncesi dönemdeki eğitimin önemine bu çocuklar özelinde ayrıca dikkat çekilmektedir. Çünkü göçmen çocukların erken yaşlarda bilişsel, dil ve sosyal beceriler anlamında desteklenmesi, ileriki yaşamlarını doğrudan etkileyebilmektedir. Küresel çapta bilinen Head Start, The Caroline Abecedarian Project, Chicago Child-Parent Centers gibi projelerin bulguları, erken çocukluk eğitiminin göçmen ve risk altındaki çocuklar üzerindeki uzun vadeli olumlu etkilerini deneysel olarak ortaya koymuşlardır (Country Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2016; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; The Caroline Abecedarian Project, 2015).

Türkiye'de yaşayan okul öncesi çağıdaki Suriyeli çocukların eğitimleri ile ilgili yapılan çalışmalar güncel durumu ortaya koyan (Aksoy, 2020; Emin, 2016; Gencer, 2017; Uğurlu, 2018; Uyan-Semerci & Erdoğan, 2018) ve beceri geliştirmeye yönelik çalışmalar (Akça & Tanju-Aslışen, 2022; Erdemir, 2021; Erdemir, 2022a; Erdemir, 2022b; Kiremit, 2019) olarak gruplanabilir. Bunun yanında veri kaynağı olarak çoğunlukla öğretmenlerin ve idarecilerin (Atasoy & Çiçek, 2017; Aydın & Kurtulmuş, 2018; F. Avcı, 2019; Günek, 2020;

Kiremit, Akpınar & Tüfekci-Akcan, 2018; Konan & Gürsul, 2021; Mercan-Uzun & Bütün, 2016; Özoruç & Dikici-Sığırtmaç, 2022; Yalçın & Simsar, 2020) tercih edildiğini söylemek mümkündür. Bunların yanında direkt olarak çocuklardan ve/ya ailelerden veri toplayan çalışmalara görece az rastlanmıştır (Doğrul & Akay, 2019; Karşlı-Çalamak, 2018; Karşlı-Çalamak & Erdemir, 2019; Yalçın & Simsar, 2020; Yanık-Özger & Akansel, 2019; Z. Avcı, 2019). Bu araştırmanın amacı okul öncesi çağda çocuğu olan Suriyeli annelerin çocuklarının okullaşmasına dair görüşlerini anlamaktır. Böylelikle bu araştırmanın oldukça sınırlı bir katılımcı türü olan anneleri ve okul öncesi dönemdeki okullaşmayı konu edinmesi sebebiyle alanyazına anlamlı bir katkı sunacağı düşünülmektedir.

Yöntem

Bu araştırma belirli bir fenomen hakkında zengin ve derin bir anlayışa sahip olmak amacıyla yürütülen nitel desenli bir çalışmadır. Araştırmada kullanılan fenomenolojik yaklaşım, araştırmanın amacı belirli bir grubun belirli bir olgu hakkındaki ortak duygu, deneyim ve algısını anlamayı gerektirdiğinde kullanılmaktadır (Creswell, 2013). Katılımcılar amaçlı örneklem yoluyla belirlenmiştir. Araştırmaya yaşları 25-40 arasında değişen, okul öncesi dönemde toplamda 15 çocuğu olan ve İstanbul'da yaşayan 12 Suriyeli anne katılmıştır. Annelerle yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yapılarak yaşları 42-66 ay arasında, 8'i kız, 7'si erkek 15 Suriyeli çocuğun okul öncesi eğitime erişim deneyimleri hakkında görüş alınmıştır. Çocuklardan yalnızca biri okul öncesi eğitimi almaktadır. Görüşmelerin dökümleri tüm araştırmacılar tarafından birçok kez okunmuş ve yorumlamalar üzerinde tartışılmıştır. Veriler tümevarımsal bir yaklaşımla yorumlayıcı analiz tekniği ile çözümlenmiştir (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Bulgular

Araştırmanın bulguları dört tema oluşturmaktadır. Bu temalar erken çocukluk eğitim hizmetine erişimde engeller, erken çocukluk eğitiminden beklentiler, çocuğun zamanını geçirme biçimi ve sosyal red endişesi olarak adlandırılmıştır. Anneler ekonomik yetersizlik, bilgi eksikliği ve sağlık sorunları gibi nedenlerle çocuklarının okul öncesi eğitim hizmetine katılmadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Katılımcılar çocuklarının Türkçeyi öğrenmeleri, ilkokula daha hazır olmaları, sosyalleşmeleri ve topluma uyum sağlamaları için eğitim almalarını istediklerini ifade etmişlerdir. Okul öncesi eğitimi almayan 14 çocuğun zamanlarını evde ve/ya sokakta oyun oynayarak, televizyon izleyerek geçirdiklerini belirten anneler, zaman zaman evde çocuklarına eğitim verdiklerini de eklemişlerdir. Son olarak anneler Türkiye'ye ilk geldikleri zamanlarda çocuklarının sokaktaki diğer çocuklar ve yetişkinler tarafından dışlandıklarını ifade etmişlerdir. Katılımcılar zaman içinde sokaktaki diğer çocukların, komşuların davranışlarının ve kullandıkları dilin iyileştiğini, karşılıklı bir alışmanın olduğunu bildirmişlerdir.

Sonuç ve Tartışma

Bu araştırmada 12 anne ile görüşülmüştür. Bu annelerin okul öncesi çağda toplamda 15 çocuğu bulunmaktadır. Bu 15 çocuktan yalnızca biri okul öncesi eğitime erişim sağlayabilmektedir. Bunun yanında

neredeysse tüm anneler çocuklarının okul öncesi eğitim almasını, Türkçe öğrenmesini, ilkokula hazırlanmasını ve sosyalleşmesini istediklerini belirtmişlerdir. Eğitime erişime en büyük engel olarak ise bilgi eksikliği ve finansal güçlükler işaret edilmiştir. Bunun yanında sosyal red veya ayrımcılığa uğrama endişesi veya durumları da ön plana çıkmaktadır. Bu bahsedilen durumlar alanyazındaki benzer çalışma bulguları ile benzerlik göstermektedir (Aksoy, 2020; Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2015; Uğurlu, 2018). Eğitime erişimin önündeki özellikle finansal ve bilgi eksikliği bariyerleri 2023 Eğitim Vizyonunda belirtilen 5 yaş okul öncesi eğitimin ücretsiz eğitim kapsamına alınması ile çözüme kavuşabilir (MEB, 2018).

Bu çalışmanın önemli bulgularından birisi de annelerin çocuklarının okullaşmaları konusunda duydukları istek ve gösterdikleri çabanın görünürlüğüdür. Bu bağlamda bu istek ve beklentinin Türk anneleri ile benzer yönlerinin olduğu Doğrul ve Akay (2019) tarafından yapılan çalışma ile desteklenmiştir. Adair (2017, s.309), göçmen çocukların eğitimi ile ilgili yapılan çalışmalarda genellikle zor tarafların öne çıktığını ve bunun istenmese de zararlı olabileceğini savunmaktadır. Çünkü böylesi bir yaklaşım bu çocukların yalnızca mağduriyetlerine odaklanılmasına; dolayısıyla, güçlü yönlerinin göz ardı edilmesine sebep olabilmektedir. Her birey gibi göçmen çocukların ve ailelerinin de zayıf olduğu kadar güçlü yönlerinin de olduğu daha gerçekçi bir yaklaşımdır. Araştırmacıların ve uygulayıcıların bu gruplar ile çalışırken güçlü yönlere odaklı bir yaklaşım benimsemesi önemlidir (Erdemir 2021; Karlı-Çalamak & Erdemir 2019; Yalçın & Simsar 2020; Zayimoğlu-Öztürk 2021). Bu araştırma bulguları yaşanan zorluklarla birlikte ailelerin güçlü yönlerini gözler önüne sermektedir.

INTRODUCTION

It has been more than ten years since the Syrian crisis started. Recent numbers indicate that Türkiye hosts 3.419.328 Syrian people under temporary protection status (Directorate General of Migration Management-Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü [GIGM], 2023). In this respect, Türkiye is the top country hosting refugees globally (UNHCR, 2022). Regarding the economic, political, and social factors, such a dramatic influx makes Türkiye one of the most influenced countries by this crisis (Bircan & Sunata, 2015). Almost half of the population under temporary protection are children below 18 (GIGM, 2023).

One of the basic needs and rights of them is education. Considering the war-related background, children are the most marginalized group; thus, their needs should be addressed immediately. Therefore, these children's access to qualified education should be the host countries' top priority (Bircan & Sunata, 2015). In Türkiye, Syrian children's right to education is guaranteed by the legal framework (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2014). The Directorate General of Lifelong Learning (Hayat Boyu Öğrenme Genel Müdürlüğü-HBOGM) is the official authority for publishing statistics about the education of foreign nationals in Türkiye. According to the statistics, there are 129.113 foreign national children at age five, and 42.196 of them are enrolled in preschool institutions. This means almost 33% of them are schooled at the preschool level. In terms of Syrian children, there are 37.171 5-year-old children enrolled in preschool institutions (HBOGM, 2022). There are neither preschool enrollment statistics for children below the age of five nor specific enrollment statistics for Syrian children in specific in that report. Based on these numbers, around 70% of 5-year-old children are out of school.

Universally, education is regarded as one of the most crucial humanitarian responses to the refugee crisis, along with other needs such as shelter, nourishment, and health services. The right to education is guaranteed by legal frameworks such as the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1951 Refugee Convention (Sinclair, 2001; UNHCR, 2023). Education is among basic rights and needs for these children because it can protect them from joining armed groups, child labor, sexual abuse, and child marriage. Besides, it can promote the community's resilience by fulfilling its individuals' knowledge and skills. Lastly, educational institutions help children better understand themselves and others in their community in which they are expected to rebuild their lives (Due et al., 2016; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; UNHCR, 2023). Despite the efforts of international institutions and agreements to ensure the right to education and the potential benefit of education for children and society, almost half of the refugee children worldwide (i.e 48 percent) have limited

access to education and remain out of school (UNHCR, 2023). These statistics indicate that although there are robust legal frameworks to ensure the right to education of refugee children, serious attempts should be made to meet these frameworks' obligations.

In terms of early childhood education (ECE) level, education can provide children with better adaptation to society and further education. Specifically, it can promote the development of language, cognitive and social skills that are essential for their future life. To provide examples, well-known intervention studies targeting young children, such as Perry Preschool/Head Start Project, The Caroline Abecedarian Project, and Chicago Child-Parent Centers, are found to have dramatic impacts on the development of immigrant children's basic skills. To be more specific, these studies were supported to be effective on children's school readiness, and longitudinal studies have indicated a positive impact on their later achievement in life (Country Health Rankings and Roadmaps, 2016; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; The Caroline Abecedarian Project, 2015).

There are studies revealing the current situation regarding the educational processes of preschool-aged Syrian children in Türkiye (Aksoy, 2020; Uğurlu, 2018; Uyan-Semerci & Erdoğan, 2018; Gencer, 2017; Emin, 2016). Most of the research is based on the opinions of teachers. The opinions of preschool teachers about the challenges they experience in education and adaptation processes of Syrian children (Güneş, 2020; F. Avcı, 2019; Konan & Gürsul, 2021; Özoruç & Dikici-Sığırtmaç, 2022), the opinions of the teachers about the difficulties experienced by the children (Atasoy & Çiçek, 2017; Aydın & Kurtulmuş, 2018; Kiremit, Akpınar & Tüfekci-Akcan, 2018; Mercan-Uzun & Bütün, 2016; Yalçın & Simsar, 2020) and the opinions of the school administrators (Yalçın & Simsar, 2020) were included in the literature. There are also other studies evaluating the developmental skills of Syrian children at preschool age (Çakan, Mercan & Mercan-Uzun, 2021; Güllüce & Uyanık, 2020; Kaya-Değer, 2019; Mızıkacı et al., 2021; Üstündağ & Şenol, 2023) as well as some intervention studies to support their developmental skills (Akça & Tanju-Aşlışen, 2022; Erdemir, 2021; Erdemir, 2022a; Erdemir, 2022b; Kiremit, 2019). There are limited research based on the views of children and their families (Doğrul & Akay, 2019; Karslı-Çalamak, 2018; Karslı-Çalamak & Erdemir, 2019; Yalçın & Simsar, 2020; Yanık-Özger & Akansel, 2019; Z. Avcı, 2019).

Türkiye proceeded considerably with refugee education. Still, many children are out of school. This situation requires educational researchers to conduct studies to determine possible obstacles, challenges, and opportunities in these children's schooling. It is crucial to note that the data based on the teachers' opinions represents Syrian children who already participate in a preschool education program. Therefore those who are not schooled are not visible in these studies. In order

to determine the status of children who do not enroll in a preschool or have access to early childhood education, the data should be obtained from the families and/or the children. Such studies are rare especially at the preschool level. We believe that this study can contribute to the field in terms of raising voices of unschooled children and their mothers, as well. Furthermore, in this study, interviews are conducted in mother’s mother tongue either at their homes or one of the NGO’s offices they are already familiar with. We believe that this provided them with comfort while sharing their experiences. The current study aims to examine preschool-aged Syrian children’s mothers’ views on their schooling based on their experiences about their children’s starting and continuing to school.

METHOD

Design of the Study

This is a qualitative study which is conducted to have a rich and deep understanding of a specific phenomenon. Phenomenological approach is appropriate when the research question requires understanding a specific group’s common feelings, experiences, and perceptions about a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this study, we investigated the preschool-aged Syrian children’s mothers’ views on their children’s schooling.

Participants

The participants consisted of 12 mothers of Syrian refugee children who are 25 to 40 years old, all living in Istanbul. They were chosen using a purposive sampling method which is the most appropriate sample selection method for phenomenology. Thus, the mothers who have young children (3 to 6 years old) were recruited. All of the mothers were housewives. 12 mothers have a total of 15 preschool children, aged between 42-66 months, eight girls and seven boys. The participant mothers in the study were coded from P1 to P12 respectively. Except for one child, none of these children were attending preschool.

Data Collection

We conducted semi-structured interviews with the mothers after we obtained oral and written consent from them. The interviews took place at the participants’ houses mostly as well as one of the NGO’s offices which supported us to reach some of the mothers. Since all mothers speak Arabic, a translator presented at all interviews. After the interviewer asked the question, the

translator asked the exact question to mother in Arabic and after the mother replied, he translated what she had to say to Turkish. In order not to lose any input from the mothers the translation performed sentence by sentence. All interviews are recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis of the Data

In order to analyze the raw data we followed the interpretive phenomenological analysis' (IPA) steps. In IPA, researchers collect data from a hermeneutic perspective. In other words, researchers focus only on comprehending and interpreting the participant's world, regardless of their own knowledge, beliefs, and opinion biases. The data from this study is analyzed inductively, starting with the important statements of the participants and moving towards the interpretation of the meaning of what the researcher wants to examine in his research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, we focused on how the mothers of Syrian preschool children living in our country experience in terms of their children starting and attending school (phenomenon) and how the participating mothers make sense of their experiences regarding this situation (hermeneutics). In the analysis, we first produced codes from the data by reading the transcripts intensively and repeatedly. Then, important ideas about the experience that started to determine among the codes and patterns (categories/themes) about their meaning began to emerge. Some of these were grouped as main themes. Finally, while presenting the findings, we identified some statements from the transcripts to support the credibility of our study (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). We performed this analysis process rigorously together. In order to ensure trustworthiness, we present the significant statements of the participants at the results part for rationalization of the themes. The themes, categories and codes are also checked by two academics (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethics

All the rules specified in the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" have been complied with. None of the actions specified under the heading "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", which is the second part of the directive, have been taken.

RESULTS

Four main themes emerged from the data analysis about preschool-aged Syrian refugee children's mothers' views on their children's schooling. These themes are, barriers to reach ECE services, expectations from ECE, how the child spends her/his time, and concerns about social exclusion.

Barriers to reach ECE services

There are basically four reasons for not attending a preschool institution that Syrian mothers mentioned. Financial problems, lack of information, health problems, and mothers' concerns about the school's negative effects were the prominent reasons. While one of the mothers explained the financial issues as the school entering an obligation like «*The Turkish school... The kindergarten didn't accept my daughter. I mean the money... They asked for money*» (P11), another mother (P12) said that it would be possible for her child to go to school only when is old enough to enter the elementary school because of the expenses: «*Because there are expenses in all things, in kindergarten... She can go to school when she becomes a first grader, when the school is free of charge*. Lack of information was also an issue for the families as P3 stated, «*I do not know where the school is, where to apply*». P1 noted her daughter's health problems «*Well, she had surgery. She had problems. So the doctors said she could take my daughter to school a year later*», while another mother explained her fears about the possible negative effects of the school: «*I mean I am scared a bit. I mean she could get away from me if she starts to go to school*» (P9).

Expectations from education

Mothers identified their expectations from education as language learning, getting ready for primary school and socialization/adaptation along with school preference and epistemological priorities. Most of the mothers agreed that their children should learn Turkish and going to school is the only way for it. P2 for instance revealed this, «*I mean he learned everything. Language... So, he can play with other kids. So I want him to go to school to learn Turkish. The education is Turkish here*», while another mother said, «*Well, after that, she learns the Turkish letters, she will understand better, she will think faster, she will be smarter*» (P7). P5 who has two preschool age children explained the importance of education such as, «*If they go to school, they learn to read and write, then they go to official schools*» and another mother noted that the most important aspect of preschool education is transitioning to primary education. «*The school is good. For her to be able to read and write, to receive more education. Everyone wants her child to be the nicest person, to be the best of people*» (P12). P8 on the other hand claimed that her son's progress in socialization/adaptation depends on attending school, «*...everything would be fine if he played games with his friends. If he communicated with his teacher at school, it would be much better if he was happy there. Now it is very difficult for us to return to Syria. Therefore, I want him to stay here, in an environment where he can feel comfortable without being completely isolated with Turkish students at school. He should be in that environment where Turks live, he should make friends and adapt to that environment*».

Mothers' school preferences and epistemological priorities include cultural priorities, religious priorities, and secular priorities. P3's two children are attending to Temporary Education Center (TEC)⁵ and she expressed the cultural priority as «*This year is the last year of the Arab school, the teacher told us that he should learn some Arabic this year, then he can go to the normal school, Turkish school*», while the religious priority stated by P4 «*...my child should learn religion first. After he learns the Qur'an, he can learn whatever else he should learn*» and P12 «*Actually, I want both. There is no Syrian school here anyway. I want to send her to school here because I have to. But I still want the Arabic language... Because Arabic is the original language of the Qur'an*». Secular priorities were put forward by P5 who has two children as well as follows «*They already learn Arabic, but they don't speak Turkish at all. No one in the family could speak Turkish anyway. We are in a lot of trouble because of that. When we have to go to the doctor, we need an interpreter and there is no one*».

How the child spends her/his time

14 children of the participants were not going to school and they were mostly spending their time at home and on the street. Children who spend time at home fill their time by playing games like P7 said «*When she gets up in the morning, she eats breakfast, then plays with his brothers, she likes to draw, then she likes to write Turkish letters and he writes Arabic letters. She combs her hair and gets dressed...*», watching television like P11 stated «*She sits at home and plays with her siblings. She only goes out with her mother when she goes to the market. Otherwise she stays at home and watches TV...*», and receiving education from their mothers at home such as P4 noted «*I am educating him at home, myself. For example, the names of the prophets, religion, how to eat, how to do things. Such things*». P5 and P12 stated that their children also spend time outside the house, especially on the street. According to P5, «*He goes out to the street because he plays, he plays with his friends*» and another mother said, «*She has Turkish friends. She plays outside*» (P12).

The anxiety of social exclusion

One of the most remarkable outcomes of the study is mothers' anxiety of social exclusion. Participants revealed that they felt anxiety when they moved to Türkiye at the very beginning. One of the mothers whose son had a chance to attend preschool remarked, «*Before... When he went to school... Turkish children... They were shouting behind him, Syrian Syrian Syrian*» (P4). In addition to that

⁵ Temporary Education Center (TEC): Temporary Education Centers (TECs) are conducted to meet the educational needs of Syrian children under temporary protection. These centers aim to enable students whose education was interrupted in their countries due to the war to continue their education. In these centers, Syrian curriculum and Turkish lessons were delivered at the same time. Thus, it is aimed to prevent the loss of years when they return to their country or continue to stay in our country (MEB, 2014). However, in recent years, these centers have been gradually converted into schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education or closed down (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi [ERG], 2017).

statement P12 responded to the social exclusion as *«I mean the neighbors, the Turks, were behaving like this. My daughter was crying. Neighbors were telling their kids not to play with my kids»*. Some of the mothers said the situation is better now. As P4 stated: *«Then the teacher found out. The teacher told all of them, “These are our brothers and sisters. They came to our country”. Now look, Turkish children and Syrian children are playing together»*. P12 had this to say, *«Now we are good. I am good with my neighbors, my children are good with their children. I mean the relationships are good. We know each other. Alhamdulillah, we greet each other»*.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this study, we aimed to explore the Syrian mothers’ views in terms of their young children’s schooling. Out of 15 preschool-aged children only one of them received preschool education. Almost all mothers stated that they want their children to enroll in a preschool institution, learn to read and write in Turkish, be ready for primary school, and adapt to their new life and social environment in Türkiye. These findings indicate that there are external reasons for children to not attend school such as financial difficulties, access to information, and health issues. These results show similarities with the findings of a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), in which financial barriers are pointed as one of the obstacles for Syrian children’s schooling (HRW, 2015). Therefore, it is a necessity that all children in Türkiye should receive free preschool education at least at the age of 5. Indeed, as stated in the MEB’s 2023 Education Vision document, the age of 5 will be included in the scope of compulsory education (MEB, 2018). Although this target has not been reached yet, the increase in schooling rates and the same goal included in the residential Annual Program for 2023 about taking 5-year-olds into the scope of compulsory education are promising developments (Presidency of Strategy and Budget-Cumhurbaşkanlığı Strateji ve Bütçe Başkanlığı [SBB], 2022). The other target mentioned in the 2023 Education Vision document includes the goal of creating an accelerated, intensive, and supportive curriculum for children at risk (MEB, 2018). If the aforementioned curriculum is prepared and implemented effectively, the inequality experienced by Syrian children which occurred as a result of this research can be eliminated, and a more equal start to educational life can be ensured.

In this study, mothers mostly manifested their strong intention for their children’s participation in ECE. There are other studies conducted with Syrian mothers indicating similar results (Karlı-Çalamak, 2018; Karlı-Çalamak and Erdemir, 2019). Furthermore, Doğrul and Akay (2019) claim that although there are differences, Turkish mothers and Syrian mothers share common thoughts and expectations regarding ECE. Therefore, it can be said that regardless of their background,

mothers have similar expectations about their children as one of our participants stated as, «*Everyone wants her child to be the nicest (absen) human beings*».

Adair et al. (2017, p.309) claim that focusing only on the challenges and negative aspects of the education of immigrant children might be harmful when they are especially “institutionally and publicly justified by deficit-oriented research and thinking”. Therefore, in research and practice, a strength-based approach should be adopted while working with these groups (Erdemir 2021; Karlı-Çalamak & Erdemir 2019; Yalçın & Simsar 2020; Zayimoğlu-Öztürk 2021). We believe that in research, collecting data directly from this population might be helpful in adopting a strength-based approach. In this way, they can be more visible in the literature without any secondary source of information.

We would also like to discuss our results within the scope of Berry's (1997) acculturation theory as it helps us to make sense of our data. Berry claims that when people begin to live in a country different from their origin, either as individuals or groups, they adopt one of four acculturation strategies; assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration. The question of which of these strategies to adopt can be decided depending on the answers to the following two questions: (1) How much do they want to sustain their own cultural values? and (2) how much will they accord with the core values of the host community? Berry declares that if people choose to abandon their own cultural values and embrace the values of the host community, that means an assimilation strategy is adopted. If they sustain their own cultural values and do not accord with the core values of the host community, that means a separation strategy is adopted. If they neither sustain their own values nor accord with the core values of the society, that means a marginalization strategy is adopted. Finally, if they sustain their own values while at the same time accord with the basic values of the host community, that means an integration strategy is adopted. According to Berry, considering the long-term effects over newcomers and the members of the host community, the most beneficial acculturation strategy would be integration. This strategy requires the host community to make their public services (i.e, health, education, labor) available for newcomers. At the same time, it requires the newcomers to comply with the basic values of the host community. In this way, it would be possible for each cultural group to sustain their lives in harmony and respect (Berry, 1997).

It is almost impossible to use precise expressions when it comes to social sciences and human behavior due to its dynamic nature and multifactorial individual and environmental aspects. Still, theories shed light on understanding human behavior. When we look at our results from Berry's

perspective, we think our participants are closer to adopting an integration strategy. To be more specific, our participants were eager to sustain some of their own values, such as their language or religious practices. They also stated that they would send their children to Turkish schools to socialize and build their future in Türkiye. That means they can also adopt the basic values of this country. Berry (1997) points out the importance of education as a powerful public service for the adoption of integration strategy since it can provide a respectful environment for both cultures to introduce and celebrate. Therefore, we conclude that from an acculturation perspective, schooling of Syrian children from the early childhood education level should be promoted. Schools should serve as a place where children’s and their parents’ cultures, differences, and similarities are welcomed, respected, and celebrated.

In this study, mothers stated lots of challenges and difficulties regarding the education of their children. At the same time, they shared how much they value their children’s education and development. We believe that this study might also contribute to the strength-based approach in related research and practice by making these voices heard.

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