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## Opinions of Education Faculty Students about Refugees in Turkey

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## Opinions of Education Faculty Students about Refugees in Turkey

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### Abstract

Migration has been a constant in human history, presenting various economic, social, and cultural challenges. The integration of immigrants into society, particularly in terms of language and education, plays a crucial role in fostering social harmony. While Turkey has made progress in its integration policies, challenges persist, including socio-cultural and economic disparities among refugees. This study aimed to explore the perspectives of education faculty students on the refugee situation in Turkey, revealing insights into foreign policy, sustainability, territorial integrity, and safety concerns. The study was conducted using the qualitative research design of a case study method. 55 teacher candidates participated voluntarily, and their views on refugees living in Turkey were obtained through focus group interviews. Participants emphasized the need for stable foreign policies and highlighted language education as essential for successful integration. They expressed apprehensions about the potential security risks associated with refugees and advocated for greater societal awareness and proactive measures. Ultimately, addressing the refugee issue requires both policy adjustments and heightened societal sensitivity.

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### Introduction

There has been immigration in the world since the creation of humanity. IOM (International Organization for Migration) defines the concept of migration as "it is a population movement in which individuals or societies, in any state, move across international borders regardless of duration or causes." UN (2019) also defines immigrants as individuals who cross any international border regardless of causes, kind, and duration or must stay in another place. The refugee is a concept used to determine the status of a person who leaves their country as a result of being persecuted due to their religion, language, ethnicity, or political opinion ([www.goc.gov.tr](http://www.goc.gov.tr), 2023). While it is described as moving individuals or societies from one place to another place, there are many problems. These problems can be economic, social, or cultural. The international way of overcoming these problems is to determine countries of migration policies. It must involve actions related to adaptation and integration. Integration is to harmonize the total of society as part of common values and norms, to gain the total from parts, and to adapt social groups to the whole (Martikainen & Özmen, 2010).

Integration is a phenomenon that includes complicated processes. It refers to the adaption to the social structure of their new country from legal status to education, from the labor market to cultural life (Yaylı & Aslan, 2023). It seems that successful and positive integration is clearly reflected in strong interethnic relations (Coşkun, 2019).

The immigration and Integration Policies Index has been measuring countries' integration policies towards immigrants since 2004. In the 2020 index, the effectiveness of integration policies for immigrants in the labor market, education, access to citizenship, establishing family ties, health, and permanent settlement of 52 different countries were measured. Looking at the measurement results; It has been observed that the Republic of Turkey has made significant progress in integration policies between 2014 and 2019. The Republic of Turkey was considered a "receiver of immigrants" with 26 points in the measurement made in 2014. But it is in the category of countries with "no integration policy". By 2019, it increased to 43 points, becoming a "country with comprehensive integration policies" and making significant progress in this field. Although progress has been made in the areas of health and education, it is noteworthy that progress has been made in areas such as political participation, the labor market, and the fight against discrimination. (Yaylı & Aslan, 2023).

Despite all these positive data, there are many social problems related to refugees in Turkey. For instance, it is a study in Elazığ, shows that Syrian immigrants' social class and level of economic development while they were in Syria directly affected their socio-cultural and economic integration into Turkish society (Polat & Yılmaz, 2021). Besides, it seems that there are many problems with sheltering, health, education, and women's problems (Aktaş, 2018). When the problems experienced are examined in detail, it can be said that the problems are both a humanitarian problem and an internal security issue for Türkiye (Kaya, 2021; Yener & Ulucan, 2021; Barın, 2023). Research is either on local problems or on a general review. There is a limited number of studies on the subject covering the experience of university students. This study aims to provide a global and local perspective on the existing literature. It is expected to contribute to the literature by revealing the global and local perspectives of university students.

As a part of this global problem, it is aimed to learn the perspectives of young people living in Turkey on the refugee problem at the local level. This study aims to learn education faculty students' opinions about refugees in Turkey. It is trying to find answers to these questions in this study:

1. What kind of evaluation do they make in terms of Turkish foreign policy?
2. What kind of assessment do they make in terms of sustainability?
3. What kind of assessment do they make in terms of territorial integrity?
4. How do they evaluate their safety?

## **Method**

In the research, a case study design was used because it was desired to learn the thoughts of teacher candidates about refugees. In the research, a case study design was used because it was desired to learn the thoughts of teacher candidates about refugees. A qualitative case study is a detailed and holistic description and analysis of a single person entity, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 1988). Yin (2018) emphasized that the case study as a research design is unique and should not be compared to a post-test design based on a single data, which is one of the quasi-experimental designs. In this study, a holistic single-case design was used. Because there is only one unit to work with, this unit is for social studies teacher candidates. 3rd and 4th grade students studying social studies teaching; They took courses covering current events such as today's world problems and the Turkish

economy. For this reason, it was deemed appropriate to collect data from social studies teacher candidates in the survey.

### **Data Collection Tool**

A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool in the study. Data were collected through focus group interviews and long-term interviews lasting 1-1.5 hours. Voice recording was made throughout the interview, and the participants' consent was obtained verbally following ethical principles.

### **Analysis of Data**

Content analysis was used in data analysis. In the content analysis, all of the participants' conversations were transcribed and appropriate themes were revealed by considering the research questions. Maxquada Qualitative data analysis program was used in data analysis to convert it into tables and graphs.

### **Validity and Reliability**

According to Patton (2002), validity and reliability have been replaced by credibility in qualitative research. The applicability of research results is more important than mathematical calculations. In this study, an attempt was made to obtain appropriate data with the research results by making use of the existing literature. Parallel to Patton's thought, Ratcliffe (1983) states that in qualitative research, the reality itself is interpreted instead of measurable things such as symbols and numbers. In other words, abstract and symbolic representations of reality can be interpreted.

Merriam (2013) thinks that reality in qualitative research is holistic, multidimensional, and continuously variable. Therefore, the data collected and the reality from which they are obtained cannot be compared with each other. The reality obtained in this research is the impact of refugees on young people in Turkey. In terms of internal validity, some strategies were used to consolidate the findings: For example, analyses were conducted by more than one researcher, and a theoretical framework was drawn together with the analyses. This framework was limited to globalization and transnational crime. Thus, it was aimed to provide a real vision of participant experiences. In addition, the fact that the study group was selected from the groups that constitute the political and religious majority in Turkey increased the realism of the research.

### **Study Group**

55 teacher candidates participated in the research voluntarily. All participants are social studies teacher candidates. According to Table 1, the study group has 55 people. It contains 39 females and 16 males. We would like to know their Political opinions and religions. They gave many answers. Conservative is at least (1) in the political opinion, the most answer (18) is also left-winger. When we examined the answer to religion, we can say the least answers are Atheist, The Other Abrahamic Religions, and Don't want to mention (1). The most answer is Sunni Muslim

(50). The Sunni Muslim is ubiquitous in Anatolia. Therefore, the study group shows the specifics of Anatolia in that religion.

Table 1. Study Group

| Variables  |                               | N  | Mean |
|------------|-------------------------------|----|------|
| Department | Social Studies                | 55 | 100  |
| Gender     | Male                          | 16 | 33   |
|            | Female                        | 39 | 67   |
|            | Total                         | 55 | 100  |
| Political  | Conservative                  | 1  | 1.8  |
| Opinion    | Right-winger                  | 2  | 3.6  |
|            | Hesitant                      | 3  | 5.4  |
|            | None                          | 5  | 9.09 |
|            | Don't want to mention         | 13 | 23.2 |
|            | Nationalist                   | 13 | 23.2 |
|            | Left-winger                   | 18 | 32.1 |
| Religion   | Sunni Muslim                  | 50 | 89.3 |
|            | Shia Muslim                   | 2  | 3.6  |
|            | Atheist                       | 1  | 1.8  |
|            | The Other Abrahamic Religions | 1  | 1.8  |
|            | Don't want to mention         | 1  | 1.8  |

## Results

In this study, foreign policy, sustainability, territorial integrity, and safeness were content analyzed.

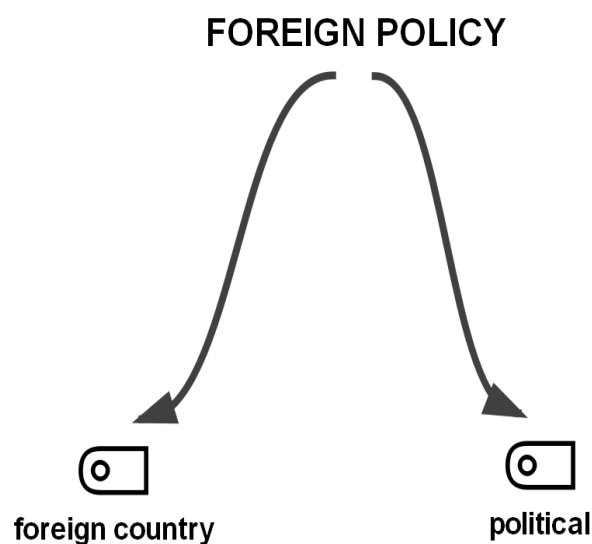


Figure 1. Hierarchical Code Theory Model of Views on Foreign Policy

Teacher candidates stated that the refugee problem could be addressed in the context of foreign policy. However, they also think that this policy may be variable. In other words, they think that it is structured in line with the interests of the country and people. They compared the situation of especially European immigrants in Turkey regarding the improvement or renewal of this policy. There are citizens from different ethnic backgrounds, including German, British, French, and Ukrainian, in Turkey. They stated that these people have different situations in Turkey regarding Turkish foreign policy. In this direction, when Figure 1 is analyzed, prospective teachers expressed two views on foreign policy: foreign country and political.

*"there was a war between Russia and Ukraine. Russians came to Ukraine to settle, for instance. But now, no one in Ukraine has a negative attitude towards Russians."* (GROUP 1 CLASS4).

*"When we see Ukrainians, we don't run away. But when we see 3-5 Afghans..."* (GROUP 3 CLASS4).

They said it is a political problem. It can change over time:

*"There's also this thing. I saw it in the news once. They were opening a border gate for such a group of refugees. Just like that, only men and young men, all of them entering the country like this. It looked very scary, for example."* (GROUP 3 CLASS3).

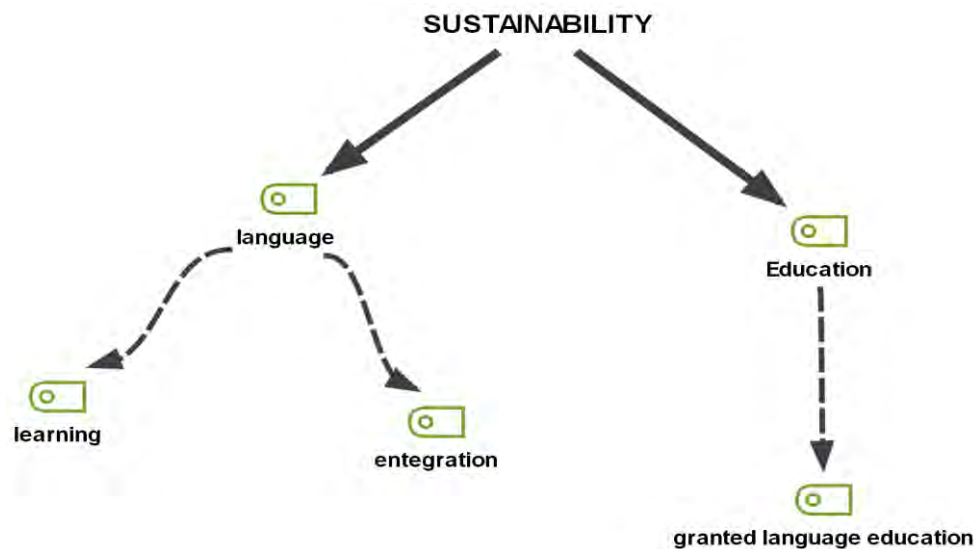


Figure 2. Views on Sustained Determination Hierarchical Code Theory Model

Teacher candidates discussed the refugee problem related to sustainability in terms of language and education. Accordingly, language learning will affect the integration processes and learning of refugees. Participants stated that the learning process should not turn into a privileged language education, otherwise there would be no social harmony. They did not approve of another teacher who speaks the language translating in the classroom or their peers translating that language. In this direction, according to Figure 2, pre-service teachers expressed 2 different views on sustainability: language and education.

"When I am teaching in a class where foreign national students are in the majority... I can offer extracurricular courses, like language classes, but I cannot teach them myself. So, I can discuss this with the principal or others at the school and invite someone who is capable of teaching language to come in." (GROUP 1 CLASS3).

"Already, I will make it compulsory. I mean, this shouldn't be just for refugees, but it should be mandatory for Turkish youth as well, the language issue. I mean, when most people can't even speak our own language properly, why should we even talk about language skills for refugees, right? Firstly, the education system should completely change now. I mean, it's getting worse even as it's supposed to get better. Universities are already open to everyone. Now, when we talk about educational equality, there are small differences in education." (GROUP 2 CLASS3)

The prospective teachers also explained the language requirement with different solutions:

"for such language conversion programs, we can provide them with earphones to listen to the translations." (GROUP 5 CLASS3).

Their opinions on language and learning ability were evaluated based on the student's competence in the teaching program:

"What I want to say about this is that all of the students in our school are already born in Turkey, so to speak, because, you know, since the time when Syrians first arrived or Afghans, it's been like 10 or 15 years, automatically all the middle school-level children were already born in Turkey. Speaking Turkish is not a problem for them, at least not for me. Yes, I don't know if they are experiencing any serious problems. I don't think they have any issues with Turkey's education program either because they haven't faced it at all. In fact, this might be the least challenging thing for them because they are not aware of the education program of the country they came from." (GROUP 5 CLASS4).

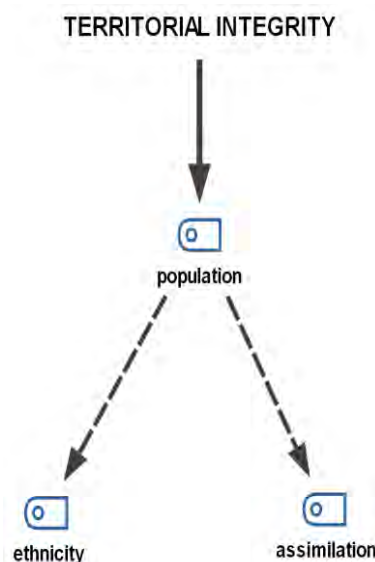


Figure 3. Views on Territorial Integrity Hierarchical Code Theory Model

Teacher candidates preferred to associate the refugee problem with ethnicity. They think that the refugee problem in Turkey has a one-sided, non-solution-oriented, and unscientific nature. For this reason, they expressed the opinion that refugees threaten Turkey's territorial integrity and that the policy in regulating social events is inconsistent and only takes into account the interests of immigrants. However, their solution seems to be forced acculturation, in other words, assimilation. They stated that refugees should learn elements of Turkish culture, especially the Turkish language. They stated that the fact that immigrants are increasingly becoming the majority of the population in Turkey and that they pose security risks in cities such as Hatay, Kilis, and Kahraman Maraş, which constitute Turkey's border regions, has a great impact on their thoughts. In this direction, according to Figure 3, pre-service teachers expressed 2 different views on population: ethnicity and assimilation. Regarding ethnicity, they thought especially in connection with Arab culture. They drew attention to the lives of Middle Eastern people:

*"Yeah, I don't know about that. Arab culture, religion, and history are very intertwined, you know, they're deeply connected."* (GROUP 1 CLASS 3).

*"I live in Gaziantep, you know there are many of them on that side. Generally, the men from our area take a Syrian woman as a second life."* (GROUP 3 CLASS 3).

*"They see children as a workforce, you know, they even prefer boys especially because they still have this mindset of 'let's have boys so our capital increases, so our family gets stronger.' As long as this mindset doesn't change, I don't think they can be of any benefit to us. I believe we need to completely assimilate them with tolerance, making them accept it".* (GROUP 5 CLASS 3).

*I mean, when we say assimilation, it's like completely forgetting, right? Are you saying that, like, they should forget that they are Arabs, that they should forget their culture?"* (GROUP 6 CLASS4).

*"They're causing us to assimilate. I mean, could we assimilate? If they don't take any measures to prevent it, if there are no precautions, I think we could, for example, in Iran, sir, the Turks there, I don't think they're Turkish anymore, they've become assimilated. For instance, Hilal said, 'We can't see Turkish signs.' If, for example, Arabic signs are not removed, neighborhoods will grow apart, one city from another, you know, this."* (GROUP 2, CLASS 3).



Figure 4. Views on the Safeness Hierarchical Code Theory Model



Teacher candidates stated that they saw their security in danger as refugees settled in Turkey. This security threat has been reinforced through both their personal experiences and the police incidents they hear from their social environment. Participants think that refugees are involved in crime in Turkey and that this crime is not local but threatens the country. In this direction, pre-service teachers expressed 2 different opinions about security: personal security and involvement in crime.

*"Sir, both men and women, there were a few photos, and videos. It's scary, you know, that's why now it's not a good image but a scary one. When you see them, you run away, like, if you see someone with a beard, you run away?" (GROUP 3 CLASS4).*

Some participants admitted the presence of prejudice regarding refugees.

*"I think the issue here is multifaceted. Let's say there's a generalization due to negative experiences, like if someone from a Syrian family comes and stabs someone, or harasses someone on the street, then a generalization forms. I'm always against the formation of such negative prejudices towards them." (GROUP 3 CLASS4).*

Pre-service teachers shared what they heard through the media and stated that the events were worrying:

*"There was a time when it was popular. It was on TV and in the news a lot, this girl... She was about to rape someone. At that moment, she was caught. I think her ID was recorded as she was trying to escape, but there was nothing. They took her directly to the police, but nothing could be found. There was no name or surname about them. If they commit such a crime, they will never be found. I mean, there are millions of people in Turkey, how will they find them, for example? That's why I think such people shouldn't be in our country. I'm saying she came here again now..." (GROUP 1 CLASS3).*

## **Discussion**

The rugged nature of Turkey's eastern borders creates a security problem and poses a threat regarding both migration and goods smuggling. One of the elements of welfare societies is security (Şahin, 2022). According to Buzan (1997), the concept of security is not only limited to the military field but also calls for urgent action in any sector and includes existing threats. Waever (1998), on the other hand, evaluates the concept of security as an area where states threaten each other, challenge each other's sovereignty, try to realize their will over each other, and at the same time protect their independence. A person who is not safe tries to ensure their safety. For this, the person can resort to illegal means. Protecting people's life security may damage the relations between the state and the citizens. For instance, the lack of security on the eastern border in Turkey has caused citizens to worry about their security. The majority of local people living in the border areas think that Turkey has a security weakness and that Syrians have a significant share in public order incidents (Yeşiltaş, 2018; Ekin & Yetkin, 2021). During globalization, organized crimes such as drug trafficking, money laundering, and terrorism have become national security problems. While during the Cold War, mafia activity was restricted, today mafia activity has

become global (Eker, 2008). Arms, drugs, and human trafficking have become a common problem in the whole world, especially in European countries. For example, it also known in the literature as the 2008 New Lines of Action, the European Council adopted the following recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the 2003 ESS (European Security Strategy) in practice:

- Submission of updated risk and threat assessment reports,
- Development of awareness-raising models for scientific, academic, and financial institutions,
- Assist third states in developing non-proliferation principles and export control reforms through intensified cooperation,
- Taking measures to combat know-how transfers through cooperation mechanisms,
- Intensify efforts to curb proliferation and proliferation trends, - Intensify efforts to combat financing for WMDs,
- Coordination with relevant regional and international organizations (New Lines for Action by the European Union in Combating the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Delivery Systems [New Lines of Action], 2008: 5-10 Cited. Küçük, 2021) Illegally obtained profit is a global threat. This threat has political, economic, and cultural consequences. In this study, cultural consequences are emphasized. Participants discussed the problems of refugees in language learning. The resistance of refugees to learning Turkish caused difficulties in cultural adaptation. As in the rest of the world, the language problem in Turkey causes problems between refugees and locals. We can see the impact of difficulties in learning the language of the host country on the integration of the local community and internal security.

Refugee students face various challenges such as resistance to learning, lack of motivation, truancy, and difficulties in adapting to school (Şahin, 2020). These problems stem from their inability to culturally assimilate. Given the direct relationship between learning and motivation, it is natural for this relationship to be present in refugee students as well. It is known that students struggle to adapt to the classroom, school, and community. One of the underlying causes of these issues is the difficulties encountered in language learning. Research has shown that language learning enhances communication and motivation (Çangal, 2022). The problems in language learning often arise from phonetic differences (Göçmenler & Türker, 2020). Additionally, challenges such as alphabet differences (Tunagür & Kardaş, 2021), the presence of idioms and proverbs, dialect variations, and the agglutinative nature of the Turkish language (Sur & Çalışkan, 2021) make learning Turkish as a foreign language difficult. This situation often leads to communication barriers and a decrease or complete loss of learning motivation. Students who have negative experiences related to school tend to experience affective issues. For instance, a study by Sarier (2020) found that Syrian refugees, who were trying to learn a new language but failed for various reasons, faced affective and socio-cultural issues such as social exclusion, trauma, forming cliques, and not adhering to classroom rules. Studies have shown that the attitude of the host country is crucial in language learning. In these studies, it has been found that when school administrators, teachers, parents, and students maintain a positive attitude toward refugee students, the issues between the two parties are reduced (Aydın & Kaya, 2020; Özmen, 2020; Backer, Raschke, Vieluf, Böse, Laschewski, Rauch & Stošić, 2023).

These problems have been attributed to quite temporary and different sociological reasons in the literature. For

example; according to Stein, refugees' "temporal dimension of adjustment" to the country of migration can vary within "the first few months," "the first one or two years," "four to five years later," and "10 years later." Accordingly, refugees who confront their losses in the first few months strive to regain what they have lost within a year or two. During this period, most refugees change their jobs and begin to move from the neighborhoods they initially settled into areas where refugees are more densely populated. After 4-5 years, refugees largely complete their adjustment process. Resistance and determination diminish, giving way to feelings of hopelessness, and individuals begin to accept changes in their lives and status. Over time, many become disillusioned and alienated. After ten years of permanent settlement, they are unwilling to accept a decline in status. Therefore, they have high expectations from institutions in their new country (Tunç, 2015). The participants in this study encountered refugees who showed more resistance. As a natural consequence of this, they argued that the refugees they encountered should adapt to them and emphasized that their problems were mostly due to their ethnic origin. These problems led them to question the ethnic origins of the refugees and showed that they had strong beliefs that the assimilation policy should be followed. For them, unsolvability has become a solution.

## **Conclusion**

In this study, we tried to understand the experiences and thoughts of teacher candidates regarding the refugee problem in Turkey. Teacher candidates generally argued that the refugee problem is related to the state's attitude toward foreign policy. Their thoughts about foreign policy being unstable and not giving priority to the citizens of the Republic of Turkey also strengthen their other arguments on the subject. For instance, They stated that this instability in foreign policy threatens Turkey's territorial integrity and that cities such as Kilis, Kahraman Maraş, and Hatay will mostly be populated by refugees, especially in the next 10 years. They stated that the danger to territorial integrity arises from the negative attitudes of refugees of different ethnicities. However, they think that refugees drag Turkey into uncertainty in terms of education, especially language education, regarding sustainable development. They stated that refugees who do not receive any education are more likely to become involved in crime, which threatens their life safety. Within the scope of this study, it can be said that young people in Turkey are pessimistic and unhappy about the future when it comes to refugees. It can be said that the participants are hopeless about their future as individuals, as well as about the sustainable development and territorial integrity of the country.

## **Recommendations**

- Courses in education faculties can be developed to enable students to acquire knowledge about foreign policy. This way, solution proposals can emerge for issues like the refugee crisis, which are discussed both locally and internationally. Workshops and educational sessions, where both refugees and host countries can participate, promoting mutual solutions and dialogues, should be encouraged. This opens up ways to prevent tensions and foster social cohesion.
- Areas where refugees and host community members can collaborate can be constructed. In these areas, individuals can come together to cultivate plants, engage in gardening, and share knowledge and ideas. These areas contribute to environmental sustainability, improve individuals' health, and raise

environmental awareness.

- Free, online language learning resources can be provided by universities, civil society organizations, and other educational institutions. Various language programs, where native language speakers can also be involved, will enable refugees to benefit from learning-enhancing and encouraging activities. Educational institutions that facilitate collaboration can also provide opportunities for practicing language learning through cultural activities. Assisting refugees in introducing their own cultures in both local languages and the language of the host country will help them gain experience.

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