

Challenges and Solutions of Syrian Refugee Children in the Process of Acquiring Basic Language Skills

Halil TAŞ¹

Ministry of National Education

Muhammet Baki MİNAZ²

Siirt University

Abstract

The aim of this study is to determine the problems experienced by Syrian refugee children in the 1st grade primary school in the process of acquiring basic Turkish language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and the solutions to these problems according to the views of teachers, parents and students. Since the most Syrian refugees in the world are in Turkey, this study was based on basic language skills in Turkish. This research was designed as a survey model. The study group of the research consists of 126 classroom teachers, 15 parents and 15 students. In the research, criterion sampling method was used to determine the participants to be surveyed, and snowball sampling method was used to determine the participants to be interviewed. The research data were collected with the data collection tool titled "Teachers' Opinions on Basic Language Skills" developed by the researcher and a semi-structured interview form. Frequency (f) and percentages (%) were used in the analysis of quantitative data, and descriptive analysis technique was used in the analysis of qualitative data. It has been concluded that Syrian refugee children have problems in describing the text they listen to determining the subject of what they listen, and answering questions about what they listen. In the study, it was determined that Syrian refugee children had severe problems related to the acquisition and use of basic Turkish language skills. It has been concluded that these children can be solved by providing basic Turkish language skills with contemporary approaches, methods and techniques enriched with appropriate materials and supported by technology and cultural elements.

Keywords: Turkish language, Turkish course, basic language skills, migration refugee children, literacy

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¹Halil Taş, Dr., Ministry of National Education, Inspection Board, Ankara, Turkey, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5219-1123>, egitimci1@hotmail.com

Correspondence: egitimci1@hotmail.com

² Muhammet Baki Minaz, Dr., Faculty of Education, Siirt University, Siirt, Turkey, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0024-1854>, mbakiminaz@gmail.com

Introduction

The concept of migration can be defined as displacement by moving across international borders or staying within national borders of a State (International Organization for Migration, 2009) as well as a forced migration due to natural disasters, economic, ethnic, religious or political reasons or a search for better working and living conditions (Castles, 2003). Though there are different reasons of migration, common characteristics of the migration are cutting off ties with one's own culture, city and circle, being left homeless and moving to a new and unfamiliar environment. Referring to a move to the unknown above all, migration means reconstructing life, thereby a new work, home, new cultural codes and behaviour patterns, different spatial patterns and new people for the migrant.

Turkey has faced with one of the biggest migration movements of the history due to its geographical borders to neighbouring countries where wars and internal disorders occur and moderate humanist policies towards opening border gates to people aggrieved by their government. In fact, some Turkish cities in the south have hosted Syrian refugees twice as much as its population (Kizil & Donmez, 2017). According to reports of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), there are 3.664.873 Syrian refugees in Turkey. The number of school-age Syrian refugees children has exceeded 1.6 million (DGMM, 2021).

Education can be described as a crucial and accurate way of solving complicated problems of migrants. According to European Union, education is a necessary and crucial socialization tool for migrants to raise personal qualities and adapt societies that they live in (EU, 2004). A semiliterate migrant will not only fail to create a desirable life and go beyond being a cheap labour for employers but also will always face exclusion (Ager & Strang, 2008). Learning the language of the host country can solve problems aforementioned to a large extent. According to European Union, as language is required for both migrants to express themselves better and more accurately and to communicate and interact with the society they live in, it will be a proper approach to insist on learning language (EU, 2004).

Giving children standard education is crucial to decrease the negative impact of problems arising from migration. It is possible to remark that the acquisition of basic language skills of the host country is a prerequisite of migrant children to benefit from education. For, failure to communicate with people of the host country in a common language makes the orientation harder for migrant children and reduces their academic success. While Roxas (2011) believes that migrant families cannot join school activities due to language incompetence; Rah, Choi and Nguyen (2009) suggest that the academic success of refugee children is negatively affected by language incompetence.

Recent studies have shown that the two most important problems faced by Syrian refugee children are failure to understand what is read and listened and establish verbal and written communication and that both problems mainly stem from language difference (Aykırı, 2017). Apart from socio-cultural and economic problems, the problem of language is one of the chief problems foreign national children encounter (Kiroglu, Kesten & Elma, 2010; Evran, Riedler & Eryaman, 2020). Language, which is vital for mankind to think better, produce, share and live, should be ideally taught from the very beginning of the childhood period (Maden & Durukan, 2011). It is known that speaking a language is a major obstacle that stands in the education process of Syrian refugee children (Emin, 2016; Levent & Cayak, 2017; Ozer, Komsuoglu & Atesok, 2016; Saritas, Sahin & Catalbas, 2016; Uzun & Butun, 2016) and that it creates the main difference for the education of them (Demirci, 2015; Seymen & Tok, 2015). Speaking Turkish for Syrian refugees that moved to Turkey is essential in terms of maintaining a regular life, finding a job and continuing their education (Seydi, 2014). Syrians want to learn Turkish in order to meet their basic needs, to get education, to find a job, to work and to eliminate communication problems in daily life (Cangal, 2022).

The main goal of language education at schools is to teach students skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in accordance with outcomes of the class level and to ensure that they can use these acquisitions efficiently (Gocer, 2015). While listening is defined as understanding what someone says and giving attention to keep what is said; speaking means conveying feelings, thoughts, designs, desires and imaginations after they have been envisioned (Sever, 2015). Having a significant role in communication, speaking skill is an inborn and improvable ability (Gun & Yigit, 2020). Reading is the process of seeing, perceiving and comprehending a writing along with its words, sentences, punctuations and other elements (Kavcar, Oguzkan & Sever, 2016). Writing is a way of communicating and expressing our feelings, thoughts, designs and what we live (Unalan, 2006).

Language teaching is the primary activity in education, which has important contributions to accommodation of refugee children to the host country apart from keeping them from dangers (Kizil & Donmez, 2017). Having significant characteristics such as interpretation of the world, generation and transfer of ideas, language is the prerequisite of learning (Yalcın & Ozek, 2006). Well developed language skills can increase the likelihood for higher education and social mobility. A clear, understandable and successful communication depends on development of all these skills as a whole (Sever, 1998). This shows that as the basis of language, basic language skills affect the development of other disciplines. It can be said that students' success in education is closely related to rates of knowing language.

In literature review, it is seen that there have been many studies conducted related to general education problems of Syrian refugees. In the study by Tut, Kiroglu and Bayraktar (2018),

perceptions of Syrian and Turkish students related to teachers and school concepts were determined through metaphors. In the study conducted by Boylu (2020), the metaphors of the Syrian refugee students regarding the Turkish Language were determined. In the study conducted by Uzun and Butun (2016), problems of Syrian refugees at preschool institutions were determined based on teachers' views. There was an investigation into education problems of migrants and education activities conducted for migrants in the study of Tuncer and Dikmen (2017). While class teachers' views were determined related to Syrian refugees' problems in education in the study of Aykiri (2017), Levent and Cayak (2017) identified views of school principals about the education of Syrian students in Turkey. Education problems of Syrian refugees living in İstanbul were the subject of the field study of Ates and Yavuz (2017).

There are some studies on problems when learning Turkish as well as problems faced by Syrian refugees that arise from a lack of language knowledge. The study on Turkish perceptions of Syrian refugees by Akkaya (2013); the study on a multidimensional approach to the problems experienced by the classroom teachers with syrian students in their classes by Kara and Ozenc (2021); the study on reading aloud skills of Syrian students learning Turkish at B1 level by Demirci (2015); the study titled Education of Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey: Reflections From the Application by Gurel and Buyuksahin (2020); the study on the problems faced by Syrian students studying in Turkey in learning Turkish by Donmez and Paksoy (2015); the study on the opinions of the instructors who teach Turkish to foreigners on Syrian refugees learning Turkish by Gun (2015); the study on the project of teaching Turkish to Syrian students by Buyukikiz and Cangal (2016) some of these are. Similar to these studies, it has been concluded that most of the educational problems of Syrian refugee children stem from not knowing the language and that these children have difficulty in learning the language of the country they live in.

Within the literature, (Borrell, 2010; Bolukbas, 2016; Dorman, 2014; Keyes & Kane, 2004; McBrien, 2005; Tunc, 2015 etc.) it is often emphasized that refugees are obliged to learn the basic language skills of the host country language to adapt their new place. At this point, among the prominent issues studies are problems arising from a lack of language knowledge, causes and solutions of these problems, what level of language should be taught to refugees and which basic skills of the language should be improved. In this context, it is of importance that language necessities of Syrian refugee children are determined, contents of teaching activities are regulated and suitable teaching environments are organized in accordance with their necessities related to basic language skills. One of the major reasons why this study was grounded on views of teachers, students and parents is that teachers are those who are closest to refugee children as well as know them and their problems very well, and students and parents experience this challenging period in person.

Because there are a few studies in the literature on the problems encountered by Syrian refugee children in the first grade of primary school in the process of acquiring basic language skills and the solutions to these problems, this study will make a significant contribution to the literature and will serve as the foundation to the program/project/activity development that will be designed for refugee students to learn basic language skills. This study is important in that it draws attention to the language learning needs of Syrian refugee children period during the first year of primary school and rigours experienced by them throughout the period of meeting the relevant needs. It is of particular importance as it manifests problems experienced during the acquisition of basic Turkish language skills and solutions for them along with views of teachers who are at the centre of problems, students who experience the problems personally, and parents. An important amount of data is expected to be created for the process of developing programs, projects and activities related to all refugee children's acquisition of basic language skills.

The purpose of this research is to determine the difficulties encountered by Syrian refugee children in the first grade of primary school in the process of acquiring language skills as well as the solutions to these problems according to the opinions of teachers, parents, and students. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the challenges encountered by Syrian refugee children regarding their "listening", "speaking", "reading" and "writing" skills?
2. What are the reasons/resources of the challenges encountered by Syrian refugee children in the process of acquiring basic language skills?
3. How can the challenges encountered by Syrian refugee children in the process of acquiring basic language skills be solved?

Method

Research Model

Aiming to evaluate problems faced by 1st grade primary school Syrian refugee children during the process of acquiring basic Turkish language skills and solutions for them depending on views of teachers, students and parents, this study is a survey model. Within the survey model that aims to portrays a situation in the past or a current situation much the same, an event, individual or object as the research subject is described within its own conditions and as is (Karasar, 2020).

Participants

Since the most Syrian refugees in the world are in Turkey (DGMM, 2021), this study was based on basic Turkish language skills. The participants are comprised of 126 primary school teachers

working at official primary schools whose classes include Syrian students. Criterion sampling method was used in determination of the participants. Defined as study of all cases that meet a series of predetermined criteria (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018), the criterion sampling method is to compose the sample from people, events, objects or situations eligible to the predetermined qualities (Buyukozturk et al., 2021). Selection criteria for the sample in the study were to teach 1st grade class at a primary school and have students who are Syrian refugees. As regards the determination process of teachers, students and parents to be interviewed in the study, snowball sampling method was applied. With reference to the questions of Patton (2018) as “Who can have knowledge on this topic most? Who do you advise me to interview related to this topic?”, 26 teachers, 25 Syrian parents and 29 Syrian 1st grade students were determined to be interviewed mutual guidance between participants and researcher. In the province where the research was conducted, there are 176 Syrian refugee students in the 1st grade primary school. 108 of these students are boys and 68 of them are girls. The students of interviewed are 17 boys and 12 girls. The parents of interviewed are 11 male and 14 female. The teachers of interviewed are 14 male and 12 female.

Data Collection Process

Necessary quantitative data for the study were collected through a data collection tool titled “Teacher Views on Basic Language Skills”, which was developed by researcher of the study. Having a goal of determining views related to the goals of the study, the data collection tool is a questionnaire of “five point likert type” in which close-ended questions are available. Items (phrases) included in the data collection tool were created from 1st grade primary school basic language skills acquisitions that are involved in Turkish Course Curriculum. Through a literature review and interviews with domain experts, phrases in the scale were graded as “I totally disagree”, “I disagree”, “I am not sure”, “I agree” and “I totally agree”. To enhance the intelligibility and regularity of the scale in relation to language rules, interviews were made with three class and two Turkish language teacher. As a result of the interviews made, there were some minor corrections that did not change the meaning in some acquisitions in terms of phrases and language rules.

Interview forms consisting of semi-structured open-ended questions were developed by the researcher in order to determine the views of teachers, parents and students on the causes of the problems experienced by Syrian refugee children in the 1st grade of primary school during the process of acquiring basic language skills and the solution of these problems. Semi-structured interview forms are composed of certain questions which are answered by participants as they wish along with clear expression of their personal thoughts (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018). In the interviews, teachers, parents and students were asked two questions each about the reasons for the problems experienced by Syrian refugee children in the 1st grade of primary school during the process of acquiring basic language skills and how these problems could be solved.

The principles of scientific research and publication ethics were meticulously followed in the study. The participants were informed in detail about the research and signed the informed consent form. Voice recordings of the participants were made and notes were taken by obtaining permission. The research data were obtained by means of proven reliability and validity. Interviews were made in person and a translator was hired for interviews with parents and students. Interviews lasted around 15 minutes. Real names of interviewees were kept secret and thus teachers were coded as T1, T2, T3... T26, parents as P1, P2, P3... P25, and students as S1, S2, S3... S29.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Quantitative Data

Frequency (f) and percentage (%) were drawn upon in the analysis of quantitative data obtained from responses of teachers to the data collection tool. Frequency analysis reveals the numerical, percentage and proportional frequency of units and items (Bilgin, 2014). As a result of the statistical analyses, participant levels and numbers of teachers for items within the data collection tool were determined. Following the interpretation of percentages related to responses given, teachers' views on problems of 1st grade primary school Syrian refugee children during the acquisition of basic language skills were presented based on findings of the study.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Descriptive analysis approach was preferred to analyse the qualitative data obtained through interviews in the study. Within the descriptive analysis, data is summarized and interpreted based on interview questions and direct quotations are taken from interviews of individuals (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018). The reliability of the data obtained from the study was verified through participant confirmation and the analysis of a corresponding expert (Boyatzis, 1998; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2020) and the validity and reliability of the qualitative aspect of the study were tested in consideration of cogency, transmissibility, consistency and approvability (Yildirim & Simsek, 2018). Sound recordings of interviews with teachers were analysed at two different times and percentage agreement in both analyses (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997) were found as 93%. According to Keeves and Sowden (1994), 80% refers to an agreement rate that is sufficient for reliability. Moreover, for a broader data analysis, a corresponding expert in the field of education sciences was present in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and texts containing participant views were investigated separately by researcher and the corresponding expert and efficient discussions were made on responses by participants. As working on verbal speeches that were converted into written texts along with interviewees corroborates the reliability and validity of data (Silverman, 2006), sound recordings converted into written texts by researcher and notes taken

during interviews were confirmed by being controlled by class teachers and parents as well as students.

Findings

Findings related to the basic language skills of “listening”, “speaking”, “reading” and “writing”

Teachers' opinions on the problems that Syrian refugee children in the 1st grade primary school experience in the process of acquiring basic language skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing are presented in Table 1, Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 1. Teachers' views on problems experienced by Syrian refugee children related to the basic language skill of listening

Basic Language Skill of Listening	I totally agree		I agree		I am not sure		I disagree		I totally disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
...distinguishes between sounds coming from natural and artificial sound sources.	70	55.56	35	27.78	0	0.00	14	11.11	7	5.56
...imitates sounds heard.	84	66.67	27	22.22	0	0.00	7	5.56	7	5.56
...distinguishes between letters corresponding to sounds.	28	22.22	56	44.44	7	5.56	21	16.67	14	11.11
...makes a prediction on the text to be listened and watched based on visuals.	28	22.22	56	44.44	7	5.56	21	16.67	14	11.11
...makes a prediction on the course of events happening during listening	28	22.22	42	33.33	21	16.67	21	16.67	14	11.11
...explains the text that is being listened and watched.	7	5.56	14	11.11	7	5.56	35	27.78	63	50.00
...identifies the subject of what is listened	14	11.11	21	16.67	0	0.00	35	27.78	56	44.44
...answers questions related to what is listened and watched.	21	16.67	21	16.67	14	11.11	49	38.89	21	16.67
...practises verbal directives.	28	22.22	42	33.33	21	16.67	21	16.67	14	11.11
...practises listening strategies.	21	16.67	49	38.89	7	5.56	28	22.22	21	16.67
...grasps non-verbal messages of the speaker.	28	22.22	42	33.33	14	11.11	21	16.67	21	16.67

Table 1 shows that teachers declared positive opinions on students' skills of distinguishing between sounds coming from natural and artificial sound sources, imitating sounds heard, distinguishing between letters corresponding to sounds, making a prediction on the text to be listened and watched based on visuals, making a prediction on the course of events happening during listening, practicing verbal directives, practicing listening strategies and grasping non-verbal messages of the speaker, and that teachers declared negative opinions on their skills of explaining the

text being listened and watched, identifying the subject of what is listened and watched and answering questions related to what is listened and watched.

Table 2. Teachers' views on problems experienced by Syrian refugee children related to the basic language skill of speaking.

Basic Language Skill of Speaking	I totally agree		I agree		I am not sure		I disagree		I totally disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
...uses words that are appropriate for the meaning.	14	11.11	21	16.67	14	11.11	49	38.89	28	22.22
...extemporises.	28	22.22	30	33.33	7	5.56	28	22.22	21	16.67
...talks about a certain topic with a framework.	14	11.11	21	16.67	7	5.56	49	38.89	35	27.78
...makes level-appropriate sentences that express his/her own thoughts and feelings.	14	11.11	28	22.22	21	16.67	42	33.33	21	16.67
...speaks with a proper tone of voice by making eye contact.	35	27.78	35	38.89	7	5.56	21	16.67	14	11.11
...pronounces words correctly when speaking.	14	11.11	21	16.67	14	11.11	49	38.89	28	22.22
...is good at public speaking.	14	11.11	28	22.22	21	16.67	42	33.33	21	16.67
...talks and discusses about a topic with his/her peers, and adults.	21	16.67	28	22.22	14	11.11	42	33.33	21	16.67
...explains familiar people, places, and facts, and expresses thoughts and opinions related to these.	14	11.11	21	16.67	21	16.67	42	33.33	28	22.22

Table 2 shows that while teachers declared positive opinions on students' skills of speaking with a proper tone of voice by making eye contact and extemporising, they declared negative opinions on their skills of using word that are appropriate for the meaning, talking about a certain topic with a framework, making level-appropriate sentences that express their own thoughts and feelings, pronouncing words correctly when speaking, being good at public speaking, talking and discussing about a topic with their peers, and adults, explaining familiar people, places, facts, and expressing thoughts and opinions related to these.

Table 3. Teachers' views on problems experienced by Syrian refugee children related to the basic language skill of reading.

Basic Language Skill of Reading	I totally agree		I agree		I am not sure		I disagree		I totally disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
...identifies basic sections in reading materials.	63	50.00	42	33.33	0	0.00	14	11.11	7	5.56
...identifies and vocalises the letter.	35	27.78	49	38.89	0	4.00	28	22.22	14	11.11
...reads syllables and words.	28	22.22	42	33.33	7	5.56	28	22.22	21	16.67
...reads simple and short sentences.	28	22.22	35	27.78	14	11.11	28	22.22	21	16.67
...reads short texts.	21	16.67	35	27.78	21	16.67	28	22.22	21	16.67
...reads paying attention to punctuations.	21	16.67	28	22.22	21	16.67	35	27.78	21	16.67
...reads paying attention to stress, intonation and pronunciation.	14	11.11	21	16.67	21	16.67	42	33.33	28	22.22
...reads writings written with different typefaces.	21	16.67	21	16.67	21	16.67	42	33.33	21	16.67
...practises reading strategies.	28	22.22	42	33.33	21	16.67	21	16.67	14	11.11
...answers text-related questions.	21	16.67	28	22.22	7	5.56	42	33.33	28	22.22
...identifies title/s suitable for the text content.	14	11.11	21	16.67	21	16.67	49	38.89	21	16.67
...reads poems.	28	22.22	42	33.33	7	5.56	28	22.22	21	16.67

Table 3 shows that teachers declared positive opinions on students' skills of identifying basic sections in reading materials, identifying and vocalising the letter, reading syllables and words, reading simple and short sentences, reading short texts, practising reading strategies and reading poems, and that they declared negative opinions on students' skills of reading by paying attention to punctuations, reading by paying attention to stress, intonation and pronunciation, reading writings written with different typefaces, answering text-related questions and identifying title/s suitable for the text content.

Table 4. Teachers' views on problems experienced by Syrian refugee children related to the basic language skill of writing.

Basic Language Skill of Writing	I totally agree		I agree		I am not sure		I disagree		I totally disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
...paints and does line drawing.	63	50.00	42	33.33	0	0.00	14	11.11	7	5.56
...writes letters according to the technique.	14	11.11	28	22.22	14	4.00	42	33.33	28	22.22
...writes syllables and words.	28	22.22	42	33.33	7	5.56	28	22.22	21	16.67
...writes numbers according to the technique.	14	11.11	28	22.22	14	11.11	42	33.33	28	22.22
...writes meaningful and regular sentences.	21	16.67	28	22.22	21	16.67	35	27.78	21	16.67

...writes visuals-related words and sentences.	28	22.22	42	33.33	14	11.11	28	22.22	14	11.11
...leaves suitable blanks between syllables, words and sentences.	21	16.67	28	22.22	21	16.67	35	27.78	21	16.67
...uses capitals and punctuations properly.	21	16.67	21	16.67	21	16.67	42	33.33	21	16.67
...practises writing strategies.	28	22.22	42	33.33	21	16.67	21	16.67	14	11.11
...revises what s/he has written.	35	27.78	42	33.33	7	5.56	28	22.22	14	11.11
...shares what s/he has written.	35	27.78	49	38.89	0	0.00	21	16.67	21	16.67

Table 4 shows that teachers declared positive opinions on students' skills of painting and doing line-drawing, writing syllables and words, writing visuals-related words and sentences, practising writing strategies, revising what has been written and sharing what has been written, yet they declared negative opinions on students' skills of writing letters and numbers according to the technique, writing meaningful and regular sentences, leaving suitable blanks between syllables, words and sentences and using capitals and punctuations properly.

Findings related to the reasons/resources of the challenges encountered by Syrian refugee children in the process of acquiring basic language skills

In the interviews, the reasons/resources of the challenges encountered by Syrian refugee children in the process of acquiring basic language skills were asked, and some of the answers given by the teachers are summarized below:

"These children have not gotten over the trauma caused by the migration yet. This situation negatively affects the education process." (T2)

"A limited fulfilment of these children's needs in terms of accommodation, food, heating, and dressing leads the education and language learning process to be ignored." (T8)

"Exclusion and isolation of these students at places of residence and schools prevents them from active participation in education activities and benefit from them properly." (T10)

"These children have not yet fully recovered from the impact of their own culture and mother tongue. They necessarily tend to speak in Arabic among themselves and learn Turkish language rules in the context of those of Arabic." (T12)

"The lacuna within basic Turkish language skills is a huge problem that affects students' success in other courses. These negativities lead these students to be stigmatized as 'lazy students' at schools and demoralize and demotivate them in learning language." (T18)

"These students have difficulty in learning pronunciation, intonation and stress in Turkish due to the language structure and pronunciation in Arabic. Besides, the fact that Arabic is

written and read from right to the left is an obstacle for them in learning basic Turkish language skills.” (T20)

“As parents of these children also cannot speak Turkish, they are not backed up at home and thus, this disrupts the acquisition of basic language skills.” (T23)

It is understood from teachers' views that among the causes of problems experienced by 1st grade primary school Syrian refugee children related to the basic Turkish language skills acquisition are that these children have not fully gotten over the trauma caused by the migration yet; that they have restricted living conditions; that they are being excluded and isolated from the society and school environment; that they depend on their culture of origin and mother tongue; and that Arabic language structure is different from that of Turkish and their parents cannot speak Turkish either.

In the interviews, the reasons/resources of the challenges encountered by Syrian refugee children in the process of acquiring basic language skills were asked, and some of the answers given by the parents are summarized below:

“We were living in better conditions in our country. Here our children do not have a nice house, good food or dresses. This demoralizes them and cause them to discountenance the school.” (P3)

“My child remains in between Arabic and Turkish spoken at school and has difficulty in learning the language as language rules and writing of both languages are different from each other.” (P8)

“As my child has not gotten over the effect of problems in our country, s/he does not want to go to school and always utters that s/he misses our village in Syria.” (P12)

“My child becomes an object of derision as s/he cannot speak Turkish at school. To avoid this, s/he does not speak Turkish unless s/he is supposed to speak and this delays learning Turkish.” (P20)

“And we cannot support him/her at home about Turkish and other courses as we also do not know Turkish. Children cannot succeed unless their parents help them about courses.” (P24)

It is understood from parents' views that among the causes of problems experienced by 1st grade primary school Syrian refugee children related to the basic Turkish language skills are nonfulfillment of their basic needs such as accommodation, food and dressing, failure to fully get over shortcomings in the country of origin, becoming an object of derision, differences between the two languages and their parents' inability to speak Turkish.

In the interviews, the reasons/resources of the challenges encountered by Syrian refugee children in the process of acquiring basic language skills were asked, and some of the answers given by the students are summarized below:

“Turkish is unlike Arabic. Writing of both languages is different. I think Arabic is easy but Turkish is very difficult.” (S7)

“I do not want to learn Turkish as we will be back to our country soon and I will go to school there anyway.” (S12)

“Other children make fun of me when I speak Turkish at school. I get sad a lot then and avoid speaking. I know the answers of questions asked by our teacher yet do not raise my hand.” (S21)

“If my mum knew Turkish, she would teach me at home, but we do not communicate in Turkish at home. My elder brother speaks Turkish better than all of us, yet we speak in Arabic at home.” (S25)

“I do not have many friends at school. Turkish children do not want to play with us. We Syrians play together and speak in Arabic among ourselves.” (S29)

It is clear from views of children that they have problems related to the acquisition process of basic Turkish language skills as their parents do not know Turkish and communicate in Arabic with them at home, they are scared of being mocked when speaking Turkish, play and speak Arabic between themselves rather than with Turkish children, and language differences between the two languages makes them think that Turkish is hard to learn.

Findings related to the solving challenges encountered by Syrian refugee children in the process of acquiring basic language skill

The opinions of the teachers on the solution of the problems that Syrian refugee children face in the process of acquiring basic language skills are as follows:

“First off all, migration-based traumatic problems of these children should be solved along with a fulfilment of their needs such as accommodation, food, heating and dressing.” (T3)

“These children should be given an education that does not disregard their own language and culture. This situation will make them welcome activities of language teaching.” (T8)

“First, exclusion and isolation of these children both at home and school should be eliminated since in case of these incidents, they will cave in and thus their education will be affected badly.” (T11)

“These children should be given non-formal education of Turkish language or extra Turkish language courses at schools.” (T14)

“By means of mass communication, programs should be applied related to teaching Syrian refugee children basic Turkish language skills.” (T21)

“An atmosphere of tolerance should be created by eliminating prejudices and misconceptions between the two societies. If it is achieved, this can accelerate the process of Turkish language learning by putting away the antipathy towards Turkish or persistency in speaking Arabic.” (T24)

“To ensure that parents have active participation in the education of their children and support them at home, they can also be given Turkish courses.” (T26)

To solve the problems experienced by 1st grade primary school Syrian refugee children related to the basic Turkish language skills, teachers are seen to recommend that firstly migration-based traumatic problems of these children should be resolved along with ideal living conditions for a human such as accommodation, food, heating and dressing and an education that does not disregard their own language and culture, and that exclusion and isolation of these children should be prevented. It is also recommended that these children should be given extracurricular education in teaching Turkish language along with a similar non-formal education in language teaching for their parents, and that understanding-and-tolerance-based relationships should be established between both societies through practices that represent and bind them together.

The opinions of the parents on the solution of the problems that Syrian refugee children face in the process of acquiring basic language skills are as follows:

“First of all, problems of our children should be solved by providing them with better housing and living conditions.” (P1)

“Derision towards our children by Turkish children due to their bad Turkish speaking should be prevented and a good friendship atmosphere should be created. If it is achieved, our children will speak with them more and thus learn Turkish faster.” (P9)

“In order for our children learn Turkish well, we should help them at home. For this, parents should be given free-of-charge Turkish courses and close relations should be retained between Turkish families and us.” (P15)

“Our children should be given free Turkish language education at school and out of school.” (P23)

“To maintain that our children learn Turkish better and socialize with other Turkish children, social activities and family visits should be arranged.” (P25)

It is seen that regarding problems of 1st grade primary school students related to the acquisition of basic Turkish language skills parents recommend that first of all, migration-based problems of these children should be solved, better living conditions should be maintained, derision towards them should be eliminated in case of bad Turkish speaking, these children should be provided with free education of Turkish language at or out of school, their parents also should be given free courses of Turkish language and to maintain the amalgamation of families, social activities and family visits should be arranged.

The opinions of the students on the solution of the problems that Syrian refugee children face in the process of acquiring basic language skills are as follows:

“If I go to the course, I will learn Turkish soon.” (S3)

“If I had more Turkish friends and played with them more, then I could learn Turkish better. Yet they should not laugh at me.” (S10)

“If my parents learn Turkish, I can learn better from them at home. In this case, we do not have to communicate in Arabic at home.” (S15)

“If we had a nice house at which I could have my own room, then I could study better and learn Turkish at better levels. Yet our house is small. (S20)

“If there were teachers speaking both Turkish and Arabic, then it would be better as they could help us more.” (S26)

It is understood from recommendations of students related to solutions to the problems related to the acquisition of basic Turkish language skills that Turkish courses should be opened, they should socialize more with Turkish students, parents should be taught Turkish, better living conditions and opportunities for studying should be maintained, they shouldn't be mocked when speaking in Turkish and teachers speaking Turkish and Arabic should be employed at schools.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Considering findings related to problems experienced by 1st grade primary school Syrian refugee children during the process of acquiring the listening skill, it was found that these children had difficulty in explaining a text being listened, identifying the subject of what is listened and watched and answering questions related to what is listened and watched. This result shows that the listening language skill which is based on comprehension have not been acquired completely. Remarks by Syrian refugee children that they would want to have a listening course most followed by

speaking within the study conducted by Bolukbas (2016) reveals the inadequacies of this basic language skill. It was determined in the study by Aykiri (2017) that failure to understand what someone is saying and communicate is the most important problem in the education of Syrian refugee children. It was concluded in the study by Coskun and Emin (2016) that class teachers could teach Syrian refugee children writing-reading skills in Turkish, however, that they were poor at teaching them effective listening, understanding and comprehension skills. Listening is the action of understanding the message of the speaker smoothly and being able to respond the relevant stimulus (Demirel & Sahinel, 2006). As listening is a necessary language skill for communication in daily life and for learning in education (Ministry of National Education, 2019) and language teaching begins and develops through listening (Demiral & Yavuz, 2016), failure to satisfactorily acquire the skill of listening leads to setbacks not only in daily life but also in education for children.

Considering findings related to problems experienced by 1st grade primary school Syrian refugee children during the process of acquiring the speaking skill, it was found that these children had problems in using words in appropriate meanings, speaking about a subject within a framework, making appropriate-level sentences that reflect their thoughts and feelings, accurate pronunciation of words, speaking out or discussing a topic with peers or adults, and explaining known people, places and events and expressing feelings and thoughts related to them. This finding represents that Syrian refugee children are not able to express their thoughts, feelings, conceptions and observations through appropriate-level vocabulary in Turkish. Besides, these findings reveal that Syrian refugee children are not able to use appropriate and applicable words and pronounce words accurately as they have not comprehended the phonetics of Turkish language. In studies by Bolukbas (2016), and Donmez and Paksoy (2015), it was determined that Syrian refugee children had difficulty mostly in speaking. Among the most significant problems of education, for Syrian children are not to be able speak and communicate effectively and fluently (Bahadir & Ucku, 2016; Coskun & Emin, 2016; Eryaman & Evran, 2019; Levent & Cayak, 2017; Tunc, 2015). Kesten, Kiroglu and Elma (2010), Aykiri (2017), and Demirci (2015) found that cross-language differences caused problems for Syrian refugee children in acquiring the speaking skill.

Considering findings related to problems experienced by 1st grade primary school Syrian refugee children during the process of acquiring the reading skill, it was found that these children had difficulty in reading by paying attention to punctuations, stress, intonation and pronunciation, reading writings written with various typefaces, responding questions related to a text and identifying proper title/s for the text content. This finding shows that Syrian refugee children are not able to make rules in reading Turkish into knowledge and skill, read a text orally or silently at an appropriate level to interpret a text accurately and draw upon sources written with various typefaces. Studies have shown that due to phonetic differences as well as differences of origin and structure between Arabic and

Turkish, Syrian children cannot fully acquire reading skills (Aykiri, 2017; Demirci, 2015; Donmez & Paksoy, 2015; Gozubuyuk, 2017). Reading is the action of seeing, perceiving and comprehending writings, words, sentences, punctuations and other elements. As Syrian refugee children do not have basic Turkish language skills, they are often not able to realize specifics and details within reading texts and vocalize writings without understanding and comprehending them. However, reading is not only a vocalization but also an action of seeing, perceiving, understanding and comprehending words, sentences or writings with its all elements (Sever, 2003). As reading skill ensures that a person adapts the society and cultural surrounding s/he lives in and gets prepared better for the future by gaining knowledge and experience, it is of utmost importance for Syrian refugee children to learn this skill efficiently.

Considering findings related to problems experienced by 1st grade primary school Syrian refugee children during the process of acquiring the writing skill, it was found that these children had difficulty in writing appropriate letters and numbers, making meaningful and regular sentences, leaving appropriate spaces between words and sentences and using appropriate capitals and punctuations. The finding shows that Syrian refugee children are not able to write regularly and neatly, thus they are not able to express in written what they hear, think, envisage, observe and interpret. Aykiri (2017) determined that Syrian refugee children had serious problems in writing skill. Syrian refugee children have the most difficulty in writing skills after speaking basic language skills (Bolukbas, 2016; Donmez & Paksoy, 2015). According to Demiral and Yavuz (2016), one of the reasons that hamper the acquisition of the writing skill is that students confuse language rules and word orders in the sentence of the target language with those of their mother tongue. Reasons such as alphabetic difference as well as differences of origin and structure between Turkish and Arabic may lead Syrian students to fail to fully acquire writing skill. Having problems related to the writing skill and failure to express themselves in written leads Syrian students to face many problems that make their life harder.

Syrian refugees should learn Turkish to adapt Turkish manners and customs and culture. This is because it is not possible for refugees to merge with Turkish society without a good knowledge of Turkish (Karasu, 2017). Studies conducted have shown that one of the major problems faced by Syrian refugee children is not to speak Turkish and that due to their lack in basic Turkish language skills, they are not able to communicate with their peers and teachers and express themselves proficiently (Simsir & Dilmacç, 2018; Uzun & Butun, 2016). Other studies have revealed that Syrian refugee children experience isolation due to linguistic and cultural differences (Kirova, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Given that communication and interaction between teachers and parents set ground for the education process, failure to fully acquire Turkish language skills implies that refugee children will be deprived of knowledge, skills and attitudes taught at school. Besides, this

failure can also prevent them from socializing by hampering their communication process with peers and can give rise to isolation.

Following recommendations can be given based on the findings of the study:

1. It should be kept in mind that Syrian refugee children may have suffered or have been suffering bad health conditions, anxiety, mistrust, hyper-alertness, concentration problems, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

2. Teachers who are supposed to teach Syrian refugee children basic Turkish language skills should be trained on issues such as multicultural perspective, unbiased thinking, tolerance to the diversities, indulgence, patience, empathy and showing tolerance, and teachers who have interiorized these human values should be commissioned.

3. Class teachers of Syrian refugee children should pay utmost attention to their micro level discourses and be sensitive to verbal and nonverbal behaviours and attitudes of these children who cannot express themselves comfortably due to the lack of basic Turkish language skills.

4. Syrian refugee children should be given courses of basic Turkish language skills prior to 1st grade primary school.

5. Syrian refugee children should be given courses of basic Turkish language skills during social activities at school, out of school or at the weekends depending on their progress on basic language skills.

6. Standards applicable in teaching basic Turkish language skills should be specified by the Ministry of National Education and in accordance with these standards, suitable resources should be made available, syllabi should be prepared, teaching materials should be developed and teachers should be assigned.

7. Parents of children should also be given courses related to Turkish language teaching to ensure that they have active participation in activities related to basic Turkish language skills at schools and support them during this education.

8. For a fruitful Turkish language teaching process, social media and mass communication should be used at high levels, and teachers should be given in-service training on how to teach foreigners basic Turkish language skills.

9. To provide fields and facilities which will be used by refugee children when learning basic Turkish language skills, physical conditions and social activities should be maintained at particularly provinces and districts where temporary refuge centres are available, and at residential areas densely populated by these children.

10. Traditional methods should be abandoned in teaching Syrian refugee children basic Turkish language skills and instead of these; stimulus-rich environments should be used with modern approaches, methods and techniques as well as technology-and-culture-aided-materials.

11. Other studies related to Syrian refugee children in Turkey including their educational experiences, relationships with peers and parents, successful migration strategies, language proficiencies, sense of belonging to school, psychosocial adaptations and academic achievements should be conducted.

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