Going beyond Structural Integration: Exploring the Role of Mainstreaming and Adaptation Classes in the Educational Integration of Syrian Schoolchildren in Turkey

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Abstract

Turkey has developed educational policies and measures to help Syrian students to access education in public schools through different integration practices. This research aimed at examining two integration practices, i.e. mainstreaming and adaptation classes, and exploring the advantages and limitations of each practice for the integration of Syrian students from practitioners' perspectives. The participants consisted of fifteen teachers who had experience in both practices and were working at primary, middle, and secondary schools in a large city in Southeastern Turkey. This research employed a comparative case study design to analyze and synthesize similarities, differences, and meaningful patterns across the integration practices. It was revealed that each practice has limitations and advantages in terms of integration. How integration is handled is the main distinction between the practices. Mainstream classes facilitate relational integration through inclusion; however, integration is fostered through language tuition in adaptation classes. Both practices warrant some arrangements for effectiveness.

Keywords: Integration practices, Syrian students, teachers, qualitative research

Introduction

The migration flows that started due to the uprisings and internal conflict in Syria in 2011 have deeply affected several countries around the world. Turkey has been affected by the migration flows most because it is a transition path, a reliable, and adjacent country (Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency, 2014; Çetin & Uzman, 2012). Turkey has adopted an open-door policy and granted temporary protection status (Duman, 2019; Tanrıkulu, 2017) to almost 3.7 million Syrians who have sought refuge in Turkey (UNHCR, 2020). This status helps conflict-affected people to get registered and benefit from health and education services (IOM, 2009).

Living in a new country brings about novelties and difficulties in all aspects of migrants' lives. Coping with the difficulties and adapting to the novelties requires effective social integration. However, the integration of migrants is not a straightforward matter. Integration requires effective management and necessary actions that involve aspects regarding the society, migrants, and their integration (Erdoğan, 2015). Among other factors, education plays a central role in ensuring integration because individuals who are out of educational processes may face adaptation problems that are likely to cause their marginalization, and this may bring about a lost generation who tends crime (Taştan & Çelik, 2017; Tanrıkulu, 2017).

Literature review

Refugee education has become an important global agenda with the impact of accelerated migration flows. In various countries, there are different pathways to refugee education including full or partial access to national schools (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). As a global education policy, refugee students have been included in national education systems, especially after 2012 (Dryden-Peterson, 2020). Three education models are widely used in western countries which receive refugees (Tsioupis & Paida, 2020): a) the separate site model, b) the direct immersion model, and c) the separate class or program within-a-school model. *The separate site model* requires the provision of education for refugee students in a different learning configuration in separate schools (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016; Koehler, 2017; Tsioupis & Paida, 2020). In this model, refugee students attend physically separated transitional classes and are educated there for a while, as in Sweden and mainstream classes (Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013). The sub-variations of these organizational models include the "landing" model that requires getting an education, for varying periods, in different districts and separate-site schools which are exclusively opened for refugee children, like the implementation in Malmö in 2012 (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016). In Norway, refugee students are placed in separate programs at regular schools for up to 2 years (Aarsæther, 2021; Fandrem et al., 2021). *The direct immersion model* ensures the direct placement of refugee students into mainstream or regular classes in which second language support may be provided in the classroom or outside (Nilsson & Bunar, 2016). *The separate class or program within-a-school model* refers to a learning configuration

that includes students who are not ready to attend regular classes due to a lack of language proficiency (Koehler, 2017; Nilsson & Axelsson, 2013). For instance, Germany uses different models: refugee students attend regular classes, separate classes, and a mixed model incorporating both separate classes for language development and regular classes to receive education in other subjects (Crul et al., 2019; Pagel & Edele, 2021).

Education of Syrian schoolchildren in Turkey

Turkey has attempted to realize a healthy social integration (Örücü et al., 2021) by implementing policy measures and education practices to facilitate Syrian students' attaining quality education (Gümüş et al., 2020). Initially, Syrians attended Temporary Education Centers (TECs), which corresponds to the separate model (Bolat, 2021). Educational activities were started in the camps, and the "Teaching Turkish to Syrian Guest Students Project" was launched to make these activities more organized and planned. A regulation "Measures for Syrian Citizens Hosted outside the Camps in Turkey", the first document regarding the education of Syrians, was published by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) on 26 April 2013 (MoNE, 2014; Tanrıkulu, 2017). This regulation is an important initiative implying that migrants' status has changed from guests to prolonged stayers (Aksakal, 2017). Later, an objective was set in the Strategic Plan (2015-2019) of the MoNE for the first time to ensure migrants' integration into the TES (MoNE-DSD, 2015). Out-of-camp Syrian schoolchildren attended public schools in line with Turkish curricula (MoNE, 2016). It became possible for Syrian students to enroll in public schools with a foreigner recognition document as enacted in Circular No. 21 (MoNE, 2014). Syrian children started to attend public schools; hence, it was aimed at helping Syrian students learn Turkish with their Turkish peers (MoNE, 2016).

Despite the policies and measures, there were some problems faced in the education of Syrians (Kaysılı et al., 2019; Unutulmaz, 2019). The challenges were about teacher competencies, curricula, and resources which required the inception of a project called PICTES (Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System), an important step taken for Syrian students' education (EU Delegation to Turkey, 2018). The Project, officially supported by the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning (MoNE-GDLL, 2020), was initiated in 2016 within the framework of the "Facilities for Refugees in Turkey" agreement signed by the MoNE and EU Delegation to Turkey. Within the project, classroom teachers, Turkish language teachers, and Turkish literature teachers were hired as contract staff (Sülükçü & Savaş, 2018).

Another out-of-camp educational service was offered in TECs where Syrian teachers educated displaced students by using Syrian curricula (Dinçer, 2012). TECs were distinctive in terms of finance, curricula, and teacher employment (Taştan & Çelik, 2017) and continued to educate Syrian

students who were not ready for Turkish curricula along with Turkish courses (Emin, 2019). In April 2019, the activities of TECs were terminated (MoNE-GDLL, 2020).

Two education practices have been implemented for the integration of Syrian schoolchildren into regular schools. The first practice was mainstream classes in which students attended 15-hour Turkish courses. Contracted teachers established two groups of Syrian students from different classrooms based on their teachers' views. These students were taught Turkish for three hours a day. Courses were held in classrooms, libraries, or resource rooms arranged by the school administration. The students were not graded in Turkish courses, and their academic performance was determined based on other courses in mainstream classes that helped students learn with their peers and improve their learning in other courses like math. The Project was renamed and updated as PIKTES while the activities were in progress (PIKTES, 2020).

Adaptation classes, the second practice, refer to an integration practice implemented by the MoNE. Syrian students with insufficient Turkish language skills are placed in these classes. Syrian students who are enrolled in public schools and those under temporary protection in other centers are brought together in adaptation classes. Students are determined based on an exam carried out across Turkey. The students enrolled in these classes are expected to get 60 points in the Turkish Language Level Determination Exam to continue their education in mainstream classes (MoNE, 2019). Adaptation classes were implemented in the 2019-2020 education year in primary, middle, and high schools for the first time, but it was decided to include only 3rd graders in the adaptation classes starting from the 2020-2021 education year.

Syrian students learn Turkish 24 hours per week in adaptation classes, and teachers employed in the PIKTES project teach in these classes (MoNE-GDLL, 2020). Syrian students are placed in adaptation classes as of September 2019, with a class size ranging between 10-30 students, and provided with an instructional program of 6 hours per day/30 hours per week. The course schedule includes 24 hours for Turkish tuition and 2 hours for physical education, 2 for music, and 2 for visual arts per week (PIKTES, 2020). It is aimed to teach Turkish in two terms at most (MoNE, 2019).

In Turkey, Syrian students have been structurally integrated into the education system and benefit from education services in public schools through mainstreaming and adaptation classes. However, how the integration practices affect the integration of Syrian students requires further investigation. Although there are research studies that focus on the problems of education of Syrians in general education classrooms (Yıldız, 2020) and adaptation classes (Bozan & Çelik, 2021), there is a need for research on the role of educational practices in the integration of Syrian students. This research may, thus, provide insights into the role of integration practices. The result of the present study may inform policy-making on educational integration practices. The study may also promote the discussion on different integration practices and how they may contribute to the integration of

migrant students based on the Turkish experience. This study, therefore, aimed at exploring teachers' experiences and perspectives on mainstreaming and adaptation classes and their roles in Syrian schoolchildren's integration. The research questions were: *1) How do mainstream classes affect the integration of Syrian schoolchildren into the TES? 2) How do adaptation classes affect the integration of Syrian schoolchildren into the TES?* and *3) How should an effective integration process be structured for Syrian schoolchildren?*

Methodology

This research employed a comparative case study design which is defined as a heuristic by Bartlett and Vavrus (2017, p. 6) that concurrently deals "with micro, meso and macro dimensions of case-based research" through utilizing two logics of comparison that covers both comparison and contrasting and "tracing across sites and scales". It includes analyzing and synthesizing "similarities, differences, and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus or goal" (Goodrick, 2014, p. 1). This research examined two cases that share a common objective of integrating Syrian schoolchildren into the TES.

Participants

Fifteen teachers, aged 25-32 years old, (female $n = 10$, male $n = 5$) working at primary, middle, and secondary schools in a large city in Southeastern Turkey participated in the research. The participants were recruited by using criterion-based sampling. The researchers believed that this sampling technique could help capture a holistic picture of two integration practices. While selecting the participants, it was paid attention to involving those who had experience in both practices, taught in different grades, worked at schools that implemented the PIKTES project, and were holding teaching positions. As there have been modifications in the integration practices, involving teachers who knew both systems could facilitate their comparisons of the practices and provide fine-grained information about these practices.

Most of the teachers were recruited from primary and middle schools, while others were from secondary schools. Most of the participants were classroom teachers. Four participants held a master's degree, and others had an undergraduate degree. Most of the participants had more than 3 years of experience in refugee education. Teachers were given nicknames to ensure anonymity.

Data collection tool and procedures

The data were compiled through an interview protocol of seven open-ended questions prepared in a semi-structured format that allowed flexibility to ask probes when needed. The protocol was prepared in a collaborative, reflective manner based on the relevant literature. The initial draft included 10 open-ended questions. The draft was examined by two experts in the field of education. Based on their suggestions, three questions were eliminated due to being irrelevant and/or very similar. The protocol was then finalized. The interview protocol is provided in the Appendix. The

one-on-one interviews and telephone interviews were held in the 2019-2020 academic year. The interviews were recorded based on the participants' permission. The interviews lasted 298 mins in total, ranging between 17-35 mins in length.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed by pursuing several procedures. Firstly, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. After the data were ready for analysis, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is "an independent and reliable qualitative approach to analysis" (Vaismoradi et al., 2013, p. 400) and can be used to identify, analyze and report patterns in the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Secondly, the transcriptions of the data were read several times, examined analytically, and thoroughly to reveal meaningful patterns embedded in the data. We read the answers to each question one by one and broke the answers into smaller units (codes) in the first cycle. Then, all small units were examined to make sense of a whole in an inductive manner. In the second cycle, similar codes were combined under sub-themes. After a careful examination of the sub-themes, overarching themes were constructed based on the sub-themes. The categorization in the coding depended on similarities and differences between the perceptions. During the theme development process, the developed patterns were checked to ensure consistency. We attempted to capture the main meanings behind the data and explore hidden concerns inherent in the data as suggested by Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019).

Trustworthiness

The procedures to ensure trustworthiness in the study are as the following:

- Preparing the interview protocol based on the related literature and expert feedback,
- Conducting pilot interviews with two teachers to ensure understandability and comprehensiveness,
- Sharing the research purpose and process with the participants clearly,
- Ensuring privacy and anonymity in all phases of the research,
- Recording the interviews for the prevention of data loss,
- Providing authentic quotations from the participants' views,
- Considering data saturation as a criterion for ending data collection,
- Individual and collaborative data analysis and theme development based on constant comparison and discussions,
- Reporting the research process clearly and thoroughly.

The role of the researchers

The researchers attempted to remain neutral during the data collection process. One researcher has worked in integration practices since the inception of the PIKTES Project. He has observed and implemented both practices and could witness the participants' first-hand experiences. The other

researcher has published research on the educational integration of Syrian students in Turkey. He is also experienced in qualitative research. The experiences of both researchers could contribute to revealing the role of mainstreaming and adaptation classes in educational integration.

Findings

The findings of the research are presented under five themes. Two themes were the contributions and limitations of adaptation classes; two themes were the contributions and limitations of mainstreaming, and the last theme was suggestions for facilitating integration (Figure 1).
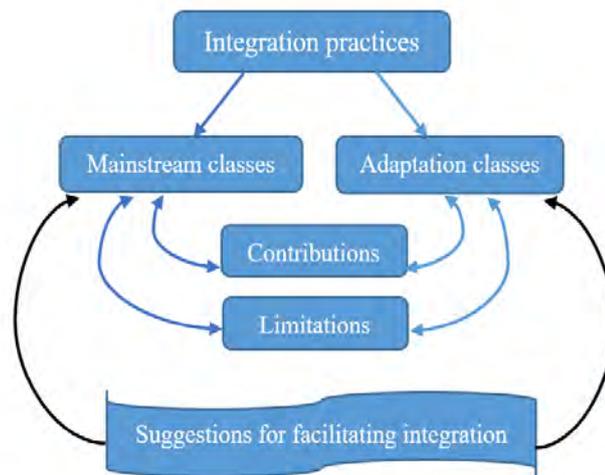

Figure 1. *Major Themes and Related Subthemes*

Contributions of Adaptation Classes

The contributions of adaptation classes were the first theme, with 4 sub-themes. The sub-themes were labeled as *teachers' general evaluations*, *advantages for students*, *advantages for teachers*, and *contribution to integration*.

Teachers' general evaluations

Almost all teachers believed that adaptation classes provided advantages for Syrian students, teachers, and integration. Teachers' evaluations of adaptation classes focused on various aspects of these classes. Most teachers considered this practice to be useful and necessary for language learning and adaptation to school. Han commented on the contribution of these classes to student behavior and teachers' understanding of students and their culture:

> *I think that taking refugee students from their [mainstream] classes, placing them in adaptation classes, and teaching them Turkish there are beneficial, first, in terms of accelerating students' learning of the language [Turkish] and second in terms of their keeping up with the school environment and school rules. Because I have observed that the students did not yet know that they should not run during the breaks and shout loudly and that they should take care of themselves. In the adaptation classes, we have a feeling for students. We can understand the emotional language of children and their cultures.*

Adaptation classes were regarded to be a systematic, disciplined, target-based, and cohesion-based practice for integration. These aspects of the practice prevented confusion and uncertainty because, in mainstream classes, there was a different implementation that required Syrian students to

go to another classroom to attend Turkish courses and come back to their classrooms. This practice caused a chaotic situation at schools, especially those with a large number of Syrian students. Underlining the contribution of these classes to language tuition, course achievement, and inclusion, Ozan commented:

> *I think adaptation classes are ahead of mainstream classes. I think the first one (mainstream classes) should be done in the second phase because students were taken for one or two courses and would come back to the same classroom at 2 o'clock. This caused chaos at the school. This resulted in a negative situation for our focus on our job and courses and other teachers' focus on their courses. The opening of adaptation classes prevented this chaos to some degree, even to a large degree... I believe adaptation classes are more logical for course achievement, inclusion, and students' learning Turkish for longer hours in the ongoing process.*

Advantages for students

Some teachers stressed psychosocial development and positive student attitudes toward school as the contributions of adaptation classes. Through this practice, students were able to complete learning Turkish due to intensive tuition, and this was deemed important for understanding academic courses. Syrian students could communicate with Turkish students and develop awareness regarding the benefit of learning Turkish. More importantly, teachers were able to offer education based on individual differences. Adaptation classes helped Syrian students to overcome their psychological problems and a sense of inadequacy and developed self-care skills, self-confidence, and a sense of belonging as students in the classes were Syrian. Gül stressed the role of this practice in classroom belongingness and positive communication:

> *In my opinion, adaptation classes have such characteristics: a sense of classroom [community] develops. Belongingness certainly. Their teacher, own friends… there is no continuous change. I, therefore, think that a sense of classroom develops in adaptation classes. Apart from these, the students adopt their teachers, and a positive teacher-student relationship develops. (Gül)*

Advantages for teachers

This practice had advantages for teachers of Syrians, too. Teachers noted that it was easier to manage the classroom and track students, and this resulted in effective teaching. Eda accentuated that:

> *Disciplinary problems have decreased much more. As we give one-on-one education in adaptation classes (a love-based education I think), we have decreased disciplinary problems of the students with love, and I get positive feedback from other teachers and teachers of mainstream classes such as "oh teacher, how much these students have changed.", "they have become different.", and "fortunately these classes have been opened."*

Eda's expression indicated the positive impact of having students in adaptation classes in terms of decreased disciplinary problems. She connected this positive outcome to love-based education given in the adaptation classes. Furthermore, teachers felt more active and did not suffer from a dilemma in terms of cohesion. Teachers were able to understand students' feelings better and taught more easily as there were almost no differences between students' levels.

Contribution to integration

The new practice helped cohesion, enhanced students' obeying school rules, and supported speaking Turkish as teachers suggested. Adaptation classes helped equip students with competencies

and opportunities to cohere with life and understand rules in the classroom and out-of-school contexts. Yener underlined that:

> The child is exposed to the adaptation class at school. S/he can continue her/his daily life outside. As the child comes to the adaptation class from her/his daily life and goes back to her/his social life leaving the adaptation class, therefore s/he does not face problems… the child can play with her/his friends in the breaks leaving the adaptation class, go to shopping outside and can queue up. The child can obey the rules.

Knowing the language of the host community was opined as an essential requirement for integration. Two teachers underlined learning and speaking Turkish as an advantage:

> I think that language is very important both here and in our society. For this reason, I find adaptation classes more valuable. Because without learning the language, the integration of refugees living in Turkey is really difficult. (Ömer)

> Students need to learn Turkish to express themselves and adapt to society. Namely, they need to learn Turkish to buy vegetables when they go to a grocery, to simply put. (Fehime)

In essence, the role of adaptation classes was stressed in terms of language learning, developing classroom belongingness, and integrating with the community. The findings suggest that adaptation classes made more contributions to cohesion at the school and community levels by providing students with the required competencies.

Limitations of adaptation classes

Adaptation classes had some limitations and caused some challenges for both students and teachers as some teachers asserted. These classes caused some barriers to effectiveness and integration.

Challenges related to the classroom system

Some teachers focused on Turkish tuition and students' attitudes towards speaking Turkish as the challenges. Teachers argued that there were too many Turkish courses that helped students develop in Turkish. However, Syrian students did not need to speak Turkish in these classes as only Syrian students were enrolled there. Criticizing the adaptation classes, Şule opined that:

> I do not find it right to restrict adaptation classes to Turkish, continue with a single teacher, and not offer any other courses. I do not think it is right to provide six hours of teaching by a single teacher. There are no adequate materials and experts. I think this is true of our school, with no smart boards, projections, and computers. These affect our students' learning; they learn harder. I mean learning via visuals could be easier. I feel that a set is drawn between these students and Turkish students, and this, I think, affects the issue of integration, which is our purpose, very adversely. We assume that we are being more productive by offering six hours of Turkish teaching, but I think this is happening a little bit through dictating it. We are depriving them of this by separating them from Turkish students.

The classroom system required Syrian students to be educated in separate classes. This was seen as an issue that affected integration negatively. The temporariness of these classes, the lack of required materials, large class sizes, and parental attitudes delimited the effectiveness of the adaptation classes, as suggested by some participants. Attending regular classes after completing the adaptation class was argued to cause a lack of belongingness. In some adaptation classes, as there were more students, some teachers had difficulties during the teaching process. These were the reasons related to the system itself. However, one interesting finding of the research was that some

Syrian parents were against these classes. Parents might have such negative perceptions of these classes as they might have felt that their children could speak Turkish more, which may cause forgetting Arabic and disconnecting from their cultures.

Disadvantages for students

As teachers expressed, the adaptation classes had some negative effects on students. Teachers mostly underlined that the practice's focus on teaching Turkish prevented the establishment of a basis for other lessons, and this caused a loss for students. Some teachers stressed that adaptation classes prevented Syrian students from interacting with their Turkish peers and practicing Turkish. This limited the development of Turkish language skills:

> *When we consider the students' side, the process of children's adaptation to the new environment and the inception of the adaptation classes during the term have become disadvantageous for us and the students. The ages and education levels of the students who came to us… These were different from each other, and these were disadvantages. From these aspects, I do not think adaptation classes have reached a sufficient level. Moreover, the students returned to their mainstream classrooms after the 2nd term ended and continued their education. This was a disadvantage… I think the process does not make much sense. I can say that this is an unsuccessful system, not very successful due to some features such as children's adaptation to the environment again and to new students and not being exposed to language that much. (Gaye)*

Apart from limitations to student interaction and practicing Turkish, some teachers complained about the negative attitudes of some Syrian students towards these classes. Prior to entirely adapting to the regular classes, these students would enter into a new cycle of adaptation. This might have been challenging for some students to overcome.

At the school level, some teachers mentioned challenges such as the noninvolvement of Syrians in school-based activities. Furthermore, some teachers argued that Syrian students were not accepted socially when they returned to mainstream classes to complete school hours. Han argued that:

> *I can see here that the students play with the ball among themselves in the adaptation classes. They are in contact with each other. They see only each other during the breaks. The children do not contact Turkish students. I have even observed that other classes fight with our classes more than before since the adaptation classes have begun… we have taken students to these classes to integrate them. Well, I think as if we have established a separate republic at the school. The children are just playing on this floor. They tease other classes… We did not have such a problem at the previous school… while meaning to integrate these students, this time, we have completely cut them off from the classrooms and school environment, I think.*

Han's explanation implied the negative impact of separating Syrian students from Turkish ones. Being placed in different classes caused problems and conflicts between students. This might have triggered a sense of "we" and "they" and resulted in the social exclusion of Syrian students.

As some participants reported, the long duration of Turkish tuition and instruction by the same teacher during the day caused students to feel bored. The reasons behind boredom might have stemmed from students' problems with classroom belongingness, classroom climate, or the teaching process. A few teachers, however, associated boredom with students' not taking the courses and teachers seriously. This may also be related to a lack of classroom belongingness and adaptation.

Disadvantages for teachers

Professionally, teachers viewed some issues regarding their work as problematic. The most underlined issue was about the teaching of all courses by one single teacher, rather than branch teachers, as Han commented:

> *Students see branch teachers two, three, or four hours a week, there is respect for them… After some time, as students see us for many hours, they start to accept us as their friends, sisters, and brothers.*

A feeling of boredom to teach Turkish and running out of patience were two perceived problems. Lastly, some teachers accentuated that they could not give marks and school reports to students, which hindered their reporting of students' progress. This may have caused a lack of professional commitment for teachers.

Disadvantages for integration

The last emphasis was on the negative aspects of these classes for integration. Most teachers opined that all students' being Syrian made it harder to contribute to their relational integration with Turkish students at the schools. Fehime argued that:

> *…Students can speak Arabic as they know all of the students are Syrian in the adaptation classes. The child can withdraw himself/herself as s/he can think they do not need (to speak Turkish)… the limitation of the adaptation classes is that students may be slow in learning the language as they are constantly intertwined with Syrian students or they do not need it.*

Teachers were concerned about the polarization caused among Syrians as they could not socialize with other students. It was argued that being separate from Turkish students also caused conflicts among students and unfamiliarity with Turkish culture. Some teachers accentuated that Syrian students were more alienated from the education system in such classes. Gaye asserted:

> *… This prevents the student's socialization. For example, as the student could not realize integration, s/he cannot adapt to Turkish culture entirely this time. The student is with students of his/her language and culture, s/he, therefore, cannot cohere with other cultures that much. This is, in fact, a limitation of language.*

Gaye underlined the cultural aspect of the integration process. Interaction between cultures was stressed to be important for social cohesion. This may imply that learning Turkish in separate classes could not yield the expected results for the relational integration of Syrian students.

Taken together, it may be asserted that although adaptation classes offered several advantages for students, teachers, and integration, there were several disadvantages, some of which may even delimit students' integration. This is because these classes might even cause polarization, conflicts, and alienation.

Contributions of mainstreaming

Teacher perspectives on the positive contributions of the mainstream classes were categorized under the theme of "contributions of the mainstream classes", and four sub-themes, i.e. *teachers' general evaluations*, *advantages for students*, *advantages for teachers*, and *contribution to integration*.

Teachers' general evaluations

It was found that most of the teachers believed mainstream classes to be contributive to integration since they enabled cultural exchange between students. Hence, in mainstream classes, students could socialize better. This practice helped Syrian students to feel like part of the education system as Syrian students attended regular classes with their Turkish peers on an equal basis. Furthermore, the students had the chance to learn all the lessons and did not lag behind academically. This practice contributed to getting to know the importance of Turkish and was viewed as contributive to students. Şule commented:

> In mainstream classes, students could coalesce better. Syrian and Turkish students could socialize better, and Syrian students could learn more as they were exposed to Turkish. As far as I observed, the students did not lag behind other courses. They felt belongingness in Turkey.

Advantages for students

When evaluating the contributions of this practice, teachers underlined the aspects concerning Syrian students. Three contributions came to the forefront: having more opportunities to practice Turkish, developing academically in all courses, and having equal opportunities with Turkish peers. In this practice, Syrian students were able to practice Turkish and learn other disciplines on an equal basis. Han commented on the role of these classes in practicing Turkish:

> I think the children had the opportunity to learn the language in those Turkish classes and to develop the language they learned directly in the next lesson or in the next break…When they had to communicate with their social sciences or math teachers, they would have to speak. We have taken this opportunity from them, I think.

Mainstream classes were believed to help students socialize and learn Turkish culture. Underlining the role of these classes in terms of acculturation, Gül opined that:

> Adaptation classes are insufficient to provide integration. If we think in terms of socialization, the child is still together with people who have their own culture. In other words, there is no cultural acculturation...

Advantages for teachers

In terms of the effects of this practice on teachers, teachers only mentioned the chance of seeing different students. Syrian students could see branch teachers, and this was deemed important by some teachers as they could ensure the classroom discipline better. This is because being with the same teacher during the day was proposed to be a certain limitation for teachers. Han highlighted the challenge he faced:

> I face a problem with classroom management in the last hours of the day. I look at other teachers, for example, the religious education and moral culture teacher does not have this problem as he teaches for one hour in the same classroom. (Han)

Advantages for integration

How mainstream classes contributed to integration was another sub-theme. Mainstream classes were believed to contribute to students' adaptation and accessing a socially rich environment. Alya opined that:

> I find mainstream classes to be positive because Syrian students were with Turkish ones, and there was an observation in every way; their games, cultures, eating, drinking, and cleaning. However, in the adaptation

classes, it cannot be said that they do integrate as they are with students from their nationality and they already know them.

Attending mainstream classes allowed students to observe one another's culture. These classes provided students with a natural observation setting. In this way, this practice facilitated Syrian students' integration into the TES, as understood from teachers' perspectives, by helping them overcome the problems of adaptation as these classes enabled social interaction among students. Fehime and Mine underlined the importance of adaptation and interaction:

I support the mainstream classes because students (Syrian) feel obliged to adapt to Turkish students when their number is greater. For us, adaptation is primary in our society, and so it is in education. I, therefore, support that practice. (Fehime)
As an advantage, although the students face difficulties in the beginning, they get accustomed to their classroom after two weeks and say "Yes, this is my classroom". (Mine)

Limitations of Mainstreaming

Apart from the advantages, there were several limitations or disadvantages of mainstream classes. The limitations of mainstream classes were the main theme developed, with the sub-themes labeled as *teachers' general evaluations*, *disadvantages for students*, *disadvantages for teachers*, and *disadvantages for integration.*

Teachers' general evaluations

Based on teacher evaluations, two issues seemed to cause limitations in the practice. One was about the structure of the practice. Teachers considered that there were complexities, uncertainties, and inadequacies in the project:

... There was chaos at school. Students were here for two lessons and were in another classroom for two lessons. Neither teachers nor students believed that this could continue in this way and were in agreement that this could not produce any benefits. (Ozan)
In the other practice (mainstream classes), children were in confusion. I would behave toward them more humanistic when they came to me, but the other teacher was with forty students. Naturally, when a Syrian student did something, the teacher could yell at them and get angry with them. Then the students would come and tell me "O my teacher, you do not get angry with us, but the other teacher gets angry". Therefore, the behaviors of these students would change in that classroom... (Eda)

The other aspect was time constraints which limited the contribution to integration. A mismatch between the planning and implementation of the project was also underlined.

Disadvantages for students

The project affected many issues regarding Syrian students. The most striking finding was about Syrian students, Turkish students, and teachers. It was revealed that Syrian students who were not sufficient in Turkish had difficulties in mainstream classes; and these students were sometimes excluded by their classmates and teachers. Students did not know which class they belonged to. Furthermore, they could not attend the courses they liked, which caused them to get bored in the classes. A sense of self-inefficacy shadowed students' real performance in the courses. Two teachers commented:

In the mainstream classes practice, students were a minority, therefore, some were resistant to learning Turkish. There were many introvert students, who could not express themselves. In other words, their behaviors affected their socialization in the classroom. (Gül)

As I work at a primary school, there is always something, I mean, a feeling of inferiority in my students. I have not experienced problems like "My teacher, we are Syrians, they do not like us", "My Turkish friend did not want to sit next to him" in the adaptation classes. In the previous practice (mainstream), such students were coming to me crying. (Eda)

Disadvantages for teachers

From the teachers' side, the practice had negative effects. Nearly half of the participants believed that it was too hard to track Syrian students' progress and communicate with their parents. Mine underscored that:

I had difficulties in controlling the students in the previous practice, i.e. mainstream. Because each of them was in a different classroom and I had two classes. As there were many students in both classes, I had many challenges in monitoring their development or communicating with their families…

It was challenging to teach because students' levels varied, and students did not take both their teachers (especially female ones) and courses seriously, as Melis accentuated:

The problem of (lack) seriousness and discipline varied a lot between male and female teachers. Students did not care about female teachers that much, but they were afraid of male teachers very much.

The problem of not taking female teachers seriously may be related to cultural or gender issues among Syrian students, or the competencies of female teachers in establishing classroom discipline. One interesting finding was that the students displaying misbehaviors were sent to the classes. Therefore, some teachers opined that they were seen as substitute teachers or trainers, which caused discontentment among some teachers.

Disadvantages for integration

The last sub-theme was the limitations of this practice for integration. Teachers underlined that there were problems for those who were insufficient in Turkish; Syrian students who were not competent in Turkish felt segregated:

… The main problem was that: students received a few Turkish courses, namely Turkish courses for foreign students. They lagged behind other courses. … They listened to mathematics, history, and social studies; however, the students did not learn these courses as they were not competent in Turkish. No matter how clever s/he was, s/he had difficulties in understanding the courses. (Ömer)

We took students from their classes, but the students blamed their teachers as they lagged behind their courses. There was a problem. They both wanted to come and did not want to come. A kind of avoidance, psychology of avoidance. That practice was not very successful. The child did not know Turkish. Put him/her in science courses, social studies courses; would that make any good for him/her? You would steal time. (Sıla)

Being in different classes during the school day made the integration difficult as it caused problems with classroom adaptation. Gaye focused on this problem and its difficulties for teachers:

The teacher could not ensure authority in the classroom. Because the student believed that s/he came to this classroom for playing, in other words, s/he did not know the purpose of attending mainstream classes.

Mainstream classes were noted to be effective for those who could speak Turkish. The students who did not know Turkish would be segregated because Syrian students could establish their groups. Therefore, some teachers asserted that educating displaced students in mainstream classes was not sufficient for integration.

Suggestions for Facilitating Integration

Considering the advantages and limitations of both education implementations, teachers made divergent suggestions to facilitate integration. Among the suggestions were arrangements for the integration practices and related aspects such as language teaching, textbooks, students, and teachers. Two teachers recommended that:

> *Primarily the language problem, after solving this problem, students should certainly continue their education with Turkish students in mainstream classrooms. I even think that the adaptation classes practice should not continue for more years or a long term. (Eda)*
> *I'm a little bit in favor of exposure. Yes, because the sense of self-expression can develop more with a shock. (Fehime)*

Almost all of the teachers underlined the importance of inclusion in any adopted integration practice. A holistic practice that includes both learning Turkish and other academic courses was deemed to be important for students' overall development. In line with other courses, several suggestions were made such as carrying out physical education, music, and painting courses as group studies including Turkish and Syrian students. Han argued that:

> *They can take a music course in a language they do not know. They can be together in physical education courses. Like visual arts, physical education, and handiwork, different activities can be organized for children on the weekends when they come to school. Workshops can be organized… Syrians are somehow excluded from these kinds of activities… I think they can better integrate if I send these students to others in physical education and visual arts courses.*

Holding additional courses on the weekends and providing courses on morals, discipline and etiquette refer to the academic and behavioral development of Syrian students:

> *24 hours of Turkish will be taught. No! In the first term, Turkish can be taught for 24 hours, but in the second term, 20 hours should be allocated for Turkish and 4 hours for moral education. I mean, instruction and education can be carried out together for students. (Yener)*

Some teachers suggested that there should be preparatory classes in which students could gain competence in the language before enrolling in Turkish public schools, but that the number of Turkish courses should be decreased. Some teachers opined that both implementations should continue and be governed by the state in a disciplined and planned way. However, they suggested that the students who know Turkish to some degree should attend mainstream classes and that those who do not know Turkish should attend adaptation classes. This proposal was based on level determination exams and placement of students in classes according to their levels. This kind of placement would help teachers perform better as differences between students' levels were a problem for teachers in mainstream classes:

> *The MoNE should conduct a level determination exam for language in a disciplined and serious way and determine the level of students. The students under a certain level can continue their education in existing adaptation classes or preparatory classes. After reaching a higher level, they can be transferred to mainstream classes. (Yahya)*

In some schools, the number of Syrian students was considered to be high. Therefore, some teachers advocated a quota for each school to ensure a balance in terms of student composition in schools. One issue stressed for facilitating integration was teachers' involvement in grading and

evaluating Syrian students. Some teachers asserted that different teachers should take part in teaching four basic language skills. Gül asserted that:

> *A school report should be given to enhance teachers' respectability and set a goal for students. I mean they should progress in line with a goal; "Will our reports be good?" We should have a grading/marking system. Teachers' views should be sought. Teachers should be able to do everything that a Turkish teacher can do.*

The re-arrangement of textbooks and course plans based on student levels was also highlighted. Other suggestions covered department meetings among teachers, constructing language classes, starting integration from the 2nd grade, a love-based education, and informing students of their rights and freedoms:

> *The first, nice thing to do in integration is love. The first prerequisite for integration is love. In other words, the integration will be unsuccessful when you cause the child to feel that s/he is from a different race, and speaks a different language... something like "why did s/he come to my country, I wish you had not come here". (Eda)*

Overall, teacher suggestions for facilitating integration highlighted the importance of adopting a comprehensive overview of the integration. Although teachers mostly focused on pedagogical issues about the integration system, there were suggestions about the professional status of the teachers, and this was considered to be critical for the success of the integration practices.

Discussion

It is evident from the findings that mainstreaming and adaptation classes had advantages and limitations. Each practice had strengths for Syrian schoolchildren's integration as well as limitations. Teachers' perspectives depended on a multi-faceted approach as they evaluated each practice in terms of the structural aspects and the role of each practice for integration, students, and teachers.

As a pedagogical model, teachers found the adaptation classes to be useful and necessary, and they opined that this implementation is a systematic, disciplined, target-based, and cohesion-based practice for integration. Intensive Turkish tuition was perceived as a major advantage because the language was an important barrier to integration and communication with students and parents as understood from teachers' standpoints. The importance of gaining language skills was frequently reported by teachers. This is because it has been revealed in the related research that the issue of understanding language is the source of many educational problems faced by Syrian students (Dolapçıoğlu & Bolat, 2021). Linguistic incompetence in Turkish hinders the development of reading skills, reading comprehension, and problem-solving skills (Bolat, 2021) and may cause Syrian students' othering by Turkish students (Eren & Çavuşoğlu, 2021).

From a psycho-social perspective, some teachers argued that adaptation classes facilitated psychosocial development and improved student attitudes toward school. This implementation helped Syrian students to overcome their psychological problems and a sense of inadequacy and to develop self-care skills, self-confidence, and a sense of belonging as all of the students were Syrian. This is noteworthy because psychosocial development was revealed to be one of the major challenges in

Syrian students' education (Çelik et al., 2021). Pedagogically, Syrian students were positively affected as Turkish tuition was considered to be necessary for understanding other academic courses. Teachers had several advantages in these classes as they could manage the classroom, track student progress and teach more effectively due to small variations in student levels. Teachers felt more active and gained professional status in this practice. Regarding integration, teachers opined that this implementation facilitated cohesion, enhanced students' obeying school rules, and supported speaking Turkish. These seem to be important positive effects since previous research (see Çelik et al., 2021) reports problems with Syrian students' obeying rules and adaptation to school.

Apart from these contributions, teachers accentuated several limitations of the practice. Teachers reported a kind of anomaly in terms of Turkish tuition and students' attitudes toward speaking Turkish: too many hours for Turkish tuition and Syrian students' reluctance to speak Turkish. In other words, this practice both facilitated and hindered language development as Syrian students could not interact with their Turkish peers in Turkish. Furthermore, there was no basis for learning other subjects, which was viewed as a loss for academic development. This finding corroborates with the Bozan and Çelik (2021) study which concluded that students' learning losses in other academic lessons were among the negative effects of the adaptation classes.

Although teachers stressed the temporariness of these classes as an advantage, it was argued to be a disadvantage for developing a sense of classroom belongingness. Teachers complained about planning, not finding adequate materials, the class size, and negative parental attitudes. Consistently, Çelik et al. (2021) revealed that Syrian parents perceived being far away from their native language and culture as a barrier to their children's education apart from the fear of exclusion and assimilation. İli (2020) revealed that most Syrian parents wanted their children to attend a parallel school system and receive education in Arabic. Some teachers stressed that Syrian students were not involved in school activities and that they were not socially accepted in mainstream classes upon returning to mainstream classes to complete school hours. International research has revealed similar findings. In a Norwegian context, it was reported that separate programs had great challenges in providing learning environments that enable sustainable interaction between these students and their peers in mainstream classes (Aarsæther, 2021). Another study in Norway concluded that introductory classes are not properly adjusted to migrant students' needs for inclusion (Fandrem et al., 2021).

Student boredom, instruction by the same teacher, and students' not taking teachers and classes seriously decreased the contributions of the adaptation classes. Variations in students' language competence levels caused difficulties on the part of teachers. Some teachers complained about their status, especially their inability to report student progress and feel like real teachers. As for integration, some teachers were worried about the polarization caused among Syrians as they could not socialize with other students. Being separate from Turkish students also caused conflicts

among students and unfamiliarity with Turkish culture. This was interpreted by some teachers as alienation from the education system. Consistently, Bozan and Çelik (2021) revealed that placing students in adaptation classes based on their language skills may help students get rid of the loneliness they experienced in mainstream classes. Nilsson and Axelsson (2013) also revealed that introductory classes and regular classes had disadvantages for migrant students: introductory classes do not offer adequately challenging environments for students due to the differences in age characteristics and knowledge, while in regular classes students have obstacles to accessing social and pedagogical resources. The authors noted that introductory classes contribute to interaction and belongingness more than regular classes. Unlikely, teachers believed that placing Syrian students into mainstream classes contributed to integration as it promoted cultural exchange between Syrian and Turkish students. Students had full access to the full curriculum, which was important for their academic development. Consistently, Crul et al. (2019) posit that refugee students should attend regular classes as soon as possible to enhance their school achievement. In a study in Germany, the results hinted that mixed schooling approaches could have certain advantages for a higher sense of school belonging for refugee students (Pagel & Edele, 2021). Furthermore, the students had the chance to learn all the lessons and did not lag behind academically. The students with developed language skills could benefit from these classes more. Syrian students could see branch teachers, and seeing different teachers was viewed to be important for the provision of quality education and the establishment of classroom discipline. Socialization was fostered more because Syrian students could adapt and access a socially-rich environment. Cülha and Demirtaş (2020) also concluded that attendance in mainstream classes was perceived to be effective for language development, cultural interaction, and integration.

Mainstream classes had several limitations. Some teachers criticized the structure of the practice by underlining the mismatch between the planning and implementation. Syrian students who were not proficient in Turkish had difficulties and were sometimes excluded by some teachers and students. This issue was accompanied by the inability to display their academic performance accompanied by self-inefficacy. From the teachers' side, the problems included not tracking Syrian students' progress, ineffective communication with Syrian parents, differences between student levels, and negative student attitudes. As an impromptu finding, teachers' professional status was reported to be a problem. This was a similar finding revealed in the limitations of the adaptation classes which indicated that teachers could not situate themselves in a professional position as due to not grading students and giving school reports. Teachers found Turkish tuition and the inclusion of Syrian students in mainstream classes to be insufficient for integration. For similar reasons, teachers criticized mainstream classes in Boylu and Işık's (2019) study. Therefore, the results may imply that a practice that ensures structural and relational integration should be implemented, as suggested by Dryden-Peterson (2020). Dryden-Peterson (2020, p. 595) posits that although structural integration

is necessary for addressing the inequalities in access to school, relational integration is of paramount importance for the development of individual-level belongingness and group-level cohesion.

To facilitate integration, teachers centered their suggestions on integration practices and several issues covering language tuition, textbooks, students, and teachers. These elements are important to construct an effective learning environment. Consistently, Çelik et al.'s (2021) study concluded that the lack of teaching materials and curriculum were challenges in the education of Syrian students. In the current study, inclusivity was highlighted as an important feature of any adopted education practice. Such a focus corresponds to one of the principles of the whole schooling approach which is to "include all in learning together" (Whole Schooling Consortium, 2022). Teachers advocated the overall development of Syrian students, i.e. academic development and language development.

The importance of courses on morals, discipline, and etiquette was also stressed. This was noteworthy as some teachers considered these issues to be important for group-level cohesion, adaptation, and integration. Another suggestion was to launch school-level group studies that enable the participation of Syrian and Turkish students in physical education, music, and painting courses. These suggestions may provide more opportunities for Syrian students to share their experiences with their classmates and teachers and thus improve their emotional well-being and mental health (Sarmini et al., 2020).

It was obvious that teachers believed in the importance of Turkish language acquisition for Syrian students' learning, and they, therefore, suggested the opening of preparatory classes and advocated for adaptation classes. Some teachers supported the co-existence of both adaptation classes and mainstreaming. Regarding the duration of language classes, Koehler and Schneider (2019) argue that refugee students should be included in regular classes after they gain the basic language skills of the host community since the social environment of peers speaking the native language will accelerate the learning process for refugee students. Bunar and Juvonen (2021) make a similar recommendation about the duration of the introductory period and the integration of newly arrived migrant students into mainstream classes.

Placing students in different classes based on language proficiency levels in line with level determination exams was another suggestion. Some teachers suggested a balanced enrollment policy to arrange student composition in schools. Some suggestions regarding teachers seemed to be made for their commitment to enhancing the quality of education for Syrian students. Supporting teachers was found to be significant for ensuring teachers' meaningful and sustainable engagement with refugee students (Karkouti et al., 2021). This is important as teachers are seen as the ones who can solve the educational problems of Syrian students by Syrian parents (Çelik et al., 2021).

Limitations

This study was not exempt from certain limitations. Mainstreaming has been modified several times, we collected data about the initial implementation. The data about adaptation classes were collected in the first year of the implementation. However, the adaptation classes were decided to be implemented for only 3rd graders after the data were collected. The curricula of adaptation classes included life sciences, mathematics, science, visual arts, and music courses; therefore, the findings of the research about not offering academic courses are not consistent with the current implementation of the adaptation classes. The participants taught at different school and classroom levels, and their experiences there might have affected their standpoints. This research depends on teachers' self-reports about the integration practices. It was, therefore, not possible to observe the effects of the integration practices in the field.

Conclusion and Implications

The present study concluded that mainstreaming and adaptation classes implemented for the educational integration of Syrian schoolchildren had both advantages and limitations. The adaptation classes can contribute to Syrian students' language development and psycho-emotional development more than the mainstream classes. The reason behind this conclusion may be that being together with Syrian students in these classes helps students to express themselves more in their mother tongue. As they are familiar with their own culture, they may not face an adaptation problem and feel belongingness there. Learning Turkish intensively can help these students express themselves in Turkish and therefore build effective communication with their Turkish peers and teachers. Furthermore, they may become more successful in other academic courses when attending mainstream classes. This may affect these students' adaptation and integration positively as they may achieve to plan future educational trajectories. However, in order for these outcomes to occur, adaptation classes should be reshaped to increase Syrian students' interaction with Turkish students. Increasing interaction between students may positively affect Syrian students' relational integration. As these classes operate as preparatory classes, it may be recommended to sustain these classes after making arrangements that can enable more interaction, socialization, and integration among students. Separating classes and placing Syrian students in them may foster a sense of segregation.

The results of the study indicated that mainstream classes should continue because these classes facilitate the socialization of Syrian students. Mainstreaming seems to contribute to relational integration more as it can foster cohesion in the classroom. Syrian and Turkish students can directly observe and learn about each other's cultures. The language problem may still challenge Syrian students who are not proficient in Turkish, but they will find themselves with opportunities to practice Turkish. We propose that strengthening relational integration relies much on practitioners. School principals and teachers should launch school and classroom-level projects to build a socially-rich

environment based on mutual understanding, recognition, and respect. Moreover, as the results of research implicated, the integration systems need further modifications to strengthen their infrastructures including instructional resources and materials and teachers' professional status. The success and effectiveness of both integration practices require a multi-faceted approach to integration. Further research may reveal novel understandings when the integration practices are examined from the eyes of Syrian students attending the integration practices.

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Appendix

Interview protocol

1. What do you think of adaptation classes? Are these classes necessary for Syrian students' education? Why?

2. When you think about mainstreaming and adaptation classes, what can you say about the contributions of each practice?

3. What limitations does each practice have? Why?

4. What do you think of the role of mainstreaming and adaptation classes in terms of the educational integration of Syrian students?

5. Which practice (mainstreaming or adaptation classes) is more effective/beneficial for integration? Why?

6. How do you evaluate these practices in terms of school adaptation and social cohesion? Why?

7. How should integration be ensured? How may the integration of Syrian schoolchildren be more effective?