AN EXAMINATION OF SYRIAN STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AT SCHOOL FROM THE REFLECTIONS OF TEACHERS

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Abstract

Education is the most effective tool for enabling immigrants' integration into the country they live in. The aim of this research is to determine teachers' views related to the education of Syrian students attending state schools. By presenting them through the experiences of their teachers, this paper deals with how the educational experiences at school of Syrian children of school age are shaped in state schools. The research is planned with a qualitative approach as a case study design. The participants of the research were 34 teachers working in state schools and having Syrian students in their classes. The research data were collected via focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews in Rize, Turkey between the years 2017-2019. The data in the focus group and semi-structured interviews were supported by means of observations. The research findings reveal that the biggest problem in teachers' opinions was the language problem and the communication and academic barriers resulting from this, that Syrian students suffered from depression and trauma because of war and migration, that they had a feeling of loneliness, and that nevertheless, they were happy at school. Therefore, this research reveals that teachers working with Syrian students are in need of vocational training and development consolidation in order to provide academic and psychological support for these students. Successfully addressing the educational needs of Syrian students in school will be especially beneficial for enabling Syrian children's integration into society.
Keywords: *education experience, qualitative research, Syrian students, teacher reflection, Turkey*

Introduction

According to the data of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in 2015, 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced from their living areas. These statistics represent the highest numbers of displaced persons recorded in world history since the Second World War. In 2011, a global refugee crisis occurred due to the war in Syria. Over 50% of the population abandoned their homes, and 4.8 million Syrians were forced to migrate to foreign countries. In this context, the world was faced with its greatest migration problem. Between 2011 and the present, over 470,000 Syrians have died, and the rate of absence from school has reached 42.5% (Syrian Centre for Policy Research, 2016). At the same time as Turkey, with which Syria shares its longest border, neighbouring countries like Lebanon and Jordan were inundated with Syrian refugees seeking safety. The number of refugees in Lebanon constitutes over one-third of the total Lebanese population (UNHCR, 2016). The statistics reveal that 57% of Syrians forced to migrate to other countries since 2011 are living in 10 countries. Among these countries, the Republic of Turkey is top of the list. A total of 3,609,884 Syrian refugees are located in Turkey (GİGM, 2020). 1,662,753 of these are Syrian children. Researchers assert that in future years, other Syrians may also migrate to Turkey and that 80% of Syrians currently in Turkey will remain permanently (Aras & Yasun, 2016; Beltekin, 2016).

Displacement from the areas where they live results in dispersed family structures and interrupted education among refugees and asylum seekers. Although a great deal of value is placed on education in Turkey, difficulties are experienced in the education of Syrian students due to both the structure of the Turkish education system and of Syrian families (Çelik & İçduygu, 2018; Toker-Gökçe & Acar, 2018; Şahin & Sümer, 2018; Tumen, 2019). However, education is a human right. The conducted studies reveal that asylum seekers and refugees generally have problems in accessing education in a new country. For example, while 50% of refugee children are registered at primary school and 22% are registered at secondary school, only 1% of young adult refugees have gone to university (UNESCO, 2016). However, it is known that only 21.8% of Syrian children in Turkey receive education and attend state schools. In this context, the great majority of Syrian migrants have no access to formal education (UNHCR, 2015). Due to lack of success at school by Syrian students based on the teacher's sharing with the class in Turkish, the increase in abandonment of school at later stages of education results in problems of integration of Syrian children into the education system. For this reason, the great majority of Syrian children remain outside the education system in Turkey. Considering also the data not reflected in statistics, it can be said that at least 700-800 thousand children are affected by this situation and belong to the "*lost generations*".

Research Problem

Education of Syrian Refugee Students

In Turkey, over 600,000 Syrian children are given free education by the state from preschool to upper-secondary school. These children receive education within the scope of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), 1) in state schools that provide formal education, and 2) in Temporary Education Centres (although these are state schools, they have a different status). Syrian children who live in border provinces and large cities in Turkey receive language training for a certain period before being introduced to the school education programmes. These children of school age enter whichever class is necessary regarding physical development and are placed in that class without being provided with an orientation programme. This situation can cause problems in the education process for children from both cultures, and deficiencies emerge with regard to teacher competences and education programmes. At the same time, the principals, teachers and school counsellors of the schools where these children are educated have not received preservice or in-service training aimed at Syrian students. School staff members (teachers, school principals and school counsellors) are not equipped to provide guidance in the necessary knowledge and skills to Syrian students who are under their temporary care at school and in class. Since teachers, school principals and school counsellors are not equipped with this professional knowledge and these skills, it is revealed in the related literature that students in this group have very weak commitment to school (Akar-Vural et al., 2018; Güngör & Şenel, 2018). Lack of achievement at school by children in this group may be due to various reasons such as financial difficulty, inadequate support, insufficient language skills, and inability to adapt to the foreign society where they live (Hebbani et al., 2012).

Between 2011 and the present, no multidimensional studies have been conducted in Turkey with the aim of determining the educational needs of Syrian children, revealing their educational goals and trends, or enabling their integration into the education system. Problems are experienced in different dimensions in the process of adaptation of Syrian children to the education system. Syrian students, who learn Turkish as a second language at school, are taken into the same education system as Turkish students without their educational needs or Turkish language levels being determined. It is revealed that lack of inclusion of special implementations for Syrian students in the teaching programme results in failure of these students to use Turkish

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effectively. Despite all the efforts of the MoNE, Syrian students have innumerable difficulties in accessing education and that prevent them from going to school. It is not known at present how many students participate in non-formal education, either. As is revealed in the related literature (Akar-Vural et al., 2018; Aykırı, 2017; Bulut et al., 2018; Erdem, 2017; Kuzu-Jafaria et al., 2018), the language problem is the biggest problem experienced by Syrian students. Besides language deficiency, the others are lack of communication, the standardised Turkish curriculum, either failing to attend school or being unsuccessful at school, and discriminatory barriers such as physical and psychological violence, maltreatment, bullying and stigmatisation. It is revealed in the field literature that the main factor in experiencing common problems is the fact that Syrian children and their families do not know Turkish and that consequently, they have communication problems. These problems are seen in the province of Rize, just as they are similarly seen in other provinces of Turkey.

A proportion of the Syrian immigrants flooding into Turkey have been settled by the Government of the Republic of Turkey in Rize. According to official data obtained from Rize Provincial Immigration Authority, 157 Syrian families live in Rize. 300 Syrian children receive education in Rize. Although a certain number of immigrant families live in Rize, no systematic research has been carried out for these families and for their children's education in terms of their adaptation to school and the environment, either by Rize Provincial Directorate of National Education or by non-governmental organisations. Syrian students in Rize begin their school education directly. Syrian students encounter various problems in this practice regarding adaptation to school and based on language learning.

Research Focus

The aim of this research was to determine the barriers faced by Syrian students in their education via the experiences of their teachers and to enable these teachers to better understand the educational needs of Syrian students. The research can help us to better understand how teachers who have Syrian students in their class make personal efforts and deal with the difficulties they face. The contribution of the research to the education literature is to fill a gap in the field by discussing the problems experienced by Syrian students in the context of their teachers' experiences. Although some studies have examined the problems experienced by Syrian students in class, in this research, an examination of Syrian students' educational experiences at school is presented holistically from the reflections of teachers.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this research was to present an examination of the educational experiences of Syrian children at school from the reflections of teachers.

In line with this general aim, answers were sought to the following questions:

1. What are the economic profiles of Syrian students?
2. How competent are Syrian students in the Turkish language?
3. Are Syrian students happy at school?
4. What kind of problems related to education are experienced by Syrian students? How are solutions to these problems implemented?
5. Do Syrian parents provide sufficient support for their children's education?
6. What can be done to provide more support for these children and their families?

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Research Methodology

Design

This research was planned with a case study design in the qualitative paradigm. Case studies are studies aiming to investigate, describe and reveal current situations that exist in real life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the case study, which was carried out as a field study, for strengthening of Syrian students' educational experiences at school with teachers' reflections, the study was enriched in depth with focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews and observations (Merriam, 2007; Yin, 2009). In this context, the research is one in which the research data were reinforced by using different methods in the qualitative paradigm at the same time (Chmiliar, 2010). To be able to achieve this aim of the research, a holistic case study design was used (Yin, 2009). The holistic case study design is a type of case study in which a single unit of analysis (an individual, an institution, a group, an environment, a problem, etc.) is investigated, and which is used to reveal how factors (environment, individuals, events, problems, processes, etc.) related to certain situations affect the relevant case, and are affected by the relevant case, holistically in one piece (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 2007; Yin, 2009).

Participants

3 primary, 3 lower-secondary and 3 upper-secondary schools, which are state schools in Rize with low, medium and high socio-economic levels (SEL) and are attended by Syrian students, were determined by the researcher with official permission as schools in which the research was to be conducted. In the field research, in the context of the socio-economic variable of these schools, attention was paid to their location in the city centre, district and countryside in order to achieve the best result. The research group was determined with the criterion sampling type of purposive sampling method. In the schools specified for the sampling group, the participants of the research were determined as teachers with different seniorities and of different subjects, who had Syrian students in their classes, at primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools affiliated to Rize Provincial Directorate of National Education in the 2017-2019 academic years. The teachers participated in the research voluntarily. 12 of the participants were male and 22 were female, making up a total of 34 teachers. 12 of the teachers were primary school teachers, 11 taught in lower-secondary schools and 11 worked in upper-secondary schools. The youngest teacher was 23, while the eldest was 59. The participants' professional experience was as follows: 12 teachers with 0-5 years, 10 teachers with 6-10 years, 19 teachers with 11-15 years, 2 teachers with 16-20 years, and 1 teacher with 31-35 years of experience. Only 6 teachers had received in-service training related to education of immigrant students. Considering the high number of immigrants and Syrian students in Rize, this number is very low. The characteristics of the participants in this research are shown in detail in Table 1.

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Table 1

Demographic profile of the participants

Demographic data		Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
		Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
SEL	Low	4	4	4
	Medium	4	4	4
	High	4	3	3
Gender	Male	8	6	3
	Female	4	5	8
Age	23-27	2	3	2
	28-32	4	5	3
	33-37	4	2	6
	38-42	1		
	43-47		1	
	59 years and above	1		
Professional Experience	0-5 years	4	6	3
	6-10 years	2	4	4
	11-15 years	4	1	4
	16-20 years	1		
	31-35 years and above	1		
Location of School	Countryside	4	4	3
	District	4	4	4
	City centre	4	3	4
Status of Participation in In-Service Training Related to Education of Immigrants	Training attended	2	2	2
	No training attended	10	9	9

When the teaching experiences of the participants were analysed, it was seen that they had generally worked in rural areas in the first years of teaching. In terms of the schools' socio-economic status, the profiles of the principals were that they had qualities of cooperation, and transformational and participatory leadership and supportiveness were important for their teachers in the work that they did, whereas student and parent profiles varied in terms of low, medium and high socio-economic level. In schools with low and medium socio-economic levels, parents were seen to lack interest and not to support teacher-student participation activities.

Instrument and Procedures

The research was carried out in schools that have low, medium and high socio-economic levels and are attended by Syrian students. Data were gathered by taking 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grade classroom teachers in primary schools and teachers from different branches in lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools, who had Syrian students in their classes, as the criteria. The data in the field research were collected by the researcher via 1) focus group interviews, 2) semi-structured interviews and 3) participatory observations. The interview was

the main data collection method. The research steps followed for the focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews and observation form were: (1) an in-depth examination of the field literature, (2) implementation of a pilot interview each with a teacher working in the primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary school classes in which there were Syrian students, and (3) deciding on the final form of the prepared focus group interview/semi-structured interview/ observation form by obtaining expert opinions.

The interviews and observations were carried out in order to examine the educational experiences of Syrian students at school via teacher reflections in a way that would best reveal them. Semi-structured interview questions prepared by the researcher were used for the interviews. The same interview questions were used in the focus group interviews and the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A). Interviews were held with the teachers face to face. First, the focus group interviews and then the semi-structured interviews were held. In the focus group interviews, while the school perception and school experiences of Syrian students were focused on with the contributions of the teachers, variation of the data was enabled by comparing Syrian students in different classes and different subjects. Three focus group interviews were conducted according to school level. The first interview was held in primary school, the second in lower-secondary school and the third in upper-secondary school. The focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews were recorded with a sound recording device and supported by notetaking. The data collection was carried out in the relevant schools in the centre, districts and villages of Rize in the months of September and May in the 2017-2019 academic years. The focus group interviews lasted for 75-90 minutes, while the semi-structured interviews took 35-55 minutes, and with regard to the most suitable time period and environment, they were held in the teachers' room after school hours. The interviews were based on the principle of voluntariness.

In the observations, the communication and behaviours of Syrian students with Turkish students and Syrian students inside and outside the classroom were examined. To prevent a biased situation from occurring in the student group being observed, the observation studies were supported only by means of notetaking. The researcher had the role of participant observer during the observations. In this type of observation, the researcher is an information gatherer rather than a participant of the group (Merriam, 2007). The observation records were made by the researcher using an observation form (see Appendix B). The observations were carried out in line with the aim of the research and the theoretical framework. Following the observations, the notes taken by the researcher were expanded and transferred to a computer environment.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis, the observations were carried out by creating the observation form based on the findings obtained in the focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews. Triangulation of the data was made by combining the data obtained in the focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews and observations. For transferring the data, the sound recordings were loaded into the NVivo 12 program for computer-supported qualitative data analysis. The sound files obtained were converted into written format in the form of raw data. Following the data transfer, the data analysis operation was begun. The data analyses were performed by means of the content analysis type of qualitative data analysis technique. With the aim of revealing the concepts underlying the data and the relationships between these concepts, inductive content analysis was used. The analysis of the data was performed using Marshall and Rossman's (2016) seven-stage content analysis steps. These process steps are 1) transferring the gathered data into writing, 2) arranging the data, 3) creating the themes and subthemes, 4) coding the data, 5) revealing the mutual relationships between the themes obtained from the data, 6) for arranging and defining the data and interpreting the findings according to the codes and themes,

describing the themes by evaluating alternative explanations and negative situations in the data (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), and 7) interpreting and reporting the findings.

The research questions, field notes, interview transcripts and observation notes were read three times by the researcher (Flick, 2009). For the content analysis based on the transcription of the focus group and semi-structured interviews, coding was done according to the concepts extracted from the obtained data. A table of codes was created for focusing on the group discussions in the main themes (Maxwell, 2013). The coded raw data were analysed by listing them according to the themes and subthemes (Saldana, 2012). After these operations, the initial themes and subthemes were created. With the inductive analysis, the codes were generated directly from the data, and according to this framework, the data analysis framework was determined based on the themes under which the data would be presented, the related field literature, the aim of the research and the dimensions included in the interviews. After the data were grouped according to the research findings, the views of three specialists were obtained and the data were reduced to the codes in the data set (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Next, the themes were generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Relationally with the themes, the observational data were reported to in order check the relationship between the Syrian students' behaviours inside and outside the classroom. Differences of opinion between the researcher and specialists were revealed in the coding, and consensus was achieved by compromise. Finally, the findings were compiled and synthesised.

With the aim of achieving validity of the research, a comprehensive review of the related literature was made. With the data obtained from there, the theoretical framework of the research was created. In the qualitative studies, by using interviews and observations together, data triangulation was enabled by confirmation of the obtained data with more than one method. In this context, by using qualitative methods, estimations for the future were made with the data collection and analysis and integration of the findings. By using data gathered with different methods that support one another, the credibility of results is strengthened. A detailed and advanced analysis can be presented by accessing richer details. For this reason, the observation method was included to support the focus group and semi-structured interviews conducted with the teachers. The data collection and sound transcription were realised by the researcher. Following the sound transcription, the transcript records and sound recordings were listened to again to check them. Great care was taken to ensure that the meanings of the direct quotes and the perceptions they reflected were accurately represented (Oliver, 2005). These efforts that were made represent the validity and reliability applications.

Research Results

In this research, in which Syrian students' educational experiences at school were examined from the reflections of their teachers, the teachers who were interviewed shared their own experiences frankly and consistently. On the other hand, due to their concerns about Syrian students' cultural integration, the teachers tended to be cautious. The findings obtained from the interviews held with the teachers and from the data in the researcher's observations in an out of class were subjected to content analysis. In this research, in which the experiences reflected by the teachers in the interviews and the observation analyses were examined, the main themes of 1) barriers faced by Syrian students in education (see Figure 1), and 2) solution suggestions for improving the quality of Syrian students' school life (see Figure 2) were determined. In this section, the findings obtained based on the data collected during the research are presented thematically in order and in depth.

Figure 1
Theme of barriers faced by Syrian students in education
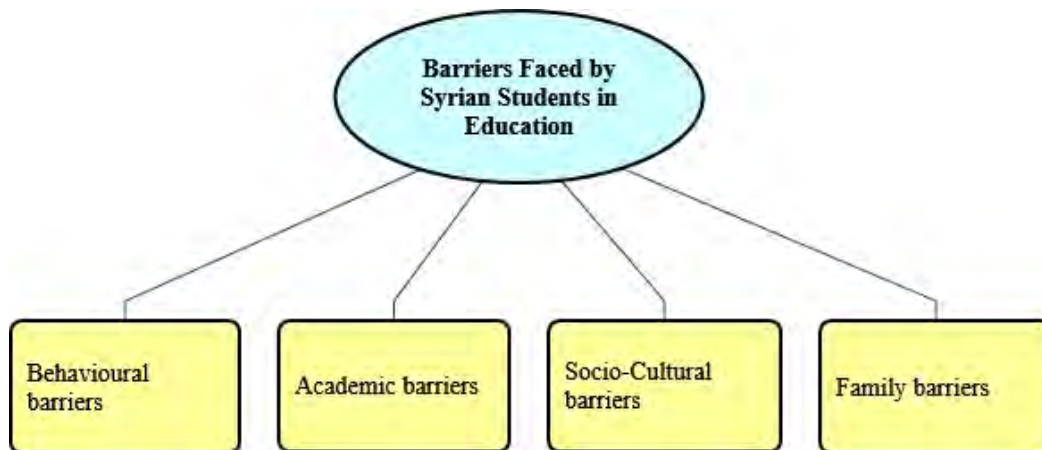
From the teachers' reflections, one of the behavioural barriers faced by Syrian students in education was alienation due to being subjected to discrimination in an intolerant way by teachers and students. Besides these behavioural barriers, social stigmatisation, especially by students, led to problems of discord and distrust, which could result in problems like loneliness, isolation, trauma and depression in this student group. These behavioural barriers seen in Syrian students were revealed in detail in conducted studies, and although it was shown that these were experienced in most cities and schools in Turkey, it can be said that this situation was experienced the least in Rize. Stigmatisation of Syrian students was reduced to a minimum in rural settlements of Rize in particular. One village teacher's striking view in this regard is as follows:

> *As a school, we have not had any problems. From the first day that the Syrian students came to school, we asked our students how they would expect to be welcomed if they went to Syria and told them to welcome the new students in the same way. We instilled that spirit in the children by placing feelings of hospitality to the fore. We also instilled a spirit of living in this country without feeling hatred in both the Syrian students and the Turks.* P25.

One behavioural barrier created by Syrian students was that of regarding their language as superior and rejecting the language of the country within the area where they lived.

> *One teacher's view: The fact that some Syrian families do not want their children to learn Turkish prevents students from showing the necessary interest...* P7.

The number of Syrian students, who were forced to immigrate because of the war, who had lost someone close during the war was very high. These findings are an important piece of data regarding ability to efficiently assess problems in psycho-social development such as loneliness-isolation, trauma and depression in Syrian children.

> *Many of our students who were born in Syria, not in Turkey, have experienced losses in their families. Most of the little ones have not seen war, but there are very many whose families have experienced losses. Especially children at young ages succeed in being happy despite difficult conditions, at a rate of 60%.* P7.

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> *If you ask me, they are as happy as they can be. Some of them are happy even though they have financial problems, have lost several members of their families, or have suffered the trauma of war.* P18.

Another behavioural barrier reflected by Syrian students was missing their country. Longing for their country was reflected as a behavioural barrier by teachers making up the participant group of this research, and was seen not in children of young ages or those born in Turkey, but in children of a certain age who had migrated from Syria. Two striking views in this regard:

> *As far as I can understand from conversations with my student, he feels lonely. He has not yet established close relations at school, and he says that rather than unhappiness, a feeling of loneliness is dominant and that he misses his country.* P13.
> *...However bad the place they have come from is, they feel a longing for their homeland.* P10.

Behavioural barriers faced by the Syrian students have become a determiner of their holding on to life and also their happiness. Although the great majority of the teachers regarded these children as happy despite all the problems they faced, a limited number of participants painted a picture of unhappiness. Reasons for these children's unhappiness were not only the problems they faced at school and in class, but were also because of psychological breakdown and trauma due to losses in their families, losing a very close member of the family (such as a mother, father, sister or brother), problems of family lifestyle due to types of culture and belief, gender discrimination between boys and girls, uncared for and unloved children in crowded families due to polygamy in the family, and violence at home. Below are some striking views of teachers regarding this:

> *They make an effort to be happy. There are those who think that they should be happy because at least they are alive.* P17.
>
> *I think they are happy, although there are those who do not like the conditions in Turkey and dream of going to Europe.* P19.
>
> *They can be happy with very small things. A little pen, some chocolate or, though old, an item of clothing, is enough to make them happy.* P1.
> *I think they are happy to some extent because they come to school. There are many children who have lost someone in the family...They are in great need of affection. The family does not show affection. In my opinion, it is school that tempers this bad situation. We do what we can for them to be happy even for a short time.* P2.

In negative teacher experiences, Syrian students were described as unhappy. Teachers' statements transferred from observation data:

> *I do not think they are happy since they are far away from their parents. One child still aged 15 is trying to survive only with his elder brother beside his relatives in this country.* P12.
> *I believe that these children are lonely. They seem not to have any friends. They speak to the others in class, but it's not enough.* P14.

Academic Barriers

With the consensus of all the teachers, the most important of the academic barriers faced by Syrian students in education was the language barrier. Again, it was stated by all the teachers that Syrian children learned Turkish at home if they had an elder brother or sister and their elder

sibling was attending school, otherwise they learned it at school. It is at school where Syrian children best learn the language of the country where they live. If the language learnt at school is not approved or reinforced at home by the family, various problems in learning the language may result. For this reason, problems are experienced, especially in reading comprehension, writing and self-expression. The teachers were in agreement in stating that Syrian children learned Turkish quickly but that if there were Syrian students especially in class and at school, they would group together and display behaviour towards not using the language. In order to overcome these problems of the students, the teachers would set aside extra time and give them special attention. All the teachers stated that due to lack of language learning, Syrian students had communication and academic barriers before them. Since deficiencies in language learning were not overcome, lack of academic success also increased. Below are some striking views of teachers on this subject:

> *They learn Turkish very quickly in about 5-6 months. They can express themselves in Turkish, can understand what they read, and can write. When there is more than one Syrian, Afghan, etc. student in the class, they speak their mother tongue amongst themselves, which slows down their learning of Turkish.* P26.

> *Since they have not completely mastered the language, their success is reduced because they cannot fully read, understand or express themselves.* P12.

> *They are below the level of their peers in reading and writing. I make them read a lot of books and do lots of writing exercises.* P13.

> *They may have problems with reading, writing and understanding Turkish. They understand the numerical and foreign language lessons better. They have difficulty with comprehension in the cultural lessons.* P11.

> *It is very difficult to teach subjects like literature, geography, history and mathematics in Turkish to someone who does not know our language.* P1.

Academic barriers faced by Syrian students included having no academic plans due to lack of importance given to education by their families, having an interrupted education, failure of families to satisfy material needs, problems with attendance, disobeying class and school rules, lack of academic preparation, differences in levels in class, lack of interest in lessons, not following or focusing on lessons, low motivation problems, disputes and discord with friends in class and school, and aggressiveness. Here are some striking views of teachers in this regard:

> *Syrian students are really complacent. They have no goals related to learning. They behave as if they are not in class. They do not make an effort to learn. This sends an incorrect message to the other students…* P12.

> *They come to school without the necessary equipment or materials.* P31.

> *Since they do not comply with school times or lesson times, they may have certain behavioural problems, such as not being open to criticism, quick-temperedness, lack of focus on lessons, and short attention span.* P26.

> *There is an attendance problem at school. Since they do not attend regularly, the compliance problems that they have are also reflected in their behaviour, unfortunately, such as wishing to leave school without permission, not wishing to play with their Turkish friends, and not wanting to obey the rules taught at school. They do not listen to the lesson and disrupt the lesson.* P34.

There are differences in their levels. It takes up a lot of my time, but I give those students homework that suits their level. P5.
*They behave aggressively. When they hit each other, they say they are playing.*P2.

They display behaviour such as peevishness, sudden loss of temper, meaningless shouting, acting as a law unto themselves, continually crying, etc. P29.

The Syrian students can be excluded by the groups, and consequently may feel lonely. To assert themselves, they may display behaviour such as fighting and attention-grabbing speech and actions. P30.

Despite these problems related to academic barriers experienced by Syrian students, a rather limited number of teachers painted a picture of success for students who participated continuously in education.

Syrian students who attend regularly can make the necessary gains at class level just like our Turkish students. We have Syrian students who take part and achieve high ranks in competitions organised on certain days or in certain weeks at school and provincial level. The biggest problem that we have is the Syrian students who do not attend regularly. P16.

The teachers stated that Syrian families preferred educational institutions based on their culture and beliefs and that in this context, they displayed an attitude of seeming to give secondary importance to the education provided by state schools. These findings are an important piece of data in terms of being able to assess Syrian students' attendance at state schools and their continuous education. Particularly striking views of two teachers were:

They attend Koran courses. They learn the Koran at home by heart. Having two different types of education at the same time is hard for a child. State school falls behind. Their own preferences are given more importance. There is a need of incentives to send their preferences below our preferences. P5.
Since their preferences are Koran courses, school does not go beyond being just a different environment. The prerequisite is to learn Turkish, and parents must be made to accept the importance of children's regular attendance at school, albeit forcibly. Clear and certain sanctions are necessary with regard to attendance at school. Children should be instilled with a perception of their future lives other than Koran courses. P18.

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Among the socio-cultural barriers faced by Syrian students in education were teacher acceptance, teacher rejection, adaptation problems, peer acceptance/rejection, cultural differences, ethnic roots, and gender inequality. Among these socio-cultural barriers, while acceptance of Syrian students by their teachers was generally positive, a negative attitude and rejection of these students was observed in a limited number of teachers. The latter situation was an upsetting one both for teachers and for students. Generally, while Syrian students were accepted by their peers and embraced by Turkish students in schools in small settlement areas of Rize, they may have suffered rejection due to their ethnic roots in crowded schools in the city centre. Views of teachers related to this:

Their language is different, their lifestyle is different, their understanding of hygiene is different. P2_P4_P6_P27.

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They have difficulty forming friendships. I sometimes observed that nationality conflicts occurred. P23.

The Turkish students sometimes offend the children with behaviours like shouting "You're Syrian! Get away from us!" and this makes them more introverted. The Syrian children lay claim to the country and the place where they live. Y18.

Below are striking views related to gender inequality stemming from Syrian students' own culture:

Even if the boys are in different classes, in the breaks, they play amongst themselves. There is a serious trend towards violence against each other in the boys. They can sometimes be alienated by other students. I can understand this while they are playing. P1.

The girls in particular are not shown affection; girls are ignored, while boys are at the forefront. Therefore, most of the girls are shy, while the boys are very naughty. P7.

While I'm teaching with songs, the idea in their culture that listening to music is a sin can sweep children completely into a world outside the lesson. Most of the time, they cover their ears. P19.

They don't join in mixed activities. When girls and boys are playing together, holding each other's hands makes them show a very negative reaction. P25.

In the integration of Syrian students into the society where they live, the teacher is the key person. Teachers must be open to multi-cultural education and in terms of ethics, must behave equally towards all students. While acceptance of Syrian students by their teachers was generally positive, it was concluded that a limited number of teachers had a negative attitude towards them. Some striking views about rejection of Syrian students by teachers having a negative attitude were as follows:

They do not show respect for the national values of the country they live in. The most common behavioural problem I encounter is dishonesty. P4.

We began our task with prejudices. I had bad impressions regarding ethics and hygiene. P3.

…My most important impression was the thought that they would debase our country. P2.

In contrast with these negative views, there were many teachers who had a positive attitude towards Syrian students. Views of two teachers:

Syrian students must not be alienated. We should be inclusive. I want them to have good memories of us. P20.

It seems that it will be difficult for the Syrians to leave Turkey, and so, to prevent them from debasing our culture, I cannot deny them as much education and effort as is possible. P31

Family Barriers

The most important of the family barriers faced by Syrian students in education was inadequate family participation due to economic difficulties. A picture was painted by the participating teachers of a parent profile in which, generally, they had a lot of children despite living and not having a job in another country, were not economically well off, and worked in day-to-day, temporary jobs that they found. Since their economic situation was not good, they generally preferred ghettos and rural settlements as places to live. Families whose economic

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situation was good and who worked in regular paid employment, however, preferred to live in the city centre, and paid the necessary attention to their children's education by sending them to schools with high socio-economic status. The fact that almost all Syrian families had a large number of children was a very striking situation. Most of the teachers reported that due to the large number of children, parents showed little interest in their children and used violence towards them, and school-family cooperation could not be established. Again, it was depicted that the greatest obstacle to communication was language, and that even if they learned and knew Turkish, they struggled to speak. Striking views related to family barriers:

They are mostly people who do day-to-day jobs and live in ghettos. P1.

Since they have too many children, most of them are not interested in their children and use corporal punishment to teach them. P2.

They have trouble making ends meet, and their children's education is not important for them. That's what I think. I cannot understand why they continually have children even though they struggle to get by. Since families have a lot of children, they remain very indifferent towards them. Their homes are very small. The children cannot move around as they wish, and so they cannot expend their energy. P6.

Since there is education with corporal punishment among the Arabs, they inflict a lot of beatings and have very little understanding of affection. P7.

Most of the families do not even visit the school; they take no interest in their children. Because we cannot reach the families, we do not have the chance to cooperate with them. Some parents do not want their children to learn Turkish. P4.

*We cannot communicate with the families because of the language problem.* P1.

However, families with high educational and socio-economic levels drew a positive profile. One view:

The Syrian parent profile is close to the Turkish parent profile. If parents are educated and interested, their students are precious for them. However difficult conditions are, they try to do something for their children. However, if the parents are uneducated, they do not take an interest in students just like Turkish parents. P7.

Solution Suggestions for Improving the Quality of
Syrian Students' School Life

Figure 2
Theme of solution suggestions for improving the quality of Syrian students' school life
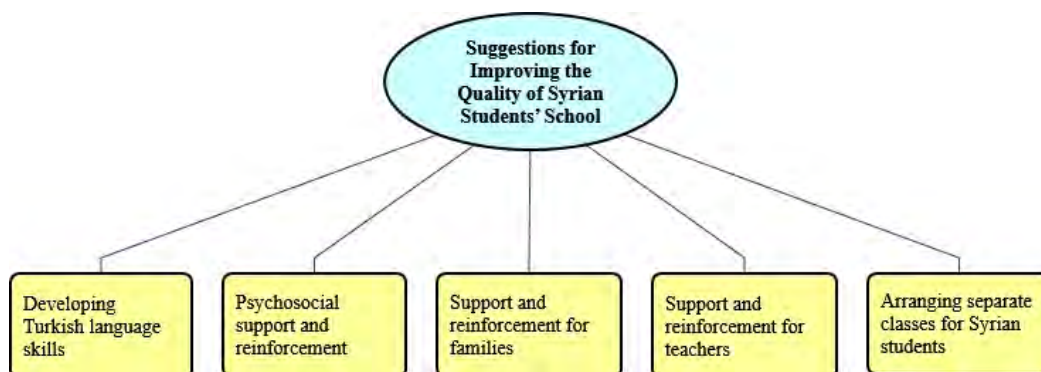
Developing Turkish Language Skills

With the consensus of all the teachers, it was recommended that the most important way to overcome academic barriers was to improve language skills. Language was depicted as the most important tool at school, in the street, while communicating with their friends and for ability to express themselves. In this context, educational institutions and teachers have social responsibilities for fostering language skills in Syrian students.

First of all, Syrian students need to be taught to speak and write Turkish correctly and fluently. Then they should receive education in schools suited to their levels. This will make their adaptation to school easier. P6.

Firstly, literacy courses suited to their level should be opened. After literacy training, they should receive education for one year in the same class. In the second year, they should be integrated into other classes according to their age group. P33.

Psychosocial Support and Reinforcement

The teachers strongly recommended psychosocial support and reinforcement efforts for Syrian students to be more successful in their school lives, for development of their sense of belonging to school, and for their integration with the society that they lived in.

We must make efforts to integrate them with normal students. We must ensure that Turkish students stay free of prejudice. P8.
We should find projects with which we can give the children material and spiritual support. Their economic problems are acute. At the end of the day, if there is a little monetary support, their interest and attention increase even more. Monthly support for education can be given to those who regularly attend school. P17.

There is a need for social and cultural integration activities. P19.

Orientation services could be provided for increasing adaptation to Turkish language and culture. Children who continue to have adaptation problems in education must be given special attention. P34.

More communication must be made with these children's parents. Counselling services should monitor these children continually and maintain communication with classroom teachers. P22.

Support and Reinforcement for Families

The biggest obstacle to a healthy process of integration into the culture existing in the country inhabited is lack of knowledge of that country's language, inability to speak it, or reluctance to speak it. It should be borne in mind that knowledge of the common language spoken in the country of asylum by Syrian families, who are in a disadvantageous position in terms of communication and language in the society where they live, will facilitate the process of their healthy integration into the culture of that country. In this context, the values that Syrian families acquire via integration into the society where they live will be passed on to their children. A large majority of the participating teachers were also of this opinion and gave a lot of importance to the education of families as well as to fostering language competences in families. Striking views:

I regard education of the family as essential. Training must be given with regard to education of the child… P2.

Language and culture courses can be organised for families. There should be family seminars. The families are very uninformed with regard to raising children. P4.

If the families are given Turkish-supported education, then the children can also see and do a lot of things from them in Turkish. There are some who are more introverted because they are behind their peers. P16.

Support and Reinforcement for Teachers

It is very important for Syrian students receiving education at school to be integrated into the education system in a healthy way. The values that children acquire via integration into the education system will be passed on to their families. It is also very important for Syrian children's adaptation to the education system to be consolidated through the guidance and support of their teachers, since the teacher is the key person in facilitating these children's adaptation to society. One teacher's view on this was:

To enable us to understand Syrian children better, in-service training must be extended by organising seminars and language training for all teachers. P1.

Arranging Separate Classes for Syrian Students

Teachers who had Syrian students in their classes suggested that separate classes can be organised and that schools can be opened for Syrian students in order to provide them with more support and so that they will not feel lonely. Arranging extra classes and courses and providing education in support training rooms were recommended within the context of the teachers' experiences. Views:

Institutions providing basic education can be opened for these students alone. In this way, students' anger and feelings of inadequacy will not develop. They will not feel isolated. P23.

There is a need for extra classes and courses. P15.

Education can be provided in support training rooms. P21.

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Discussion

This research describes the barriers faced by Syrian students in their education at school through the experiences of their teachers and enables these teachers to better understand Syrian students' educational needs. The research relies on interviews and observations carried out to empirically document the adaptation of Syrian students' educational experiences to the school environment. Failure to meet Syrian students' educational needs at school can lead to discriminatory practices against them. In this context, the aim of the research is to make a new contribution to the literature on Syrian students' educational needs.

The research results reveal that teachers and school managements in state schools in Rize have, as a general attitude, provided a warm and safe learning environment for Syrian students. As Matthews (2008) stated, schools are safe social institutions that give new immigrants the opportunity for interaction and learning with the host society. Among the problems encountered by Syrian students in their educational experiences at school, the most reported problem was language. In state schools in Turkey, Syrian students' psychosocial, emotional and mental problems in their learning experiences are limited by language barriers (Çelik & İçduygu, 2018). The research results reveal that due to the inadequacy of Syrian students' Turkish competences, they cannot follow the lessons, so that their class level falls behind, and although they learn Turkish at school, their academic success level is insufficient, and communication and academic barriers result from inadequate language skills. Syrian students experience difficulties due to starting school without orientation to school or solving language problems. Studies on this subject show that in terms of learning, Syrian students' inadequacy in Turkish skills means that they lack cognitive entry characteristics, which leads to low academic achievement in these children (Kiremit et al., 2018; Şahin & Sümer, 2018; Tösten et al., 2017). The most striking findings regarding academic barriers included having no academic plans for the future, giving no importance to education, attendance problems, inadequate preparation, lack of extra lesson support, level differences in class, lack of interest in lessons, lack of materials, weakness in comprehension and expression skills, and low motivation. The findings revealed in this research are supported by findings in the related literature (Aras & Yasun, 2016; Erdem et al., 2017; Nielsen & Grey, 2013; UNICEF, 2014).

These studies reveal that Syrian children's academic performance is lower than that of their Turkish peers in class, and that because they cannot express their own feelings and thoughts, they cannot participate in lessons (Güngör & Şenel, 2018). For teaching Turkish to Syrian students, it is very important to take them into classes only after they have acquired Turkish language skills with the development of a special programme and materials (Taşkın & Erdemli, 2018).

Failure to learn the language of the country inhabited leads to problems for immigrant students in accessing education opportunities and integrating into society. In Turkey, education of Syrian students in state schools as a state policy is free. However, despite all the opportunities in the acceptance policy provided for Syrian students in state schools, language continues to be a big obstacle. In state schools, all lessons other than language lessons are conducted in Turkish. Although private schools offer the opportunity for education in different languages, due to financial restrictions, it appears impossible for Syrian families to pay the fees of these schools. Furthermore, the fact that Syrian families do not give enough importance to their children's education, do not plan their children's academic futures, and prefer religion-based education due to their cultural and local structures, also continue to be a barrier to Syrian children's participation in education.

In Turkey, standardised programmes are applied in state schools by the MoNE. Bilingual programmes developed for Syrian children do not exist. Although the PICTES project, aimed at integration of Syrian children into Turkish society, is implemented by the MoNE,

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monoculturalism and monolingualism are again predominant in this project. The monolingual, monocultural educational practices in Turkey cause Syrian students' estrangement from state schools. In these schools, Syrian families cannot observe their children, and the students also feel alienated and become depressed (Çelik & İçduygu, 2018). Due to this practice, UNICEF has recommended the development of different programmes by the MoNE to enable the continuity of education for Syrian children (Bonessi, 2016). In this context, the presence of Syrian children can be seen as an opportunity for developing intercultural schools modelled on equal access of immigrants and asylum seekers to society and for developing school-centred integration.

The research findings reveal that in their educational experiences at school, Syrian children have problems related to behavioural barriers regarding missing their homeland, exclusion, exposure to intolerant attitudes of teachers and students, discrimination, loneliness-isolation, trauma and depression, considering their language superior, social stigmatisation, incompatibility and insecurity. It was revealed in studies that especially children emigrating to Turkey from Syria had suffered one or more losses in the family. Traumas suffered by Syrian children displaced due to war and migration can reach very high levels. In Sirin and Rogers-Sirin's (2015) research, it was determined that 79% of Syrian children had had a death in the family, 60% had seen someone kicked, shot at or physically hurt, and 30% had themselves been kicked, shot at or physically hurt. These findings can be seen as an important piece of data with regard to enabling healthy assessment of Syrian children's psychosocial development. The traumas experienced by these children lead to their trusting of no one, including their teachers, and to their fear of them (McBrien, 2005). There are also studies which reveal that the lack of communication between Syrian and Turkish students and Turkish students' bullying tendencies towards and exclusion of Syrian students results in compliance and psychological problems for the latter, and that Turkish students fight with Syrian students because they are unhappy about receiving education with them (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Erdem et al., 2017; Çelik & İçduygu, 2018; Toker-Gökçe & Acar, 2018; Özdemir, 2018). A large majority of the teachers who participated in this research displayed positive attitudes towards Syrian students and provided as much individual support as they could to develop Syrian students' sense of belonging to school and improve their academic performance.

The research results show that Syrian families had low income and education levels, had a large number of children, lived in small homes, did not take an interest in their children, used violence, and lived in ghettos. These findings reveal that Syrian families are also in need of social and emotional support. Refugee families generally suffer from socioeconomic disadvantages, poverty, lack of social support, difficulty in accessing education, living in very crowded areas, and isolation due to family structure and cultural differences (Alpak et al. 2015; Porter & Haslam, 2005). To these problems can be added Turkish families' negative reactions, prejudices and complaints towards Syrian families (Kiremit et al., 2018). The fact that Syrian families' Turkish language skills are weak and that they show resistance towards learning Turkish is also a significant problem. Families' financial problems and language deficiencies are also reflected onto their children's education. Since they do not give importance to their children's education (Aydin & Kaya, 2019), they do not help their children with their lessons or cooperate with teachers. On the other hand, families with high socio-economic levels show the necessary attention both for sending their children to school and for their children's education. In Çelik and İçduygu's (2018) research, it was emphasised that the lack of adaptation, preparatory or orientation classes in state schools in Turkey and the lack of provision of counselling services for Syrian children who have suffered trauma made Syrian families afraid and weakened their trust in state schools. Inadequacy of language skills in foreign families is the main barrier affecting integration into the education system and society of the country they live in (Oikonomidoy, 2010). Considering that especially knowledge of the common language spoken in the country

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will facilitate a healthy integration process, support and reinforcement for Syrian families in a non-assimilatory way is very important, since in the family, the woman is the key person who can also facilitate the integration of the children. Through the education of women, especially of mothers, the integration of their children into society and the education system will be made even easier.

Suggestions for solving the problems experienced in education by Syrian children were generated in the context of the teachers' experiences. These solution suggestions included organising extra lessons and courses, providing education in support training rooms, integration in classrooms according to age level only after receiving language instruction, improving Turkish language skills, providing psychosocial support and reinforcement, support and reinforcement for the family, support and reinforcement for teachers, and organising separate classes and schools for Syrian students. These findings revealed in the research are also supported by findings in the related literature (Beltekin, 2016; Özer et al., 2016). Rather striking among the research findings was the recommendation that separate classes and schools should be organised for Syrian students. In Sakız's (2016) empirical research, school principals supported the provision of education for Syrian students in separate environments rather than in state schools. When teachers' views about the relationships of Syrian students in the school environment were evaluated, it was determined that in state schools, students' relations with each other, with their classmates and with their teachers were good (Taşkın & Erdemli, 2018). Other studies, however, reveal results such as prejudice towards Syrian students, cultural differences, forming a group instead of socialising with Turkish students, fighting, lack of attendance, lack of discipline, and inadequacy of counselling services (Şahin & Sümer, 2018; Tösten et al., 2017). It can be said that Syrian students' learning in isolation from Turkish students can cause them to be isolated from the society they live in rather than being integrated into it. The most important tool for a healthy integration process into the existing culture of the country lived in is education that enables social integration. The idea of opening separate classes and schools especially for Syrian students is not supported by the related literature. In complete contrast to separate classes and schools for these students, the need for measures that will enable them to amalgamate with society and with Turkish children is put forward.

Studies conducted with regard to the educational needs of Syrian students in Turkey reveal that schools' physical equipment and conditions are at an inadequate level. Especially, lack of intercultural skills of teachers who can provide education to Syrian and other immigrants, insufficient and deficient materials, failure to organise content according to Syrian students' needs, lack of multicultural education, and inadequate and monocultural programme applications for teaching Turkish to foreigners are revealed (Aydin et al., 2019; Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Erdem, 2017). In this context, at the basis of preservice and in-service training in multicultural education for teachers, foreign students' educational needs, and communication and ability to work with families of children in this group, education must be given based on what the psychological needs of children in this group are, and on practices for benefiting from students' existing mechanisms for coping with trauma and for using these strategies. Further studies need to be conducted on this subject to determine the socio-emotional barriers faced by Syrian students and what the existing support systems provided for them are.

Conclusions and Implications

Development of confidence in their friends and teachers by Syrian students, of their sense of belonging to school, of their academic achievement, and of activities for improving their skills in and out of class, all rely on language competence. If Syrian students can adapt to the countries where they live, their sense of belonging to school may assist in supporting their academic success by continuous relational participation in a social sense. While schools

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are carrying out their mission of transferring cultural heritage to future generations, they must enable foreign students on their premises to preserve their cultures as well. While the culture of the country in the position of host country is being taught, it must also be made impossible for them to lose their own cultures. The way to achieve this is to include different cultures in process-based school curricula. This arrangement in school programmes will prevent immigrant students and their families from feeling that they have rejected their own cultures, histories or languages when participating in the culture of the country they live in.

This research shows that the approaches to Syrian students and the performances of teachers actively involved in the education of these students are very important. For these teachers to be able to meet the educational needs of Syrian students, the teachers certainly require support. Providing education to the large number of asylum seekers who are coming unprepared into Turkey is a new, unexpected problem that needs to be solved. For the solution to this problem, the teachers, educational institutions and MoNE who are involved in this process must work together in consensus and in practice. For this process to be conducted efficiently, there is a need for support from the public, NGOs, and national and international organisations, and for projects to be carried out for sustainability in this matter.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Questionnaire

1. Could you speak a little about your teaching life? Where and for how long have you been teaching up to the present?

2. Could you talk a little about the school where you work at present? Could you give a little information about your student profile, parent profile, and your teaching and administrative colleagues?

3. How long have you had Syrian students at your school and in your class? What were your first observations about these children?

4. What can you say about the economic profile of your Syrian students? What are the children's financial circumstances like?

5. What can you say about the language competence of Syrian children? Did they speak Turkish when they came to the school? Where do they learn the language?

6. What can you say about the Syrian children's social and psychological characteristics? Do you think they are happy?

7. What kind of problems do you have related to Syrian children's education? How do you solve these problems?

8. Have you received training (undergraduate training or in-service training) related to immigrant children or children whose mother tongue is not Turkish?

9. What can you say about Syrian parents? What kind of profile do they have? How competent are they in the Turkish language? Do they provide enough support for their children's education?

10. Finally, what do you need in order to provide these children and their families with more support?

11. Is there anything you would like to add in this regard?

Appendix B. Observation Form

In-Class / Out-of-Class Participant Observation Form				
No.	Items	Explanation		
		Yes	Partially	No
1.	Does the student come to class and leave class on time?			
2.	Does the student sit next to his/her friends?			
3.	Does the student focus on lessons?			
4.	Does the student actively participate in class?			
5.	Does the student get bored when listening to lessons?			
6.	Does the student take notes in class?			
7.	Does the student have lesson equipment?			
8.	Does the student actively participate in in-class activities?			
9.	Is the student's in-class motivation high?			
10.	Can the student communicate effectively with his/her teacher?			
11.	Are the student's Turkish comprehension, listening and speaking skills adequate?			
12.	Does the student have difficulty in understanding subjects that include cultural items?			
13.	Can the student communicate effectively with friends outside class?			
14.	Does the student actively participate in out-of-class activities?			
15.	Is the student accepted by his/her Turkish friends?			
16.	Is the student subjected to discrimination by his/her Turkish friends?			
17.	Does the student display negative behaviour towards friends of the opposite sex?			
18.	Is the student subjected to discrimination by his/her teacher?			
19.	Does the student act aggressively towards his/her classmates?			
20.	Does the student act aggressively towards his/her friends at school?			
21.	Does the student act aggressively towards classroom equipment?			

22.	Does the student act aggressively towards school equipment?			
23.	Does the student use slang words with his/her classmates?			
24.	Does the student use slang words with friends outside class?			
25.	Does the student obey class rules?			
26.	Does the student obey school rules?			

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