

# Viewpoints of Teachers and Syrian Immigrant Students about the Impact Of the Communication Model on Academic Success in Primary Schools

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## ABSTRACT

In this study, it is aimed to evaluate the positive or negative effects of the communication model applied in primary school classrooms on the academic success of Syrian immigrant students from the perspective of teachers and students. Therefore, the case study method, which is a qualitative research method, was preferred. The study group of the research is Syrian immigrant students enrolled at primary schools in the cities of Gaziantep and Hatay of Turkey and teachers working in schools where these students receive education. The perspectives of 22 students who immigrated from Syria and 15 teachers were collected using a semi-structured interview form. The data obtained from the semi-structured interview form were analyzed with the NVivo R1 Program. As a result of the research, it was concluded that especially the academic achievements of the students were negatively affected due to the fact that they did not know the Turkish Language. It has been revealed that school stakeholders must first solve the communication problem of immigrant students by acting in cooperation. The communication skills of the teachers and the fact that they are equipped in terms of immigrant students enable them to find solutions more easily when faced with any problem in the educational institutions where they work. This will have a positive reflection on the success of both teachers and students.

**Keywords:** Communication, Academic Success, Immigrant Students, Schools

## INTRODUCTION

Mankind, who is a social being by nature, shows a strong tendency for socialization. Therefore, it can be stated that communication is an important element of an individual's life. Communication is a polyphonic concept. Therefore, when the literature on the subject is reviewed, very different or similar definitions of the concept in question can be found. In general, the concept stands out with the meaning of "message conveyance". Communication, which is defined as an action or series of actions, is a process within the structure in question. The definition of the notion, which is believed to contain general meanings, is the exchange of messages that takes place with or without a purpose in order to convey conscious or unconscious thoughts and feelings (Sür and Delice, 2016). It is a basic need for the individual to be able to explain something to the other person or to be able to understand it in the same way during effective communication, both in his private life and in his professional life. However, in this way, it is possible for the person to express himself correctly by keeping up with social life and finding solutions to the problems that may arise. As a matter of fact, if there is no healthy communication, unhappy, excluded, lonely and unsuccessful individuals may emerge.

Individuals working in professions where people are in contact with other people more have to manage the communication process better. Considering the educational process, which is a communication activity in itself, the healthy execution of this process depends on an effective communication between the teacher and the student.

The attitude of the teacher while communicating with the students in the classroom, listening to them without interrupting them, giving constructive feedback while listening, being able to be heard while speaking, using clear and understandable expressions, and being respectful to different ideas are the main behaviors expected from the teacher (Aksungur, 2018). In addition, according to Pehlivan (2005), using the language correctly, using clear and understandable expressions, being fair to everyone, speaking the appropriate language, having knowledge of the field, choosing suitable physical environments, being tolerant and understanding, empathizing, loving students and the profession, being friendly, and using appropriate body language are the basic communication skills that teachers should possess. Therefore, by ensuring that students are included in a

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learning environment where effective communication can be established, increasing the quality of education and enabling them to acquire the desired behaviors also increases academic success. The failure of the teacher to establish a healthy communication with the student in the classroom may lead the student to become alienated from the lesson and negatively affect the academic success in the respective course.

However, despite the fact that there is unlimited communication opportunity under today's conditions, it is seen that not enough importance is given to communication with foreign students, especially in primary education, which is the first step of education, and many teachers cannot use their communication skills effectively (to the degree they have) with their students. Noise pollution occurs due to the language that such students cannot understand, so a healthy communication cannot be established. It should be aimed to endear the school, education and teacher to the students at the primary education level, which is the basic building block of the education system. Unfortunately, many teachers have little knowledge about the factors that facilitate communication or often overlook them. Many problems arise due to not considering intercultural differences. In particular, individuals who have cultures that differ in terms of value judgments, norms and lifestyles have difficulty in understanding and interpreting these differences, and even as a result of this, misunderstandings may arise. Differences in ideas, thoughts and behaviors arising from multiculturalism can cause communication and adaptation problems among individuals (Yeşil, 2009).

However, despite the fact that there are unlimited communication opportunities under today's conditions, it is seen that not enough importance is given to communication with foreign students, especially in primary education, which is the first step of education, and many teachers cannot use their communication skills effectively (to the degree they have) with their students. Noise pollution occurs due to the language that such students cannot understand, so a healthy communication cannot be established. It should be aimed to endear the school, education and teacher to the students in the primary education level, which is the basic building block of the education system. Unfortunately, many teachers do not know the factors that facilitate communication or

are often overlooked. Many problems arise due to the fact that intercultural differences are not taken into account. In particular, individuals who have cultures that differ in terms of value judgments, norms and lifestyles have difficulty in understanding and interpreting these differences, and even as a result of this, misunderstandings may arise. Differences in ideas, thoughts and behaviors arising from multiculturalism can cause communication and adaptation problems among individuals (Yeşil, 2009).

Communication process has been handled and studied from different perspectives by many researchers. In this paper, various communication models are examined in order to examine them on a theoretical basis, and decision was made to use the Shannon-Weaver Communication Model. The reason for choosing the model in question is that it contains the basic features in the field of communication, it describes the communication process in general terms, and therefore the model is suitable for an approach from the perspective of classroom communication. This linear model of communication was put forward by Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver.

As seen in Figure 1, the message that originates from an information source is turned into a transmitter signal. The sent signal becomes a received signal via a channel. Then this signal is transferred to the destination by passing to the receiver/decoder unit. At this point, the source of the message is the information source. The message or information from the source passes to a sender and the sender transmits the signal to a channel or communication medium. The message, which turns into a signal through the said channel, reaches the receiver and then to the destination through the receiver. The most distinctive feature that distinguishes this model from others is the "noise source" element. The characteristics of the communication medium affect the interpretation of the process. Therefore, any factor that may prevent the transmission of the message during communication is defined as "noise". Noise prevents the message from reaching the target clearly and accurately (Bulduklu & Karaçor, 2019). In addition, this model has been subjected to many criticisms due to its linearity. The underlying reason for this is that communication is a two-sided process and if one of the communicating

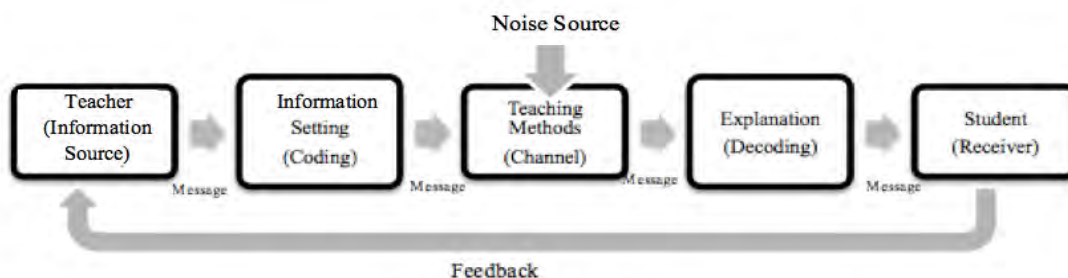


Fig. 1: Shannon-Weaver's Model of Communication (Sür and Delici 2018, p. 73)

parties is active and the other is passive, communication may reach a breaking point (Ulutaşdemir, 2007). In this context, the fact that both the sender and the receiver are active in the communication process brings continuity and dynamism to the communication. In order to achieve this, the model was redesigned by adding a feedback element to the communication process.

Wherever there are people, there is live activity, hence communication. In this context, as mentioned before, the communication environment in the classroom mostly consists of teachers and students. In traditional education-teaching environments, the teacher assumes the roles of a processor, a source of information and a sender of information. In the communication process, the sender is a unit that encodes the message or information for certain purposes and transmits it to the receiver. Therefore, coding in the teaching process is reflected as the teacher's task of transferring knowledge. This piece of information, which is seen as a message, is accepted as a channel through the methods and techniques used by the teacher. It is seen that students are in a receptive position at the point of taking certain information through their sense organs and giving it meaning. In educational environments, students' reactions are expressed as feedback. As it gives the model a cyclical nature, students' feedback gains more and more meaning with each passing day. The feedback element closely affects the purpose and efficiency of the communication process (Yıldırım, 2003). In addition, students and teachers are negatively affected in a noisy classroom, and some problems and different perceptions are experienced in the communication process, because the information-based message reaches its intended target differently. Therefore, it is very important at this point to identify the factors that cause noise and seek solutions first.

Effective communication in the classroom leads to the training of successful students with the right personalities. Therefore, teachers need to have effective communication skills. Therefore, the cities of Gaziantep and Hatay, which are highly populated, have a student population with a wide and diverse cultural background. With this population change, teachers have to face the crucial task of discovering new methodologies in order to better communicate with their students who speak different languages. In this context, within the scope of the research, it will be tried to reveal how and to what extent the communication model applied for foreign students at primary school level affects students and their school achievement. Another importance of the research is that the participants can determine the causes of the source (noise) that lies at the root of the problems in the applied communication model and offer the opportunity to evaluate themselves. Adequate studies have not been conducted on the effects of the communication model applied at primary school levels of educational institutions in Gaziantep and

Hatay on foreign students, teachers who need to be in constant communication with them, and other school stakeholders. Therefore, it is believed that the results of this study can shed light and create a resource for educators. Thus, the aim of the research is to evaluate the positive or negative effects of the communication model applied in primary school classrooms on the academic achievement of Syrian immigrant students from the perspective of teachers and students. Moving from this direction, the following sub-objectives were determined depending on the main objective:

1. According to teachers' opinions;
  - a. What are the attitudes, behaviors and reactions of Turkish students towards Syrian immigrant students?
  - b. How does a compliance problem between students from two different cultures affect the academic success of immigrant students?
  - c. What are the communication-related problems experienced with immigrant students in the classroom?
2. According to students' opinions;
  - a. What are the difficulties of living in Turkey?
  - b. How does the life style in Turkey and Syria show similarities? Is there cultural harmony between both countries?
  - c. What are the communication-related problems experienced as an "immigrant student" in the classroom?

## METHOD

### Model of the Research

This study has been designed with case study model which is a qualitative research method. The method in question is described as defining and analyzing the existing problems within a limited system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In addition, the research was planned in the phenomenology pattern as it aims to examine a phenomenon in depth. Phenomenological approaches focus on how an individual or group experience is defined and how this definition is expressed (Patton, 2002). Therefore, questioning the experiences of the participants in the classroom communication process forms the basis of this research.

### Study Group

The study group of the research is the students who immigrated from Syria that study in primary schools in Gaziantep and Hatay provinces and the teachers that work in the schools where these students receive education, who were determined by the criterion sampling method. The focus of the criterion sampling method is to include the situations that correspond

to the criteria chosen before initiating the research. The said criteria can be arranged by the researchers or sample criteria can be used (Teddle & Yu, 2007). In the study, three criteria were applied to determine the students: being Syrian immigrants, volunteering to participate in the research, and being accessible. In addition, three criteria were chosen in the determination of teachers: Syrian immigrant students studying in the schools where the participants work, being accessible, and volunteering. In this context, the study group of the research consists of 22 Syrian students studying in primary schools in Gaziantep and Hatay provinces and 15 teachers in the schools where these students' study. While giving examples from the views of the participants, coding was conducted using the letters (T) denoting the teacher and (S) denoting the student.

### Data Collection Tool and Application

The research was planned with the semi-structured interview technique in order to obtain the opinions of the participants. Before preparing the form, similar studies in the field were examined, and opinions were sought from two different faculty members, an education administration and supervision specialist, and an assessment and evaluation specialist, regarding the content of the questions. A language expert was also consulted to check the intelligibility of the questions. Afterwards, a pilot study of the interview questions was performed and the interview form was given its final form with minor changes. The semi-structured interview technique used in the research has a more flexible structure compared to other interview techniques. Researchers prepare pre-planned interview questions and can change the flow with sub-questions about the course of the interview during the interview (Karasar, 2020). Prior to the research, the Near East University Research Ethics Committee was consulted and an ethics report was obtained for the data collection tool planned to be used. Then, the necessary permissions were obtained from the Ministry of National Education for the interviews and the research was launched. The study group was first informed that participation in the research was completely voluntary, and it was stated in the written informed consent form that the data obtained would only be used within the framework of this research and that the research would be conducted in accordance with the ethics of confidentiality. In line with the permissions obtained from the participants, 45-50 minutes of audio recordings were taken during the interview and converted into written text as is, without any intervention to the recordings.

### Analysis of Data

The analysis of the face-to-face interview data was carried out both manually and using the NVivo R1 program. In this way, the consistency of the obtained codes, categories and themes

was also tested. The data obtained were processed into the program in question and the frequency values of the answers given by the participants to the questions were determined. Thus, the processed data is presented with tables in order to make it easier to understand and interpret.

### Evaluation of Findings for the First Main Objective

#### Evaluation of Findings for the First Sub-Objective

The answers given by the teachers to the question "What are the attitudes, behaviors and reactions of Turkish students towards Syrian immigrant students" are shown in Table 1.

When the opinions of the teachers on the subject are examined in Table 1, it is seen that the majority emphasizes the theme of "Exclusion". However, in connection with the aforementioned question, the theme of "There is no problem between students" was expressed by 3 participants. The themes of "Discrimination and compliance problems", "Conflict and fight", "Reaction due to communication" and "Reactive behavior" were expressed by 2 participants each. The theme of "not wanting to communicate" was also mentioned by only 1 person. Sample comments on the above question are given below:

"They do not want to include Syrian students." (T, 5)

"Turkish students in our class do not have a prominent negative attitude, behavior or reaction towards Syrian children." (T, 10)

"They are inclined to fight due to the current immigration." (T, 12)

When we look at the general results, it has come to the fore that Turkish students exclude immigrant students and therefore conflicts occur due to not being able to communicate properly. Similarly, in Gender's (2017) research, it was concluded that immigrant students have difficulties and are excluded due to main reasons such as the school's climate, environment, and language and curriculum differences.

#### 3.1.2. Evaluation of Findings for the Second Sub-Objective

The answers given to the question "How does a compliance problem between students from two different cultures affect the academic success of immigrant students?" are shown in Table 2.

**Table 1:** Attitudes, Behaviors and Reactions to Syrian Migrant Students

Theme	Teacher Opinions	
	N	%
Discrimination and Compliance Issues	2	11,6
Conflict and Fight	2	11,6
Exclusion	5	29
Not wanting to communicate	1	5,8
Reaction due to Communication	2	11,6
No Problem Among Students	3	17,4
Reactive Behavior	2	11,6

**Table 2:** The Effect of Adjustment Problem on Academic Achievement of Migrant Students

Theme	Teacher Opinions	
	N	%
I Didn't Observe a Problem	1	4,5
They Have Difficulty Learning Languages	1	4,5
Communication Problem	1	4,5
They don't want to come to school	1	4,5
Adversely Affecting	10	45
Adaptation Difficulty	7	31,5

When the opinions of the teachers on the subject are examined in Table 2, it was seen that nearly half of them expressed the theme of "It affects negatively". In addition, 7 participants conveyed the theme of "Adaptation difficulty". The themes of "I did not observe a problem", "They have difficulty in learning a language", "Communication problem" and "They do not want to come to school" were expressed by only 1 person each. Sample comments on the above question are given below:

*"Yes, I think that their academic achievements were negatively affected due to the fact that they are two different cultures." (T, 15)*

*"They are negatively affected, but I think the main reason for the problems is that immigrant families are unfamiliar with the Turkish National Education system and the understanding of education." (T, 6)*

*"Due to the cultural differences of the two countries, there is a difficulty in compliance." (T, 1)*

In his research, Greene (1998) concluded that as a result of living in a different society, foreign children received lower scores in educational tests than other children due to the insufficient foreign language they learned, and therefore they were academically unsuccessful. Likewise, in Çelik's (2018) study, it was revealed that Syrian immigrant students experienced academic failure because they had too much difficulty in following their courses.

**Table 3.** Problems Experienced Due to Communication

Theme	Teacher Opinions	
	N	%
Avoidant Behaviors	1	4,3
Non-Compliance to the Order	2	8,6
Lack of Empathy	1	4,3
Cultural difference	3	12,9
Ignorance and Attention Deficit	2	8,6
I'm not having problems	3	12,9
They Don't Share Their Problems	1	4,3
Lack of Knowledge of Turkish Language Completely	8	34,4
Differences in Lifestyle	2	8,6

### Evaluation of Findings for the Third Sub-Objective

The answers given by the teachers to the question "What are the communication-related problems experienced with immigrant students in the classroom" are shown in Table 3.

Considering the opinions of the participants on the above question in Table 3, the majority of them focused on the theme of "lack of knowledge of the Turkish language completely". 3 participants each expressed the themes of "Cultural difference" and "I don't have any problems". In addition, 2 participants each underlined the themes of "Non-Compliance to the Order", "Ignorance and lack of attention" and "Lifestyle difference". The themes of "Behaving shy", "Not being able to empathize" and "They do not share their problems" were emphasized by only 1 participant each. Sample opinions of some participants are given below:

*"They cannot explain themselves, they do not understand what Turkish students are saying. This is why there are problems." (T, 1)*

*"There is a language problem because of the cultural and educational difference between the countries of Syria and Turkey, and that's why we have a communication problem." (T, 7)*

*"Children do not have order in the classroom, they do not conform to order very well." (T, 4)*

In general, according to participant opinions, it was stated that immigrant students did not speak Turkish well, acted shyly due to language and cultural differences, did not comply with the order, could not empathize, and could not share the problems they experienced. Contrary to the findings of this paper, in the study conducted by Seymen and Tok (2015), it was found that foreign students learning Turkish as a second language are in a more advantageous position than others due to their familiarity with the target culture they are in.

### Evaluation of Findings for the Second Main Objective

#### Evaluation of Findings for the First Sub-Objective

The answers given by the students to the question "What are the difficulties of living in Turkey" are shown in Table 4.

When the views of the students on the subject are examined in Table 4, it is seen that the majority of them underline the theme of "I have difficulty in learning Turkish, communicating and understanding the class". However, in connection with the question in question, the theme "I do not experience any difficulties" was expressed by 5 participants. While the theme of "the cost of living" was expressed by 3 people, the theme of "I have problems with Turkish students" was emphasized by 2 participants each. The themes of "Shopping", "Tradition difference", "I have problems with everything", "there is too much theft" and "Violence by students" were also mentioned

**Table 4:** Difficulties of Living in Turkey

Theme	Student Opinions	
	N	%
Shopping	1	3,7
Tradition Custom Difference	1	3,7
Cost of Living	3	11,1
I do not experience any difficulties	5	18,5
I'm Having Trouble With Everything	1	3,7
There is too much theft	1	3,7
Violence by Students	1	3,7
I Have Problems with Turkish Students	2	7,4
I Have Difficulty Learning Turkish, Communication and Understanding the Class	12	44,4

by only 1 person each. Some of the participant views regarding this table are as follows:

*"The only problem I have is not being able to use the Turkish language and not being able to communicate with people." (P, 8)*

*"I don't have any difficulties here." (P, 20)*

*"I think of the difficulty that life here brings to us as the cost of living." (P, 9)*

In general, most of the students stated that they had difficulty in learning Turkish and understanding the class, and that they had difficulties in shopping, differences in tradition, being exposed to violence from other students, and theft. Some students stated that they had no problems at all. Likewise, in the research of Güngör and Şenel (2018), it was stated that there is a language and culture incompatibility, inability to understand the language and therefore falling behind the curriculum, and as a result, there are problems such as academic failure.

#### *Evaluation of Findings for the Second Sub-Objective*

The answers given by the students to the question "Does the life style in Turkey and the life style in Syria show similarities? Is there cultural harmony between the two countries?" are presented in Table 5.

As seen in Table 5, two contrasting themes stand out in the students' views on the above question: "We have a difference in culture and life" and "There is no difference". The theme of "The lifestyle in my own country was better" was also expressed by 4 participants. In addition, the themes of "We feel lonely because our relatives are not here", "I have no idea" and "There is equality gender equality in Turkey" were mentioned by only 1 person each. Some of the participants' views on this question are as follows:

*"There are differences in our cultures and lifestyles." (P, 7)*

**Table 5:** Lifestyle of the Two Countries

Theme	Student Opinions	
	N	%
We Feel Alone Because Our Relatives Are Not Here	1	4,3
I have no idea	1	4,3
No Difference	8	34,7
The Lifestyle in My Home Country Was Better	4	17,3
We Have Differences in Culture and Life	8	34,7
There is Gender Equality in Turkey	1	4,3

**Table 6:** Communication-Related Problems

Theme	Student Opinions	
	N	%
Behaviors	4	16,4
Language problem	15	61,5
Fight	1	4,1
No Trouble	2	8,2
They Don't Like Syrians	1	4,1
Transportation Trouble	1	4,1

*"I don't think there are any differences between my country and here." (P, 16)*

*"I was living a very good life in Syria, our life in Turkey is worse" (S, 3)*

As can be understood from the participant statements above, immigrant students generally have difficulties in adapting to Turkish society due to the different cultures, languages and lifestyles. On the other hand, despite such differences, some participants said that there was no difference. As a matter of fact, when the studies in the literature (Güngör & Şenel, 2018; Levent & Çayak, 2018) are examined, it is seen that in general, Syrian immigrant students have difficulties in adapting to Turkish society because the lifestyles are different from each other.

#### *Evaluation of Findings for the Third Sub-Objective*

The opinions of the students regarding the question of "What are the communication-related problems experienced as an "immigrant student" in the classroom" are given in Table 6.

When the opinions of the students on the subject are examined in Table 6, more than half of them emphasized the "Language problem" theme. However, in connection with the question, the theme of "Behaviors" was expressed by 4 participants. While the theme of "There is no problem" was expressed by 2 people, the themes of "Fight", "They do not like Syrians" and "Transportation problems" were also mentioned by 1 participant each. Some of the participant's views on this question are as follows:

*"I suffer from the behavior of my teachers and students in the school." (S, 18)*

"I have a problem with not being able to understand the Turkish language during the training given in the lessons." (S, 5)

According to the statements of the participants above, it has been revealed that especially the students experience serious difficulties because they cannot fully understand Turkish, and that the language is actually the biggest problem in their education. According to the research conducted by Kirmayer et al. (2011), it was observed that even the mental health of foreign students was negatively affected as a result of language problems. In the study conducted by Alagöz and Geçgil (2016), it is seen that the biggest problem faced by refugee students is language problem. Similarly, in Uzun and Tüm's (2016) study, it was determined that foreign students experience serious problems in schools because they do not know Turkish, they cannot communicate with their teachers and friends at the level they want, and they are not happy with this situation.

## CONCLUSION

Although Turkey is a country that constantly receives immigration due to its location, it is known that Syrian immigrants are the most highly populated group among those who come to the country. Therefore, Turkey is experiencing some problems in connection with the immigrations it has received. Probably the most important of these problems is education. As a result of this research, it has been seen that Syrian immigrant students studying at primary schools in Gaziantep and Hatay experience considerable problems both academically and socially, such as not being able to communicate, not understanding the language, being excluded, facing discrimination, and not being able to develop a sense of belonging. In general, it has been understood that teachers are not sufficiently informed about these students and that they are not given enough support to raise their awareness or to educate them on this subject. It was understood that some sensitive teachers provided extra support to these students in their classrooms by sacrificing the time allocated to them, and the students were satisfied with their teachers because of this attitude. However, it has been revealed that these students do not find their educational opportunities sufficient and that they are not satisfied with it. Based on the results of the research, suggestions can be made to increase language education for these students, to help meet the needs of these students by establishing more contact with their families, and to give more importance to social activities and guidance education in order to solve the language and communication problem.

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