

# An Arendtian Perspective on Education as a Means of Citizenship: How Citizenship Is Processed by Syrian Immigrant Students in Higher Education

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## Abstract

In the present study, the authors focus on putting forward the thoughts of Syrian immigrant students at Turkish universities citizenship about citizenship from an Arendtian viewpoint. The authors investigated the thoughts and experiences of participants using qualitative research and a phenomenological design. The participants are Syrian students at Turkish universities. In order to ascertain the participants, criterion sampling method was used. The collected data was analyzed through a three-step model by exploring the data to obtain a holistic understanding of it, (en)coding the data and determining the themes. After all those procedures, the themes were reached as: the myth of acceptance at first glance, temporary togetherness, and university as a life-saver.

**Keywords:** Syrian students, immigrants, higher education, university, Arendt

## 1. Introduction

As a way to support citizenship, education values the role of schools in removing obstacles to coexisting peacefully in a community (Dewey, 1916). Governing via education is one developing strategy by which not only 'state' offices but also other non-state organizations regulate, shape, and empower citizens. Schools, colleges, society associations, religious organizations, the media, government offices, and state organizations are among the community organizations where education on governing is processed (Pykett, 2010). On the other hand, most educators, lawmakers, and society members agree that promoting citizenship in schools makes people more aware of their responsibilities as citizens while also supporting democracy (Bank et al., 2005). Accordingly, members of the states can be informed about their duties in society through schools. According to some, schools have the aim of raising individuals aware of their citizenship charges (Veldhuis, 1997). Additionally, the focus of educating people about democratic citizenship was expressed at one Council of Europe seminar as preparing young people to participate more fully in participatory democracy by assuming and practicing their societal rights and obligations (Birzea, 1996). Although much effort has been given to this, we have come up with a young generation that is isolated and is socially and collectively aware (Welply, 2019; Topolski & Leuven, 2008; UNESCO, 2011). For young people in our century, the concept of citizenship is limited to being accepted into or rejected from a nation, deviating from common sense (Brown, 2016; Gholami, 2017). About 60 years ago, the controversial thinker of her day, Hannah Arendt described this absence of common sense as an "educational catastrophe." Surprisingly, she claimed that the fundamentals of progressive education were the root of the issue. Extravagant student autonomy without adult control and accountability in education is one of these presumptions that makes it impossible to create a link between the old and the new (Arendt, 1961). Arendt's prescription has a conservative tone for this crisis, as appeared in these lines "...this aspect of the modern crisis is especially hard for the educator to bear because it is his task to mediate between the old and the new so that his very profession requires of him extraordinary respect for the past..." (Arendt, 1961, p. 174). Arendt argues that young people who lack historical knowledge and tradition are unfit for social sphere just for individual freedom and a better understanding of liberal democracy (Arendt, 1961, 1971). Hence, to her, education should give children the foundation for becoming not just "legitimate citizens," but rather aware citizens by having adults take charge of "renewing a shared world" (Arendt, 1961). This purpose of education to solidify citizenship becomes more important as the number of refugees and immigrants increases in a country. Among these countries, Turkey must deal with a large number of

Syrian immigrants who have relinquished the rights that come with being a citizen of their home country.

The research on the interaction between education and citizenship (Bailey, 2010; Pykett, 2010) emphasizes the prominence of the issue. For instance, while Staeheli, Attoh, and Mitchell (2013) state that university students' participation in generating citizenship is considered as a method to legitimize them; nevertheless, this case is not always encouraged, and political groups may even justify it as illegal. In another study in pre-school education hubs, Grindheim (2017) emphasizes the importance of play in engaging child citizens in everyday life.

Despite several studies available in the literature, this study addresses a gap in migration and identity research questioning how students in higher education process citizenship. Furthermore, this study may contribute to the literature by addressing the relationship between citizenship procedures and education in the setting of immigrant students. Because these students have had little previous cultural or legal engagement with the host nation, education takes precedence over formal processes in terms of citizenship. Through an Arendtian lens, the study seeks to understand how Syrian immigrant students navigate citizenship in Turkish universities. We hope that the findings will redound to the benefit of relevant researchers and university staff who want to get an understanding of the socio-political discourses that migrant students experience during processing citizenship.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1 Status of Syrian Immigrants in Turkey

Turkey welcomes the greatest number of immigrants in the globe so that as high as a possible population can do away with the turmoil, rigor, and coercion led by terrorism, combat, and occupation. According to the statistics of 2019, the total number of immigrants who took refuge and registered in Turkey is over 3.6 million including over 330.000 individuals coming from other countries (UNCHR, 2020). Among these, there are 819.60 Syrian immigrants at the age of between 15-24 range posited as young population (Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü Verilerine Göre Türkiye'deki Suriyeliler [Syrians in Turkey according to Data of Immigration Administration General Directorate], 2019). Turkey has increased the density of Syrian immigrants in Turkey especially with the "open-door" policy. Turkey could not stay indifferent to the violations of human rights and the striking outcomes of these violations in terms of humanitarian aid assistance in Syria in 2012 and commenced some legal steps under the aforementioned policy (Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü [Syrians in Turkey according to Data of Immigration Administration General Directorate], 2020). Accordingly, one basic step was taken as the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2014. Besides, in 2014, Temporary Protection Regulation was executed to adjust the liabilities and rights of the individuals to be protected for a certain time in Turkey. With this, Syrian immigrants started to have some basic human rights such as health and education (UNHCR, 2020). Despite these adjustments, these are not enough to live neatly in the host country for them as the Turkish citizens do per se. It is because citizenship is also shaped as regards economic and social areas operating in particular territories apart from political processes (Staeheli & Hammett, 2010). Marston and Mitchell (2004) allege that citizenship could be conceptualized considering the processes such as social and economic by which citizenship is shaped and explained meaning rather than focusing on only the ways it is realized via laws or theories. In the same line with these approaches, Adıgüzel (2017) stresses the duty of states of providing its residents with education, as states are in charge of both rendering the knowledge of language and history to their citizens and providing education as one of the social processes to refugees and immigrants. Accordingly, in the Turkish context, the fact that young individuals, especially immigrants are provided with education is vital of importance that they are furnished, and they internalize the culture, history, or language of the host country enough, which may be useful ways of dissipating refugees' need for belonging in the new country. Moreover, Syrian immigrants within the cultural and historical milieu of Turkish schools can consciously or subconsciously learn how to stem the tide of difficulties of starting under the new laws, discharging the necessary responsibilities led by being a member (or prospective citizen) of the host country.

### 2.2 Arendtian Perspective on Education and Citizenship

When it comes to the unprepared young generation in a politicized public area, Arendt's emphasis on this gains importance. While *Crisis in Education* outlines a more theoretical framework on chaos in modern pedagogy (Arendt, 1954), *Reflections on Little Rock* demonstrates how legal equality failed to eliminate social prejudice regarding segregation in school (Arendt, 1959). However, the common point in both essays is the critique regarding that young people are left unprepared in the politicized public sphere. Arendt (1961) insistently holds that attending public life requires preparation. According to her, this preparation, defined by the process of making newcomers ready for being an active participant in public, must be practiced only in a private realm under the responsibility and authority of the adults (Arendt, 1961). She suggests that education is a preparation process before entering into the public realm, emphasizing the urgent need for a conservative realm in education to protect

the unique nature of every young individual from public life (Arendt, 1961; Topolski & Leuven, 2008). Arendt's critique on education is that the myth 'growing up free individual', about liberal countries, serves for creating ahistorical and banalized individuals in society in addition to getting rid of taking responsibility for the future of a new generation. Accordingly, this understanding of libertarian education, which seems for the favor of the students at first sight, actually isolates the individual and creates a blurred line between the public and the private sphere (Arendt, 1971). The individual in this blurred line is deprived of the experience of being a citizen; instead, 'an isolated form of state membership' is substituted for citizenship (Arendt, 1971; Welply, 2019). This conceptual shift has induced the loss of political and historical aspects of citizenship (Gholamai, 2017). According to Arendt, one basic reason for the erosion in the citizenship among youth is the strict distinction between the worlds of adults and children based on the assumption of contemporary education philosophy that children need no adult authority in their world. She expresses that where there is no authority of adults, peer authority among the equals yields more devastating outcomes rather than adults' (Arendt, 1961); for instance, peer oppression from the lack of authority might trigger the trauma of young people who have come to a new country, escaping from war, persecution or torture. In such a case, a young newcomer is in "the position, hopeless by definition, of a minority of one confronted by the absolute majority of all the others" (Arendt, 1961).

For Arendt (1961), education, the prominent extension of politics, promises to begin a new world only with those entering by birth or by migration. For this reason, young newcomers are a worthwhile source for building the future of the host country (Kunczer, Lindner, & Puck, 2019). This article interrogates whether policymakers and university staff take responsibility for the preparation of these newcomers into public life through education or these young people are left to find their way under the illusion of libertarian education.

Even though there are practices or plans to make individuals aware of citizenship, it is sometimes seen that these do not work. At this point, how citizenship is penetrated in education must be designated very well. Although there are orientations as to citizenship and belonging in France and England, students do not internalize the concepts regarding citizenship neatly (Welply, 2019). While growing the young generation as proper citizens, national identity is commonly connected to the Republic; however, interaction with the society is also emphasized as well as being aware of national affairs (Osler & Starkey, 2001). The fact that minority groups are not considered while recognizing education as the means of gaining the feeling of citizenship and belonging is another important point that has to be tackled. Osler and Starkey (2011) highlight the lack of minority group participation in the formulation of national programs on citizenship. They also emphasize that as they are excluded from discourses on citizenship, it is not likely to feel included in the country. On the other hand, when the literature on immigrants, as one of the minority groups, is analyzed, it is seen that education as a means of gaining the feeling of citizenship and belonging is not a frequent topic searched.

The existing literature regarding the education of immigrant youth highly focuses on difficulties for access to inclusive education (Akkaya, Korumaz, & Tabancalı, 2021; Cin & Doğan, 2020; Dolapçioğlu & Bolat, 2019; Hayward, 2017; Menashy & Zakharia, 2019; Tezel McCarthy, 2018). Hayward (2017) and Dolapçioğlu and Bolat (2019) emphasize that the main difficulties regarding immigrant students' integration into the education process in the host country are language barriers, the challenge of acculturation, inadequate support. Tezel McCarthy (2018) suggests that educational policies concerning immigrants are sometimes in contradiction with basic laws in a nation-state context designed for only citizen children to fill the gap related to the educational need of immigrants. Cin and Doğan (2020) find out that link of refugees to higher education is driven by personal desire, family support, and social encouragement. Briefly, studies on immigrant education have shed light on the student perspective about education, they do not pay regard to the impacts of education on how citizenship is exercised by immigrant students in higher education. Therefore, we aim at exploring how citizenship and belonging are processed by immigrant students in higher education, and what the embedded or explicit role of education in this is.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Research Design*

In order to examine the experiences of Syrian students from immigrant backgrounds at a Turkish university, the current study uses a qualitative research approach that includes a phenomenological design. The nature of the qualitative research approach enables researchers to focus on their subjects in the richness of content without any generalization (Cresswell, 2007; Glesne, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This qualitative study allows for analyzing a great variety of the views of Syrian immigrant students through open-ended questions avoiding generalization. Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009, p. 208) hold that a phenomenological design offers "a description of the essence or essential common structure of an experience" at the completion of the study. The researcher

obtains data from those who experienced the phenomenon and flourishes a blended description of the essential experiences for all (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, the present study is both a description and an interpretive process including our -as researchers'- interpretation related to the meaning of the lived experiences (van Manne, 1990; Creswell, 2007). To put specifically, we had the role of mediator between different meanings, incorporating their interpretations to reveal the essential experiences of being a citizen for young immigrants in the context of higher education.

### *3.2 Research Participants*

Criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling techniques, is utilized particularly in qualitative studies to reach a great variety of data from participants having predetermined characteristics (Neuman, 2013; Patton, 2001). In this study, the reason for selecting criterion sampling is that it provides lived experiences on being a citizen of a group of young immigrant students in the environment of higher education in a relatively conservative city in Turkey. To provide data to address specific study topics, certain situations, people, and experiences might be purposefully chosen (Maxwell, 2009). Being a university student from a background of Syrian immigrants in a city where a conservative and religious lifestyle is very prevalent in Turkey is the main requirement for research participation. Studying in such a city as a criterion involves the importance to understand the shared experiences of Syrian students regarding how to negotiate their belongings to the host country and process their citizenship based on common religious belief with the city dwellers (Creswell, 2007). The active participation of the courses for a minimum of two semesters in the university is another criterion taken into consideration. This criterion is critical to distill the accumulated experiences of the participants as university students in the host country. Furthermore, five academics in the university in addition to the student participants are selected to grasp and reflect a holistic understanding of Syrian immigrants' experiences as a citizen. The criterion for selecting the academics is the condition that they have experience of lecturing Syrian students.

The participants, who were selected based on the criteria aforementioned, are studying at university in the city of Samsun. 5 participants are studying in the social sciences department, whereas 7 of them are studying in the science department. 8 of them have a perfect level of Turkish. However, 4 of them are not very good at communicating in Turkish. That's why we got help from a translator during the interview. We also took into consideration their religious affiliation as it may be the reason why they feel themselves belong to the host country, or not. All of them stated that they were Muslim. Last of all, 8 of them are second-year students in the department, while 4 of them are third-year students. As for academics, they had experienced for 3 years with different Syrian student groups at university.

### *3.3 Data Collection Tools*

The data in this research were gathered via semi-structured interview questions. Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, and Ormston (2013) emphasize that the quality of the interview questions in face-to-face interviews is a form suitable for the nature of the research to reach in-depth. In order to encourage the interviewee to give more detailed answers on the subject (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2011), interview questions were prepared as open-ended. Before creating the interview form, the relevant literature was reviewed and the interview questions used in comparable studies were analyzed. Then, an interview outline was formed with the questions to be asked and was arranged to receive an expert guide. In qualitative studies, interview questions are seen as important for researching expertise to increase the credibility and repetition in the research (Creswell, 2012). After the draft interview form was submitted to the expert opinion, some corrections were made on the interview questions according to the feedback. Interview questions were re-submitted to expert opinion after a pilot interview with an immigrant student who is a student in an undergraduate program. The questions were finalized, and a questionnaire for interviews was obtained with 9 open-ended questions to be used in interviews.

### *3.4 Data Collection Procedure*

We requested authorization to conduct a research involving human participants from the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) after having developed our interview questions. This was granted on June 14, 2020. We asked three professionals in the field of educational sciences to review the interview process, and we took their suggestions into consideration. Accordingly, we made the necessary changes. After that, we prepared a consent form to ask the participants to sign if they were eager to participate in our study. In addition to the consent form, we also informed them that their participation was voluntary, and they could decide to leave the study when they wanted. We also gave the information that we would use pseudonyms instead of their real names to hide their identities and make their responses secret. Then, we answered the participants' questions as to the interview process and explained the points they found ambiguous in detail. We learned the necessary information to contact and we learned their agendas of availability from them to plan the appropriate time and place for the first interview.

We met our participants and conducted the interviews and focus group meetings in August 2020 met higher education managers to conduct individual interviews. Our interviews took approximately 40-50 minutes. Meanwhile, we recorded each interview by getting the consent of our participants.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

After collecting data through one-to-one interviews and focus group meetings, we transcribed the recordings. We read and analyzed transcribes again and again. Accordingly, we classified them to pinpoint the themes. During the data analysis, we used a three-step strategy. We first studied the data to obtain a general understanding of it, and then we (en)coded it (Saldana, 2009). Following these approaches, we identified the themes as *academic facilities, socialization/desocialization for the future career, social acceptance, and social rights for survival*.

## 4. Findings

Following an examination of the data received from the participants, three themes were developed to describe the experiences and viewpoints of Syrian immigrant students studying in Turkish institutions. The study asserted that immigrant students are free to express their thoughts in academic procedures through the first theme which is the myth of acceptance at first glance. They are not, however, guaranteed that their opinions are considered. Additionally, they are not educated about social rights at universities, and neither the curriculum nor the campus setting help to teach students about their legal and social rights. The opinions of our participants are thus addressed as academic equity, not serving for teaching social rights and freedom under the theme. The second theme, temporary togetherness, illustrates how Syrian immigrants in Turkey do not receive assistance from their friends or professors. Our categorization of their experiences in relation to the topic included no social support, language barrier, social distance to immigrants, and racist attitudes. The last theme, “University as a Lifesaver,” presents the opinions of Syrian immigrant students about what they think it means to be a student in Turkey and how they see the university. We have four sub-themes under the last theme, which are as follows: academic facilities, socialization/desocialization for the future career, social acceptance, and social rights for survival.

### 4.1 The Myth of Acceptance at First Glance

The theme, *the myth of acceptance at first glance, unfolds the views of Syrian immigrant students in Turkish universities towards the role of universities in serving them both the knowledge and the practice of their rights in Turkey*. The first point presented under the theme is related to in which way they experience that their thoughts are considered in decision-making practices at university. The second point is related to what the university offers for them in terms of serving their awareness of their rights in Turkey. Accordingly, we obtained two sub-themes as follows: academic equity and not serving for teaching social rights.

#### 4.1.1 Academic Equity

Analysis of the data we gained during the interview of the participants reveals that academic equity is among the most frequently repeated notions by the Syrian immigrant students in Turkish universities. Most of the participants stated that all the students are equal regardless of their ethnicity, gender, or religion. For instance, two of them expressed their opinions as follows:

*“The university grants equal rights and privileges to all students regardless of gender, race, religion, etc., In summary, there is no discrimination between a foreigner student and a Turkish one.” (Ahmad)*

*“I think all students are equal. As I wrote before, there are not migrant students, foreign students or Turkish students at university; there are just students at the university ...” (Fatma)*

The participant views also display that student councils at universities are useful organizations through which all the students’ thoughts are free to express their ideas equally especially on academic issues. The participants point out that student councils mediate to convey the opinions or requests of students to the academic administration.

*“The student council forms the main link between us as students and the academic administration, as they work hard on passing our proposals and needs to them. However, most of the time, our proposals are not taken into consideration.” (Ahmad)*

*“In other words, the decisions about the exam or the courses to be made are asked to students, we usually express our views to the teachers, they do whatever they see proper...” (Fatma)*

*“...I also work on the council. We can convey our requests through the council...” (Omar)*

*“...Our opinions are taken first, meetings are held beforehand. Sometimes they ask.” (Nusabia)*

The sub-theme *academic equity* demonstrates that Syrian immigrant students at Turkish universities can express their opinions equally when it comes to academic decisions. At this point, Syrian immigrant students find student

councils effective to convey their ideas to the academic administration.

#### 4.1.2 Not Serving for Teaching Social Rights

The findings demonstrate that most participants reach the knowledge of their social rights in Turkey through other sources than university components such as lecturers and lessons. The participants' views show that they do not find university active in teaching their social rights and responsibilities because the university does not serve for teaching students being a citizen in Turkey. Therefore, they learn their rights via other resources such as organizations and the internet. Some of the participants views constituting the sub-theme *not serving for teaching social rights are as follows*:

*"...I consider the internet as the main source to learn the rights and responsibilities that I have to commit to in order to integrate into the Turkish society..." (Ahmad)*

*"...There are associations. There are associations in Samsun, we don't visit much. When we have things we don't know, we ask to these associations..." (Lilas)*

*"...I research and learn about education or health by myself. I have never suffered injustice until today...." (Omar)*

A general analysis of the thoughts of the participant Syrian immigrant students at Turkish university suggests that according to Syrian immigrant students, Turkish universities do not help them process their rights led by living in Turkey. The participants resort to other sources to learn about their social rights such as education or health, or they learn the procedure by themselves when it is needed.

#### 4.2 Temporary Togetherness

Another theme, *temporary togetherness* categorizes the views of Syrian immigrant students in Turkish universities towards how much they are welcomed in the Turkish university environment. We came up with this theme because of their views that they suffer from the lack of social support, facing some racist attitudes and social distance towards themselves, and not speaking the same language with the locals. We explained the theme under four sub-themes as follows: no social support, racist attitudes, social distance, and language barrier because these are the core aspects explaining the theme.

##### 4.2.1 No Social Support

The cultural and social background of Syrian immigrants at Turkish universities may lead Syrian immigrants to experience some basic differences and challenges. At this point, when their thoughts are asked, the participants clearly state that the university environment does not provide any convenience. As foreign students, they are not offered orientation by the university or their lecturers. One of them, Halim, indicates the gap between his expectations and the reality at university causes some difficulties in his academic life as follows:

*"No, nobody said that. When the university ends, you do research. How am I supposed to study? The lecturers do not tell, they come and tell us the subject. I was thinking about a master's degree like this. When you graduate, I thought the professors would come and tell everything from scratch, but it did not happen, when the graduate started at the university, the professors came, after 1 week they gave a project assignment. The first period was very difficult for me." (Halim)*

When they are asked whether they are offered any social orientation programs, the participants emphasize that they have never supported in this way to integrate into the society. They also point out the lack of social activities at university.

*"No, I haven't seen anything by the university. I'm just doing what I have to do, as a foreigner I don't see anything." (Omar)*

*"They did nothing for social integration. No, they didn't. Maybe they didn't do it because time was a bit limited. Also, since we are at a private university, they do not do many social activities." (Salih)*

Considering the views of the participants, it can be inferred that Syrian immigrant students in Turkish universities are deprived of social support. They claim that any activities or events that will facilitate their social integration into society were not carried out by their universities.

##### 4.2.2 Language Barrier

It is an inevitable fact that language is the key to the communication required to access education as it is the core means of conveying meaning. As for the Syrian immigrant students, likely, all the students in Turkish universities do not know Turkish. This makes both the immigrant students and the local students abstain from communication with each other as well as arousing some academic obstacles for immigrant students. According to the findings,

our participants highlighted language as a drawback to express themselves better being aware that it is a key to success in both academic and social life. Abdullah, for instance, gives a sample academic success of his friends and mentions the importance of language.

*“...Actually I want to improve my Turkish. Many students even feel that way. I just feel this in the language. For example, some friends are successful and come first in medical school and engineering. But if you learn a language, you will express yourself better.” (Abdullah)*

Lilas also reflects that there is a direct positive relationship between being able to speak Turkish and not having difficulty both socially and academically. Even, Lilas thinks that she does not need their lecturers' favors just because she is not suffering from a lack of language knowledge.

*“I have not seen any privileges, they treat us the way they treat Turkish students. I am not having difficulties because my Turkish is improving. They don't help academically either because I don't need them, but I don't know the others” (Lilas)*

Moreover, Omar emphasizes that he has not had any problems with his lessons. He undoubtedly asserts that he is not having any trouble as he is keen on the lessons and besides he does not have any language problems.

*“I had no trouble. Our teachers also look at it differently, to see if we have any problems, but since I love my department and do not have language problems, I do not have any problems.” (Omar)*

It can be understood from our participants' views, language is a very significant component to be able to survive in a community without any problems. They are aware that language brings them success both in their academic life and in their social life. Besides, it can be inferred that they make a strong connection between dealing with the language barrier and being independent of other people.

#### 4.2.3 Racist Attitudes

The participant views exhibit that they are exposed to some racist attitudes by both their friends and lecturers. Even though all of them have not experienced racism concretely, almost every participant has a story to tell when they are asked about their university life. Related to this, Osman and Omar mention the discriminatory behaviors of lecturers at university as follows:

*“Our teachers help in this matter ethically and sensitively, but unfortunately some teachers do not behave equally, they treat foreign students unfairly with a racist attitude.” (Osman)*

*“In general, I have not experienced a distinction as foreign or not. However, some friends are exposed to racism by their lecturers. But when it comes to foreigners, foreigners and Syrians are separate. For example, I have a friend studying Psychology. Nobody wants to talk to him because he is Syrian, nobody wants to approach him. For example, a teacher said, “Are Syrians retarded?” he asked and everyone said “Yes”.” (Omar)*

Similarly, apart from stating that universities are not providing immigrant students with support for living in Turkish society, Salman points out racism as a reason for this.

*“I can't say the university is getting the immigrant student ready for being a part of Turkish society. It happens because of the racist which the foreigner student face.” (Salman)*

On the other hand, the participant views illustrate that university or the lecturers are not the only reasons for racist attitudes they have to deal with. They think that there is a general perception about Syrian immigrants and they are labeled as beggars or rapists. ... states his opinions on this as follows:

*“There is a lot of wrong information, but nobody corrects it. For example, when you look at a Syrian, there is a wrong perception such as beggar or rapist. But this happens in every nation. I think politics also affects this.” (Omar)*

Given the participant views above, we reached the finding that Syrian immigrant students in Turkish universities are subjected to misperceptions and labeling not only about being a foreigner but also being Syrian.

#### 4.2.4 Social Distance to Immigrants

The sub-theme *social distance to immigrants* reveals the participants agree that their Turkish friends at university keep their distance from them. They state that their classmates do not want to have good relationships with them, and they are distant at first.

*“Approaching a Turkish student would be a bit challenging, and still like a puzzle for me; I wonder if it's because I'm a foreigner or that is the friendship with Turks.” (Fatma)*

*“They are a little distant. Then friendship is established. I was a little excited on the first day of school, I didn't*

*talk to anyone, I stayed a little distance from people. No one came to meet me, then I went to meet them. We chatted so we became friends.” (Salih)*

Syrian immigrants at Turkish universities, in other respects, are aware of the possibility that Turkish friends might be scared of Syrian people. One of the participants passes his opinion on this as follows:

*“... I know the others but I only have 2 close friends. Not everyone wants to get close, they are afraid or they don't like it. They do not want to approach as they think that all Syrians are bad. They may be afraid.” (Lilas)*

The participant views highlight that their friends and classmates avoid keeping close relationships with them.

#### 4.3 University as a Lifesaver

The study's participant Syrian immigrant students' perspectives are shown in terms of two facets under the theme, "University as a Lifesaver." The first issue is to what it means for them to be a university student in Turkey. The second one has to do with what the university offers to its students. Their opinions on these issues overlap, thus we choose to list them under the same theme. As a result of our study of the data, we were able to identify four sub-themes: academic facilities, socialization/desocialization for the future career, social acceptance, social rights for survival.

##### 4.3.1 Academic Facilities

Based on the sub-theme, *academic facilities*, the participant views clearly display that the immigrant students in the study perceive being a university student in Turkey as a great opportunity for having qualified education, better living standards, high social status, safe environment. A participant stresses that there is no alternative to graduation from university to save his own life as well as provide his family with better living conditions. He also emphasizes that he feels fortunate because he resides in Turkey. Clearly understood from his view in the following, he considers that he has better living standards and more qualified education in Turkey than in his homeland, Syria.

*I have no other option except studying just work hard to graduate and get involved in the real-life, to help my family. We are four (siblings). One got married and the rest study. Turkey is an advanced country in all fields especially in terms of education so I'm lucky to have such a good chance. (Salman)*

Another participant's view demonstrates that he is proud to be a university student in Turkey since thanks to it, he states that he could access qualified education and a good career plan for the future.

*I'm proud of my being a university student in Turkey. It means for me having education in a prestigious country, being trained and looking to the future in a developed city, reaching the top by finding easily a job after graduation. The privileges and rights it has given me are taking my responsibilities, taking and implementing my judgment, carrying out ideas, addressing the people at the same level as me, working in a safe environment and with understandable people. (Osman)*

He clearly believes that the university education in Turkey will provide him autonomy for decision-making and expressing his ideas making negotiations with decent colleagues in the working environment. Inferred from the view, the participant attributes graduation from a Turkish university to a gate for high professional and social standards in his future career.

*I believe that being a university graduate offers me many job opportunities and increases the likelihood of me having a job of my choice. Besides, it provides me with a decent life, a good income, and good social status. (Ahmad)*

It can be easily understood above that studying at university in Turkey means for Syrian students increasing possibilities for employment in desired sectors, positions, satisfying salary and high status in society.

##### 4.3.2 Socialization/Desocialization for Future Career

This sub-theme explains whether Syrian students have memberships in social clubs and attend the activities there. Their views present the explicit and implicit reasons behind their preferences. The participants joining the social communities have motivation for being informed on recent improvements in their majors and creating networks in their future careers.

*There are communities, but there is a problem with communication right now as it continues from afar. We, as the civil aviation community, are working as best as we can. Whatever we do from a distance is less. Before the pandemic, we went directly to the airport last year. We were getting information there which is closely related to our study fields. We could communicate with professors about internships and work. (Omar)*

*There are a lot of communities. I became a member. For example, I became a member of the preschool community. We are meeting, making decisions. But we haven't done much yet. We can say something whenever*



*we want, we interact. We can communicate. We meet new people. It can be useful for us to find a job in the future. (Lilas)*

*Yes, there is a textile student club in our department, and they organize a seminar every two months. They are also making a technical trip to the department. Other than that, they are preparing a congress every year textile students are meeting and exchanging their ideas in this convention about our future career plans in Turkey. (Osman)*

However, some participants do not prefer becoming a member of any social clubs in university. The main reason for their preference is the presumption that social activities in these clubs are useless for achieving their goals. Furthermore, given the views in the following, they consider attendance to them as a waste of time and distracting for concentration on their academic studies.

*I have never been a member of any student clubs or taken part in social organizations. I feel it will be more useful for me to follow only the lessons carefully... (Fatma)*

*There are some organizations for students, but I did not deal with them. I didn't join in them as I said earlier, I focus on studying only. (Salman)*

No matter whether they participate or not in social clubs and activities, their views highlight they extremely focus on the academic aspect in the university atmosphere. They also give priority to pursuing professional goals on their preference. Seeking and increasing job opportunities is their basic motivation for joining in social communities whereas some of the participants find them an obstacle to focus on their courses.

#### 4.3.3 Social Rights for Survival

In the analysis of the collected data, the other opportunities universities provide for immigrant students are identified as accounted cards for public transportation, museum, dining hall, and accommodation facilities for the limited number of students. The participant, Fatma, exemplifies one of these opportunities as the free prep class program in the first year of university for the students failing the English proficiency test. She also emphasizes that there is no difference between Turkish students and immigrant students regarding social rights. However, she points to the need for a free Turkish language teaching program in the first year at university, as well.

*Immigrant students at the university have a lot to gain, for example, they can study in the English preparatory class for free. But the student does not have such an opportunity to learn the Turkish language. We can have discount cards such as the transportation card or the museum card. We may have the right to live in state dormitories, but only a limited number is accepted. The student, like Turkish students, can benefit from the cafeteria services at a discounted rate ... And whatever services they offer to Turkish students, the same is valid for us, as well. (Fatma)*

The participants seem impressed with the information technology facilities at their universities. Their views in the following support the finding that they are pleased to benefit from student-friendly libraries and laboratories for their studies. It is understood that reaching free medical service on the campus is also a precious right for immigrant university students when they face health problems.

*The university offers our social rights because it tries to bring us the most advanced technology in terms of education. There is a polyclinic within the school in case of any health issues and sick students can go and be treated for free, etc. (Osman)*

*Yes, there isn't any negligence when it comes to these aspects, especially health and education. There is a medical center that offers its services for free for all students, as well as libraries and laboratories distributed among most of the faculties. (Ahmad)*

The participant views clearly point out that there are social services provided for immigrant students as well as Turkish students. On the other hand, immigrant students are newcomers into the society, and it is the fact that there is a war in their homeland that's why they could need different types of services from their Turkish counterparts such as psychological consultation (i.e., for post-traumatic disorders), orientation and language support, etc. It can be inferred that the current social rights are only enough for their survival.

#### 4.3.4 Social Acceptance

This sub-theme accounts for the position in the society the participant immigrant students reach through studying at university in Turkey. Sharing their ideas, they make comparisons between the current situation they are in as a university student and the possible situation they would be in if not. One of them also compares himself with his peers working in Turkey but not studying. He also explicates the benefits of being a university student in Turkey for him such as building up effective communication, raising cultural awareness, and learning new things.

*I'm different from the Syrian peers who do not study at university here, for example, I came here, met and talked to people from many different countries at university, I learned a lot of new things. They came here, just worked. When I speak to someone from a different country, I am comfortable knowing something about his culture, I can communicate, I understand what he means. (Halim)*

The participant, Nusabia, emphasizes the difference between a university student and a layperson as an immigrant person in the eyes of people. She also explains in the following how becoming a university student in Turkey enables her to be regarded as a reliable person in society.

*It is different to say that I am a student with people. Turkey comes from a foreign country to be different from normal people and university students. People think that this girl is doing it well. You feel good. I think that's why it's something else. I can do any activity I want. If I wasn't a university student, they wouldn't have employed me. Now I benefit people, I can do a voluntary activity. But if I wasn't a university student, they wouldn't have entrusted me to take care of a child as a babysitter. (Nusabia)*

Given the participant views above, we obtained the finding that university means for them access to social acceptance in addition to qualified education, basic social rights for now, and a good career, decent social life, high living standards in the future. Therefore, it seems that university functions as a lifesaver for them.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The study has shown immigrant students' views on the function of the school including institutional systems, virtues, practices, and discourse around citizenship in Turkish universities. In line with the aim of the study, which was to discover what immigrant students' views and experiences on being a student in Turkish universities could reveal about different conceptions of citizenship, we concluded that Turkish universities do not have a huge effect on students' processing citizenship. We have reached that the core concepts pertaining to the Republican values of Turkey are not directly given to the immigrant students through lessons or other sources in Turkish universities. Turkish universities do not render identified knowledge and framework of citizenship available especially for immigrant students, which contradicts Arendt's request for recapturing "tradition" and "authority" in education (Arendt, 1961), as well as the need to recapture the politics and social aspects of citizenship (Arendt, 1971). Citizenship is not processed by Turkish universities directly and no great effort is made to make rights and responsibilities adopted by immigrants. Accordingly, Syrian immigrants do not engage in the knowledge of their rights and obligations as a citizen, and the ones who want to learn about those rights endeavor to possess knowledge about their rights and responsibilities on their own through their relatives or charity organizations. This abandonment of the universal concept of rights and obligations in support of what Arendt (1971) refers to as the "myth of individual freedom" could be interpreted as indicative of the rise of apolitical and increasingly individualized modes of citizenship (Staeheli, Attoh & Mitchell, 2013). Lack of citizenship awareness, on the other hand, can foster an individualized mentality, which rejects citizenship's political character and can help to position students as illegitimate individuals, who are likely not to comply with the definition of 'good citizen' (Arendt, 1971; Brown, 2016; Fargues, 2017).

The study has also put forward that Syrian immigrant students in Turkish universities are exposed to social distance and discriminatory attitudes by the people around them at school. The study shows that Syrian immigrant students face discriminatory or different attitudes. The background including history and ethnicity is one of the determinant factors in discrimination or exclusion. Even though schools provide citizenship education, there are other factors affecting immigrants' processing of citizenship. In line with this, according to Staeheli and Hammett (2010), even projects aimed at developing a different form of a citizen cannot necessarily eradicate the memory of violence and injustice in fractured communities. Lister (2008), has claimed that citizenship education programs are not adequate to deal with the inequalities and marginalization in societies, which restrict inclusion in the democratic communities. This may be attributed to the fact that there are many factors leading to discrimination or inequality and the feelings of exclusion, such as poverty, ethnicity, religion, and processes of racialization (Fraser, 1990; Warner, 2002). Accordingly, the social domain that schools provide immigrant students is robust in processing citizenship as well as schools which are important social agents. Concerning this function of schools, Arendt (1959) also asserts that the merging of diverse groups in a society can be possible through schooling. However, there are several research findings that not only Syrian students but also Turkish ones face similar problems. These findings demonstrate that Turkish students cannot socialize at the university and its surroundings due to the lack of social opportunities, and they experience various psychological problems due to reasons such as loneliness, family pressure, not being able to benefit from opportunities such as scholarships and dormitories, and financial difficulties (Akyol et al., 2018; Kil et al., 2021). On the one hand, Turkish students experience social, psychological, and financial problems in higher education, on the other hand, policies (Council of Higher

Education, 2017) aimed at increasing and supporting the number of Syrian students in universities may increase the tension between Turkish students and Syrian ones. For this reason, it may be necessary to explain the academic integration problem of Syrian students with the concept of unfair competition rather than racism. However, this issue is beyond the scope of this study and can be analyzed in detail in another study.

Moreover, this study has confirmed the previous ones (Welply, 2019; Topolski & Leuven, 2008; UNESCO, 2011) by revealing that youth deprived of solidarity and suffered from a lack of consciousness of being a part of the unity in the land where they live. Most probably, this issue has eminent effects on the internalization of the process of citizenship immigrant students experience at Turkish universities. The findings of the study demonstrate that neither Turkish students nor academics pay specific attention to this process. Compared to the 20th century, it is obviously understood that the phenomenon of globalization in this century approaches the concept of citizenship from a different perspective (Bauman, 2000). While the citizen profile with certain rights and responsibilities in a bordered land has been moved away, citizenship has evolved into a financial asset that can be purchased. rather than being value-based, education has gradually been removed from its function of transmitting national values (Bauman, 2004). This study allows us to make limited inferences about the transformation of the concept of citizenship. For this reason, it may be suggested to examine the views of education stakeholders on the subject in more depth in further studies.

*The temporary togetherness* theme in this study has also supported that individuals in this century tend to build relations with others on the basis of their needs and avoid creating deep devotion to any kind of relationship (Bauman, 2001; Giddens, 1991). The participant students stated almost no need for membership in any social clubs or organizations. On the other hand, some participant views clearly show that immigrants students prefer attending social club activities if only they matter to their future careers. It can be alleged that overfocus on individual professional goals hinder building up permanent relations and sharing common dreams, practices, and plans. Admittedly, it is, to some extent, understandable that immigrant students prioritize their future careers to socialization considering their life conditions and background. The participant views implicitly and explicitly display that they regard studying in a Turkish university as a *life-saver*. However, there is no evidence about what they aim to contribute to the host country with their bachelor's or master's degree. To test Arendt's hypothesis "renewing a common world" with immigrants through education by taking responsibility requires more interrogation (Arendt, 1961). A longitudinal study could analyze the contributions of immigrants students to their host countries through their university education.

Overall, this study has echoed the experiences on how Syrian immigrant students process their citizenship at Turkish universities. Their experiences shed light on the functions of universities as a hope-instiller for the individualistic victory, not a fulfilled citizenship provider in an inclusive understanding. The participants of the study are only Syrian immigrant students. For further studies, the participants could be varied such as university rectors, deans, academics, and native students in order to gain a holistic perspective and explore the hidden details on why universities fail to the processing of citizenship, thereby limited to providing superficial technic-level support.

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