

Evaluation of Refugee Education in Lithuania According to Teachers' Opinions¹

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This study evaluates the refugee education in Lithuania, focusing on the perspectives of teachers. Employing a qualitative case study approach, semi-structured interviews with 14 teachers were conducted to explore the challenges, strategies, and outcomes related to refugee education. The findings reveal that while Lithuanian schools facilitate academic and social integration, significant obstacles persist, including language barriers, war-induced psychological distress, and limited access to tailored resources. Teachers reported varied levels of cultural adaptation among refugee students, with Ukrainian and Belarusian students adapting more easily due to cultural proximity. Social activities and inclusive school environments contribute positively to integration, yet the lack of specific programs and materials tailored for refugees hinders progress. Recommendations include improving keyframe, enhancing teacher competencies, and fostering continuous engagement with refugee families. This research underscores the need for systematic policy reforms and resource development to support refugee education in Lithuania. It also provides recommendations that can be used for countries that are inexperienced in refugee education in a similar way.

Keywords: Lithuania, refugee education, integration, multicultural education, teacher

INTRODUCTION

Migration is defined as the temporary or permanent departure of people from their current places and their movement to other places. The location dimension of the phenomenon of migration is the displacement of the migrant in a direction within or outside his/her own country, regardless of distance. However, people moving from their homes and people changing their countries by fleeing from war or natural disasters are of course different phenomena (Lee, 1966, p. 50). Immigrants and refugees are connected concepts but unlike refugees, who are unable to safely return to their home countries, migrants have the option to return home if they choose.

When we think of refugees for Lithuania, Ukrainians come to mind. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began in February 2022, Lithuania has welcomed a large number of refugees relative to its population. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has created one of the largest humanitarian crises in recent European history, causing increased casualties, destruction and displacement both inside and outside Ukraine. Ukrainian civilians have been bombed and subjected to violence, and an estimated one-third of Ukrainians have been forced to flee their homes both at home and in neighbouring countries.

In the first period of the crisis, as of July 2022, more than 5.6 million Ukrainian refugees were registered in Europe, including in Poland (1,207,650), Germany (867,000), Turkey (145,000). In

¹ This study was produced from the data of the PhD thesis.

Lithuania, the number is around 70,000. Around 90% of them are women and children at higher risk of violence and abuse, including trafficking, smuggling and illegal adoption. While figures continue to vary, more than 2.5 million Ukrainians have returned home since the start of the Russian occupation (European Parliament, 2022). Nevertheless, more than these numbers are still living in different countries as refugees. Lithuania has taken the boldest steps in Europe in the Ukraine crisis. Currently, the Lithuanian government is facilitating Ukrainian refugees in many areas such as education, transportation and housing. In addition to cultural ties, the fear of being the next target of occupation is also effective in this high level of empathy.

It is necessary to consider the refugee situation in Lithuania before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which began in February 2022, as a milestone.

Lithuania and the Refugees Before Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

In Lithuania, in the last 20 years before 2017, around 700 people were granted refugee status and more than 500 people received subsidiary protection status in the country (Lithuanian Refugee Department, 2017). In 2015, Lithuania joined the European Commission's Emergency Relocation Program and faced with a large number of asylum seekers, the EU started the resettlement of foreigners in its member states (Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, 2018). During this period, Lithuania committed to receive 1,105 refugees and provided asylum to 460 people by the end of 2017. According to unofficial estimates of March 2018, about 349 asylum seekers left the country. In this period, it can be said that the Lithuanian state shows an abstentionist attitude towards refugees.

In the pre-Russian occupation period, the perception of refugees in society was also quite different. Despite the small number of refugees in Lithuania during this period, the social distance between the majority of the population and refugees was high. A public opinion poll conducted in 2017 shows that more than half of Lithuanian respondents agree that refugees are a burden for national taxpayers and a threat to social welfare and are therefore recognized as making a very limited contribution to the national economy and enrichment of culture. Moreover, another survey conducted in 2019, revealed that Lithuanians have an increasingly negative attitude towards refugees. 64% of respondents tend to see refugees as economic migrants rather than people fleeing persecution, compared to 44% in the same survey conducted in 2015. Moreover, similar to 2017, more than two-thirds of respondents think that refugees can increase crime rates and cause social problems (LRT.lt, 2019).

Lithuania's 2018-2030 Demography, Migration, and Integration Strategy aimed to create inclusive communities and better working and living conditions for foreigners. However, it primarily focused on promoting the return of Lithuanian citizens, highly skilled workers, and students, while excluding comprehensive strategies for international refugees (European Commission, 2024).

Lithuania and the Refugees in the Aftermath of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Lithuania is the country that showed the strongest reaction and took the boldest steps in the EU against the invasion of Ukraine. In a sense, Lithuania has an open-door policy for Ukrainian refugees, offering free transportation, accommodation and financial support for Ukrainians (vilnius.lt). In addition, the Lithuanian government announced that it relaxed the requirement to speak Lithuanian, which is mandatory for many sectors, for Ukrainian refugees and provided language exemption for Ukrainians under temporary protection status (TRT Haber, 2022).

It can be said that Lithuania, which was not favourable to accepting refugees before the Ukraine crisis, has changed this approach for Ukrainians. Lithuania, which committed to take in 1105 refugees before the invasion of Ukraine, hosts 90,780 refugees according to end-2024 data. More than 97% of this number are Ukrainians, with Russians in second place and Belarusians in third place (UNCHR, 2024b).

Common History of Lithuania - Ukraine

Lithuania and Ukraine share deep historical connections dating back to the 14th century. After the Battle of the Blue Waters (Lt. *Mūšis prie Mėlynųjų Vandenų*, Ukr. *Битва на Синіх Водах*), the Grand Duchy of Lithuania dominated the Principality of Kiev, influencing Lithuanian-Russian relations (Rowell, 1994, p. 97–100). This bond continued under the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Encyclopaedia of Ukraine, 2022). Following years of Russian control, both countries endured Soviet rule until gaining independence in 1991 (Snyder, 2002, p. 105).

Refugee Education

Refugee education is an increasingly important phenomenon for every country in today's world. Success in refugee education is vital for both host countries and refugees. Although some countries are more experienced with refugees than others, it is not possible to talk about a country that has overcome all problems in refugee education. Therefore, it would be helpful to outline the practices and shortcomings of countries with experience in refugee education in order to draw a framework for the subject.

Refugee Education in Germany

For more than fifty years, Germany has developed extensive experience and knowledge in the education of asylum-seeking and migrant children whose first language is different from German. The "Federal Integration Program" run by the Federal Office for migration and refugees plays a key role in migration management. This program focuses on the inclusion of asylum-seeking children in the education system, ensuring that they can continue their education, preventing early school drop-out, choosing a profession and participating in the labor force (Bendel, 2014, p. 5). In addition, practices such as building trust between the government and refugee groups, supporting community-building activities, transferring the benefits of inclusive policies to refugees and closely monitoring the effects of these policies are also prominent (Süssmuth, 2009, p. 1).

There are two models for the education of refugee children in Germany: In the first, refugee children are educated in the same classroom with other children; in the second, they are grouped according to age and educated separately from other students. For many years, especially at the primary school level, these education models have been provided for migrant children, especially those of Turkish origin. However, Germany needs to train more teachers and develop models for creating long-term learning environments to support newly arrived students (Dryden-Peterson, Adelman, & Nieswandt, 2016).

The problems in the education of refugee children in Germany can basically be evaluated around two main problems. The first one is the high number of refugee students with low language proficiency, skills and academic achievement. The second problem is the reluctance and inability of refugees to adapt to German society and culture. In this context, increasing the school achievement of migrant children, improving their language skills, supporting their adaptation to the social culture and managing cultural diversity are among the priorities of Germany's migration policies (Miera, 2009, p. 20). In addition, teachers in Germany do not receive special training to support newly arrived asylum seekers, which leads to a lack of knowledge of the different age groups trying to learn German. Moreover, teachers do not have enough knowledge to intervene in situations such as trauma that may occur in refugee students (Dryden-Peterson, Adelman, & Nieswandt, 2016).

The reasons why some refugee families do not send their children to early childhood education centers or keep their distance from German education include socio-economic structure, language barriers, lack of knowledge and cultural differences regarding childcare. The education of refugee children in Germany continues to be debated around language barriers, shortcomings in meeting the

educational needs of schools and families, and problems in children's access to education (Dryden-Peterson, Adelman, & Nieswandt, 2016).

Refugee Education in France

The most important practice for refugee students in France is the 'Unité Pédagogique pour Élèves Allophones Arrivants (UPE2A) (Réseau Canopé, 2015, p. 12). The UPE2A was established in 2012, replacing the previous structures of 'Classe d'Accueil' (CLA) and 'Classe d'Initiation pour Non Francophones' (CLIN) (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2012, p. 4).

The main objective of UPE2A is to enable refugee students who are newcomers to the French education system to rapidly improve their language skills and increase their academic achievement (Réseau Canopé, 2015, p. 15). UPE2A supports equal opportunities in education by facilitating the integration of refugee students into the French education system. These units aim to improve students' language skills and increase their academic achievement, while at the same time enhancing their social and cultural integration (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2012, p. 10).

UPE2A units aim to improve refugee students' French language proficiency while also providing support to help them succeed in other subjects. Students are placed in general classes according to their language level and academic background (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2012, p. 6, ÊtrePROF, 2023). This assessment process ensures that the most appropriate educational plan is created, taking into account students' previous educational experiences and language skills (Réseau Canopé, 2015, p. 18).

Students are further integrated into mainstream classes as their language skills improve and the hours of support in UPE2A are gradually reduced (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2012, p. 8). Refugee students can receive additional support in the areas they need (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2012, p. 6).

UPE2A is staffed by teachers specialized in teaching French as a foreign language and trained to support language development. These teachers help students develop their language skills while also supporting their social and cultural integration (Réseau Canopé, 2015, p. 22). Teachers aim to ensure students' active participation in the educational process by using different teaching methods according to their individual needs (ÊtrePROF, 2023).

There are many factors that make it difficult for refugee students to adapt to the French education system. In particular, language barriers and low levels of education are the main factors affecting the educational process and professional integration of refugees. Refugees arriving in France have serious deficiencies in terms of language skills, and the language barrier is observed to be a significant obstacle in both written and oral communication. According to 2019 data, 40% of refugees fail the French written comprehension test, while 35% of refugees have difficulty in oral comprehension. Although French skills have improved over time, refugees have twice as many language difficulties as other immigrants (Ghiorghita, Henry & Ninnin, 2023, p. 31).

The traumas refugee students experience during the migration process negatively affect their mental health. In 2019, 40% of refugees reported feeling depressed in the last year and 30% reported losing interest in things they normally enjoy (Ghiorghita, Henry & Ninnin, 2023, p. 35). The difficulties in refugees' access to health services and the language barrier make it even more difficult for them to benefit from these services. Therefore, refugees need to be supported not only in education processes but also in the field of mental health.

Housing conditions are another important factor affecting the integration process of refugees. Newly arrived refugees in France usually stay in temporary accommodation centers or with a relative (Ghiorghita, Henry & Ninnin, 2023, p. 34). There are differences in the integration of refugees into

the education system according to their age and gender. Generally, male refugees come to France between the ages of 18-29, while female refugees fall outside this age range; 21% migrated to the country under the age of 18 and 19% over the age of 40. Age differences make it difficult for women refugees to participate in education and the labor force (Ghiorghita, Henry & Ninnin, 2023, p. 30).

Refugee Education in Lithuania

Lithuania bases its policies on the integration and education of refugees largely on the norms of the European Union, but also offers solutions adapted to local circumstances. Language education is of great importance in the integration process. The Lithuanian government offers Lithuanian language courses to refugees and aims to facilitate their participation in both the education system and the labour market (European Commission, 2023). Furthermore, these courses are supported by cultural integration programs, helping refugees to integrate more quickly and smoothly into Lithuanian society (Refugee Council of Lithuania, 2023). As language barriers are one of the biggest challenges in education, such programs increase the participation of refugees in the educational process.

The coordination of refugee training policies is managed by the Lithuanian Ministry of Social Security and Labour. The Ministry works closely with civil society organizations in the development of these policies, providing vocational training and employment opportunities (European Commission, 2023).

However, Lithuania's refugee integration policies face some challenges. The MIPEX report reveals that although Lithuania's integration policies are legally egalitarian, they face serious obstacles in practice. Language problems and social exclusion of refugees in education are still key issues that need to be addressed (MIPEX, 2020). However, with the arrival of refugees from Ukraine, the government has reviewed its education policies and made some adjustments (European Website on Integration, 2022).

Applications on Refugee Education in Lithuania

Description of Models of Educational Organization for Children of Returning Citizens and Refugee Students in Lithuania

The document prepared and published by the National Agency for Education (Lt. Nacionalinė Švietimo Agentūra) of the Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport (Lt. Grįžusių Lietuvos Respublikos Piliiečių ir Atvykusių Užsieniečių Ugdymo Organizavimo Modelių Aprašas), prepared and published by the National Education Agency (Lt. Nacionalinė Švietimo Agentūra) under the Ministry of Education, Science, Science and Sports of Lithuania, is the official guideline for the organization of the educational process of returning citizens and foreign students in Lithuania. It is used as an official reference by educational institutions and relevant stakeholders. The study deals in detail with the challenges, opportunities and effective integration methods in the educational process of these students.

The first part of the document provides information about the current situation in Lithuania, including information about schools that set good examples for returning Lithuanian children (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė et al., 2023, p. 5-6).

The second chapter focuses on the process of integrating foreign students into the education system. It provides a detailed guide on how to plan the admission, the adaptation process and the organization of education.

The third section presents model proposals for the integration of both children of Lithuanian families returning to Lithuania and children of refugee and migrant families into the education system. The models prepared in three different approaches differ in terms of children's language competence, psychological needs and educational needs (Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė et al., 2023, p. 20).

Model 1: Direct Integration

In this model, children are directly integrated into their classes in Lithuanian schools and are taught in Lithuanian.

Implementation: Children are placed in classes of their peers and included in the general education process. Individual education plans are prepared for children with inadequate language skills. In addition, Lithuanian language lessons are provided 2 - 5 times a week. Children are also encouraged to integrate by participating in social and sporting activities.

Model 2: Preparatory Classes

For children who lack language proficiency or need time to integrate into the classroom, preparatory classes are created without direct inclusion in education. The duration of education in the classes can be extended up to 6 months.

Implementation: Students form classes in small groups of 8-12 students. These classes are mainly taught in Lithuanian (can last up to 6 months). Children adapt by participating in social activities before moving on to mainstream classes. In some cases, peer teaching is applied.

Model 3: Multilingual and Culture Friendly Schools

It is a model that allows students to preserve their mother tongue and cultural identity.

Implementation: Students are encouraged to speak their mother tongue at school. In addition to Lithuanian, Ukrainian language, culture and history classes are offered. These classes can be offered up to 5 hours a week. Cultural ties are strengthened through the employment of Ukrainian teachers. Cultural events are organized.

The final section of the study contains conclusions and recommendations. Recommendations are given to all school stakeholders, school administrations, classroom teachers, Lithuanian language teachers, subject teachers and parents.

Ukrainians Centre

The Ukrainians Centre (Lt. Ukrainos Centras, Ukr. Український Центр) is a centre operating at the Academy of Education of Vytautas Magnus University (VMU) in Vilnius, Lithuania. It was founded on the initiative of the First Lady of Lithuania Diana Nausėdienė and the First Lady of Ukraine Olena Zelenska.

The centre aims to bring together the Ukrainian community in Lithuania, provide cultural and educational support, promote humanitarian initiatives for Ukrainian refugees, and connect Ukrainian culture with Lithuanian culture (ukrainoscentras.lt). Aiming to serve Ukrainians of all ages, especially children, the centre offers gymnastics, English, Lithuanian lessons, as well as hobby-oriented activities such as art workshops and sewing courses that provide socialization opportunities. Group therapies are organized by Ukrainian psychologists for those fleeing the war (YLE News, 2022).

METHOD

This The aim of this study is to evaluate refugee education in a country like Lithuania, which can be considered inexperienced in terms of immigrants, based on the views of teachers who teach refugees, and to make recommendations on the subject in the light of the information obtained regarding the practices for refugee education.

Research Design

In this study, which aims to evaluate refugee education in Lithuania according to teachers' views and to make suggestions for refugee education with the data obtained, a case study from qualitative research methods was used.

Qualitative research is a method in which the subjective perceptions and experiences of a limited number of individuals are followed in their natural environment, the number of people is small, the data obtained is detailed, and qualitative data collection techniques such as observation, interview and document analysis are used (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 40). In qualitative research based on theory building, which is a modelling study aiming to explain previously unknown results in the context of their relationship with each other based on the collected data, social phenomena are investigated and tried to be made sense of within their context (Glaser, 1978, p. 27).

Case studies are empirical research methods that deal with contemporary phenomena in their own living environment, where the boundaries between the situation and the current context in which the situation exists are not clearly defined and where there are multiple sources of evidence or data. In case studies, answers to the questions "how?" and "why?" are sought. The researcher has almost no influence and control over the events (Yin, 2003, p. 23). The case study researcher does not try to test a hypothesis or reveal relationships. They aim to define events and behaviours in categories.

Case studies are divided into sub-patterns. These are single-case (holistic), single-case (embedded), multiple-case (holistic) and multiple-case (embedded) (Yin, 2003, p. 39). In this study, a single-case (holistic) design was used.

Sampling

Snowball sampling method was used in the research. The term snowball describes a mass that starts small and grows as it rolls (Bailey, 1987, p. 95). This sampling method is particularly effective in reaching participants with rich knowledge about the research problem. The process starts with the question "Who might have the most knowledge on this subject?". In the light of the information obtained in the process, the number of people reached grows like a snowball. Over time, the suggested names begin to be repeated, and data saturation is reached (Patton, 1987, p. 55). The method is mostly used to identify people with a specific quality to be included in the research.

Teachers who teach refugee students were reached through educators working at the Academy of Educational Sciences of Lithuania Vytautas Magnus University (Lt. Vytauto Didžiojo Universiteto Švietimo Akademija). Then, with the guidance of these teachers, colleagues with refugee students were reached and the process continued until data saturation was realized.

Table 1
Demographic details

		n	%
Gender	Female	12	85,8
	Male	2	14,2
	Total	14	100
Length of Service	1-10	3	21,5
	10-20	4	28,5
	20+	7	50
	Total	14	100
Educational Degree	Bachelor	4	28,5
	Master's	10	71,5
	Total	14	100
Type of the School Worked At	Primary	9	64,4
	Secondary	1	7,1
	High School	4	28,5
	Total	14	100
Average Class Size	1-15	4	28,5
	15-30	10	71,5
	30+	-	-
	Total	14	100
Branch	Primary School	7	50
	Lithuanian Language	4	28,5
	Arts	1	7,1
	Biology	1	7,1
	German Language	1	7,1
	Total	14	100
Number of Refugee Students in Classroom	1-5	11	78,7
	5-10	2	14,2
	10+	1	7,1
	Total	14	100

Data Collection Tool

The data of the study were obtained through semi-structured interview forms. Interview forms are prepared to obtain the same type of information from different people on similar topics (Patton, 1987, p. 111). The interview form used in the research consists of structured questions developed by the researcher in accordance with the purpose of the research.

Semi-structured interviews combine both fixed-choice answering and in-depth exploration of the relevant field. Therefore, this type of interview includes the advantages and disadvantages of structured and unstructured interviews. It has advantages such as ease of analysis, allowing the interviewee to express himself/herself, and providing in-depth information when necessary (Büyükoztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2021, p. 158).

The following process was followed while preparing the interview form: Literature review, document review and identification of raw interview questions, creation of a question pool, pilot implementation, determination of Krippendorff similarity ratio (KR), finalizing the interview form.

The form was translated from English into Lithuanian by a Lithuanian language expert. After the translations were completed, expert opinion was obtained from an expert working at VMU. In this way, the validity of the data collection tool was increased.

Data Collection Procedure

The duration of the interviews was approximately 45 - 50 minutes. This is within the recommended time range for interviews (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 56). Eight of the research interviews were conducted face-to-face. The other 6 interviews were conducted online. Except for four of the teachers, the interviews were conducted in English as their English level was sufficient. The remaining four were interviewed through an interpreter.

Data Analysis Procedure

Within the scope of the research, the audio recordings of the interviews were first transcribed and written down. After this process, the answers given to each question were systematized. The answers divided into groups will be subjected to content analysis, one of the data analysis techniques used in qualitative research methods. In content analysis, the researcher decides what will constitute themes and their naming (Patton, 2014; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 242). The ultimate goal of content analysis is to reach explainable concepts and relationships from the collected data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 241). Cresswell (2007, p. 72) emphasizes that content analysis brings the data together in a meaningful way and makes it easier to understand.

A data processing program called Nvivo was used in the analysis of the data. Nvivo is a program used in qualitative data analysis. This program helps researchers to systematically examine and categorize qualitative data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p. 12).

The collected data were first conceptualized; then the data were organized logically in the context of the emerging concepts; and then themes explaining the data were identified accordingly (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 242).

The data obtained during the coding process were analysed in depth and a meaningful data set was obtained with the emerging themes and categories. The findings were evaluated to answer the research questions. The contribution of the results to the existing literature and their theoretical implications were evaluated (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 112). Finally, the research findings are reported.

FINDINGS

Due to limitations, one sample opinion on each element has been shared.

The participants were asked *"You work in a school environment where refugee students are concentrated. How would you interpret the impact of this situation on the school environment? What is the relationship between refugee students and local students? Can you exemplify it?"*. The opinions on the question are as follows:

Table 2

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' opinions on the first question

Code	Category	Theme
Positive academic status	Academic status of refugee students in the classroom	Refugee students' general success in the classroom
Negative academic status		
Adequate social cohesion	Social adaptation of refugee students in the classroom	Adaptation of refugee students to the educational environment
Inadequate social adaptation		
Social situation between refugee students and local students	Local students' relationship with refugee students	
Mutual cultural exchange		
Organizing aid campaigns for refugees	Factors affecting the integration of refugee students	
Common language use		
Welcoming of refugee students by local students		

Refugee students' academic status in the classroom:

The responses received regarding the academic status of refugee students in the classroom indicate that students are generally interested in the lessons and make the necessary effort in the lessons.

P10: "... now I have one girl and two sister students. Girls are very talented and they try to learn. They are especially successful in math."

In addition to positive responses, negative responses were also given to academic success in the classroom. It was stated that some students did not show the expected interest in the lessons due to reasons such as the family's belief that they were not permanent in Lithuania.

P9: "Some of our students think that they are not permanent here. That is why they are not interested in the lessons. They are here just to spend time and socialize with other refugees."

Refugee students' social adaptation in the classroom:

Positive opinions were more frequently shared about the social situation of refugee students in the classroom. It is stated that refugee students who are included in the classes make an effort to integrate and that they are happy to be in their environment.

P1: "... on the other hand, it is clear that my students were very happy to meet and connect with each other. True, serious war events were not discussed in class, but it was clear that they found solace and support in their class."

As in the academic situation in the classroom, there were also some negative experiences in the social situation in the classroom.

P5: "My student withdrew into herself for a long time, avoided communicating with her classmates because of language barrier."

Local students' relationship with refugee students:

The local students' approach was reported to be overwhelmingly positive towards refugee students. Lithuanian students welcomed the refugee students very warmly and made friends in a short time.

P6: "The students were friendly, happy to communicate. This is how our students learn tolerance."

Positive communication between refugee students and local students allows for cultural exchange. While refugee students learn about Lithuania from their friends, Lithuanian students have the opportunity to get to know better the culture of their refugee friends.

P9: "I call the environment of our school a 'capsule of nations'. Our students learn new things from others every day and I think the migrants who live in this environment are in the same situation."

In addition to welcoming and accepting their refugee friends, Lithuanian students also help them financially. They collect money for the refugees who have fled the war and left almost everything at home country and help them to meet their needs.

P10: "For 2 years, our student community provided financial aid to refugees for trips and other needs."

Factors affecting the adaptation of refugee students:

When the reasons for the rapid integration of the students mentioned above are evaluated, it is emphasized that the fact that some of the refugee students and Lithuanian students know Russian is an important factor in overcoming the language barrier and allows the students to integrate quickly.

P4: "...Since all of my own students know Russian in some level, I give the lessons in Russian."

The Lithuanian students' warm welcome and inclusion of refugee students is stated as the biggest factor that enables refugee students to quickly adapt to the school and classroom environment. This kind of sincere and warm welcome allowed the students who fled the war to feel safe.

P11: "I think our refugee students were a great gift for the school and our class. They were well received and the children made great friends."

The participants were asked "*What problems do you face in the education of refugee students? What are the most important problems according to you? What do you think is the cause of these problems? What do you think should be done to overcome these problems?*". The opinions on the question are as follows:

Table 3

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' opinions on the problems subheading of the second question

Code	Category	Theme
Language barrier with refugee students	Out-of-class and general problems	Problems encountered in refugee education
Psychological distress experienced by refugee students		
Difficulties in adapting to the educational context in Lithuania	Academic problems in refugee education	
Academic level differences between refugees in classrooms		
Limited individual time available for refugee students		

Out-of-class and general problems:

The most commonly mentioned problem related to the education of refugee students is the language barrier. It was frequently mentioned that the fact that students do not speak Lithuanian and teachers do not speak Ukrainian causes disruption in education.

It was underlined that efforts to find a common language such as Russian are not sufficient for the healthy continuation of education.

P1: "We partly have language problems. We have to communicate in Russian, but this language is neither my mother tongue nor the mother tongue of the refugee students, so there can be disconnections."

It was shared that the psychological distress experienced by refugee students leads to adaptation problems. Such adaptation problems are among the out-of-school and general problems encountered in refugee education.

P10: "One of my refugee female students did not have a good relationship with her parents. She was a bit withdrawn, it was difficult to talk and communicate, and she lied a lot. She had difficulty in adapting."

Academic problems encountered in refugee education:

Regarding the academic dimension of the problems related to refugee education, different situations were reported. These included difficulties in adapting to the curriculum in a new country, the difference in academic level between refugee students from different backgrounds and educational environments, and the lack of individual time of teachers' that refugees need due to school conditions.

P6: "I think that a refugee student has difficulty in adapting to the new school curriculum and new learning subjects."

The differences between refugee students' educational levels, foreign language knowledge and language learning capacities, cause teachers to face difficulties in the classroom.

P14: "If your refugees are from very different countries like mine, it can be quite challenging to teach them something at the same time. Because they don't all have a common educational foundation."

The inability to give refugee students the attention they need due to overcrowded classrooms and limited time is considered by teachers as one of the major problems in the classroom.

P12: "Refugees in the classroom may need special attention, but it is not possible to find time and opportunity for this in a crowded classroom environment."

Table 4

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' views on the causes of the problems subheading of the second question

Code	Category	Theme
War trauma	Causes of social problems	Causes of problems
The isolation of refugees		
Language barrier	Causes of academic problems	
Lithuanian education system's inadequate preparation for refugees		
Lack of/low availability of materials to be used in the education of refugees	Causes of language-based problems	
Refugees' low interest in the lessons, thinking that they are temporary in Lithuania		
The difficulty of Lithuanian language		
Locals' preference for speaking Russian over Lithuanian		

When the causes of the problems experienced by refugee students and the problems in refugee education are examined, many topics emerge: the trauma caused by the war on children, refugees' living in isolated areas, language barrier between teachers and students, Lithuanian education system not being ready for refugees, lack of materials to be used in the education of refugees, refugees' low interest in the lessons considering that they are temporary in Lithuania, Lithuanian being a difficult language, local people's preference to speak Russian with refugees instead of Lithuanian.

Causes of social problems:

Teachers clearly observe the devastating effects of war on students.

P4: "Some students had psychological problems at the beginning of the semester. The war and the difficulties in traveling to Lithuania had negative effects on their psychology."

Causes of academic problems:

The language barrier is not only a problem in itself, but also a cause for other problems. The disruption of student-teacher communication due to the language barrier was highlighted as a source of problems.

P3: "We have a language barrier. Most of the teachers do not speak Ukrainian or Russian. Our refugees have not learned Lithuanian yet, so there are difficulties in getting along."

Since the massive influx of refugees is a new phenomenon for Lithuania, the lack of a ready education planning for refugees is considered as a cause of disruption in many areas of education.

P7: "...as I said, the program for refugees in Lithuania was approved only in 2023. Preparations are late."

Lack of materials for the education of refugee students is cited as one of the reasons for the disruption of education.

P9: "In Lithuania, there are not enough resources in schools for students to learn the language (which I think is very important), especially student books."

The fact that refugee students and their families see Lithuania only as a stopover and therefore do not attach importance to the education they receive during their stay there is a student-related problem that contributes to the lack of refugee education at the desired level.

P5: "My student was convinced that she would only stay in Lithuania for a short time. So she did not need to communicate or follow the lessons."

Causes of problems with language:

The inherent difficulty of the Lithuanian language was cited as a reason why students did not learn it at the desired pace.

P7: "It is difficult for refugees to learn Lithuanian grammar, to pronounce loud difficult words. This discourages students."

The fact that local people prefer to communicate with refugee students and their families, who need practice while learning Lithuanian, in Russian, which they speak in common, rather than in Lithuanian, is a factor that has a negative impact on the speed at which students learn Lithuanian.

P6: "...complain that they cannot practice Lithuanian because the local people often switch to Russian. Obviously, this situation negatively affects the students."

Teachers made suggestions for solutions to the problems they mentioned, which can be addressed under different headings.

Table 5

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' opinions on the solution suggestions for problems subheading of the second question

Code	Category	Theme
Getting help from experienced and language-speaking students in and out of the classroom	Solution suggestions for the problems in the classroom	Solution suggestions for the problems encountered in refugee education
The need for teachers to improve themselves in order to be more useful for refugee students		
Finding common ground for students		
Continuous, uninterrupted communication with students	Solution suggestions for social-psychological problems of refugee students	
Being in constant contact with the families of refugee students		
More sensitive approach to students with war trauma		
Encouraging students to speak Lithuanian	Solution suggestions for language-based problems	
Providing education support to refugees in their own language		
Teachers' self-development in common languages		

Suggestions for solutions were categorized into three main groups: suggestions for solutions to classroom problems, to social-psychological problems of refugee students, and solutions to language-related problems.

Solution suggestions for classroom problems:

The first suggestion for solving in-class problems is to get help during class from students who have been in the country before, are more experienced and speak a common language.

P10: "Students who can translate can also help, but it would be easiest if they have at least a minimum basic knowledge of Lithuanian."

In order for refugee students to receive a better education, it was emphasized that it would be beneficial for teachers to improve themselves in the aspects needed in refugee education.

P9: "First of all, I think it is very important to develop as a teacher by gaining experience."

Teachers' suggestions include using universal values such as music and dance during lessons and providing experiences where they can empathize with each other.

P8: "Communication through gestures, movements, games and dance language was very helpful in my lessons."

Solution suggestions for social-psychological problems of refugee students:

Teachers mentioned being in constant communication with refugee students as a suggestion that would allow them to intervene in their problems immediately and feel good about themselves.

P12: "You need to be in constant contact with the students and communicate a lot on the phone, be open and patient."

Being in constant communication with the parents of refugee students is also considered as a step towards solving the problems experienced.

P8: "...however, active cooperation with parents and strengthening their psychological state can help to improve the overall situation and children's adaptation will be faster and smoother, so they can integrate faster into the new environment and learn in the same "rhythm" as local students."

Taking into account the potential traumatization of the students, teachers also recommended sensitive communication with them in order to solve the problems.

P13: "The training given to teachers on how to interact with war refugees and what kind of difficulties they may encounter while teaching such a group should be detailed and repeated."

Suggestions for solutions to language-based problems:

One of the first solutions to overcome language-based problems is to motivate students to speak Lithuanian and to find environments where they can use Lithuanian.

P9: "Students find Lithuanian difficult, so they run away to speak Russian or English. But I think education only works well when you use the Lithuanian language. Yes, it takes more time, but I think this process is the best way to teach."

Providing refugee students with educational support in their own language was mentioned as a solution to language-related problems.

P1: "Organizing classes for refugees in their own language, employing teachers who speak and teach in refugees' own language at school can be useful."

Teachers learning the mother tongue of refugees or learning languages such as English and Russian, which can be communicated as a common language, is one of the solution suggestions for solving language problems.

P7: "I speak English and Russian myself, so I did not have any difficulty in the lessons. It is not difficult for me to teach the material."

The participants were asked "What kind of a program is implemented in your school for refugee students? Do you think this program is useful? a) b) What are the differences in the content for refugee students compared to the standard program? c) What kind of a path is followed in the teaching-learning process? d) How is assessment and evaluation done?". The opinions on the question are as follows:

Table 6

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' opinions on the third question

Code	Category	Theme	
Implementation of standard learning outcomes in the program	Practices related to learning outcomes	The status of curriculum elements in refugee education	
Teachers' making individual arrangements in learning outcomes for refugees			
Methods used in the teaching-learning process	Applications related to teaching-learning the process		
Simplification of content	Contextual applications		
Adaptation of content			
Usage of standardized assessment and evaluation methods	Applications related to assessment and evaluation		
Assessment and evaluation by the teacher's initiative			
No assessment and evaluation			

Practices related to learning outcomes:

In terms of the learning outcomes of refugee students' education, teachers generally try to provide students with the outcomes of the standard curriculum in practice without any need to make any changes.

P3: "With a slight simplification, we aim the learning outcomes in the general curriculum."

Some teachers can organize the learning outcomes according to their students. At this point, it was also stated that school administrations give freedom to teachers.

P1: "We teach our lessons with our standard curriculum, but teachers are free to organize it individually."

Applications related to the teaching-learning process:

Regarding the teaching-learning process in refugee education, teachers sometimes try to help refugee students learn better by adding new and different techniques to the methods and techniques they generally use.

P9: "I use the 'immersion' method while learning Lithuanian language. That is, I do not speak English, Russian and other languages, I only speak Lithuanian. Thus, they start to make sense of it over time."

Contextual applications:

Most of the teachers stated that the content to be taught to refugee students was simplified and organized.

P8: "At least if it is the first year of arrival, I make the content simplified."

In addition to simplifying the content; adapting the content to the student and the needs of the student is also a common practice of teachers.

P7: "I created the program for refugees myself, I included the main themes while creating the content ("in the hospital", "in the store", "at school" etc.)."

Applications related to assessment and evaluation:

In the assessment and evaluation process, different practices are expressed due to the freedom that schools give to teachers. Some teachers stated that they applied standardized assessments for local students as they do for refugee students.

P10: "I evaluated the children like the others, I only took into account the problems related to Lithuanian less, I did not give negative grading."

Some teachers use assessment practices on their own initiative with the freedom that their schools give them.

P5: "Our school gives a lot of freedom regarding refugees. We teachers decide how the evaluation will be done."

Considering the psychological state of refugee students, examples were also shared where no assessment and evaluation was carried out to avoid exam stress for children who were already stressed enough.

P1: "It was decided not to have any progress evaluation at the end of the semester. So that refugees fleeing the war would not experience extra stress."

The participants were asked "*What kind of out-of-school activities are provided for refugee students? Can you elaborate? What kind of activities would be useful?*" The opinions on the question are as follows:

Table 7

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' opinions on the fourth question

Code	Category	Theme
Activities already available at the school	The quality and resources of social activities for refugee students	Out-of-school activities of refugee students
Activities created at the individual initiative of the teachers		
Out-of-school activities for refugee students		
Lack of special activities for refugee students		
Teachers' suggestions for social activities	Refugee students' participation in social activities	
High interest and participation in activities		
Low interest and participation in activities		

The quality and resources of social activity opportunities for refugee students:

Teachers reported that refugee students can participate the school's standard activities as they wish, including when there are no specific activities for refugee students.

P3: "They have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular clubs like other public school students."

Some teachers sacrifice their personal time to organize activities for refugee students.

P1: "...some teachers were doing additional activities with their students after class."

Outside of school, social activities are offered to refugee students, centered at Vytautas Magnus University. Teachers can direct their students to these activities. Activities organized according to the needs and interests of refugee students were also mentioned.

P5: "I would often go to VMU for social activities with my Ukrainian students. 8th-9th grade students used to go, sometimes other Ukrainians would also come."

When talking about the current activity opportunities in schools, there were also responses where it was emphasized that there are no special activity opportunities for refugees.

P7: "We do not have a special application other than the standards of our school."

Regarding what kind of activities would be beneficial for students, teachers recommend activities such as art and team sports where students can have a pleasant time, have a high level of interest, and contribute to socialization.

P9: "Artistic activities, especially music and painting, where they can express themselves should increase. In this way, especially traumatized refugees can experience 'catharsis'."

Refugee students' participation in social activities:

Generally positive experiences were shared regarding refugee students' interest and participation in social activities. Refugee students are generally enthusiastic about participating in extracurricular activities.

P3: "Their participation in activities is quite high. They can socialize in this way. It is also a good opportunity to forget bad memories."

It is also noted that there are students who are reluctant to participate in the activities offered.

P8: "My refugee student was not interested in the activities. He chose not to participate in the school trips even though I personally invited him."

The participants were asked "*What is the approach of the families of refugee students towards their children's education? Do families benefit their children's education? How is the cooperation between the school and refugee families ensured?*". The opinions on the question are as follows:

Table 8

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' opinions on the fifth question

Code	Category	Theme
High family involvement	Families' level of interest	Communication between refugee families and the school
Low family involvement		
Consideration of Lithuania time as temporary by refugee families	Causes of communication breakdown with family	
Difficult living conditions of refugee families		
Language barrier between family and school		
Families' prejudices towards education in a new country		
Face-to-face communication opportunities	Type/channels of communication between school and family	
Online communication channels		

Families' level of interest:

Mostly positive responses were given regarding the interest of refugee students' families in their children's education. It is underlined that families keep communication channels open with teachers and make a point of visiting the school for face-to-face meetings whenever they have the opportunity.

P3: "Parents of refugee children are happy that their children are receiving education and going to school. Parents are interested in the education of their children. Parents willingly cooperate with the school through phone calls, e-mails, individual meetings with teachers."

Some families are not as interested in their children's education as they should be, often due to force majeure.

P2: "Especially my refugee's family was not interested in education, they did not ask about the refugee's situation. Then we communicated with them by calling them to school, by phone, by e-mail."

Causes of communication breakdown with the family:

In response to the question about the reasons for the breakdown of school-family communication, the following responses were given: the family's perception that Lithuania is temporary, lack of opportunities due to the difficult living conditions, the language barrier between the family and the school, and the prejudices of the families towards education in a new country.

As mentioned in the previous questions, families who see Lithuania as temporary and aim to move to other European countries, do not show the necessary interest in their children's education.

P9: "Interest is low because I think for them Lithuania is just like a bus stop."

Teachers say that families who are trying to survive in a new country are also not as interested in their children's education as they should be.

P10: "I think it is because parents work a lot, they cannot take time off from work, and work hours end late."

Refugee families avoid communication with their children's teachers and schools due to language barriers.

P5: "It is more difficult for parents to learn the Lithuanian language, they do not have time to learn the Lithuanian language, so there are problems when communicating with the new generation of teachers. Because they do not speak Russian."

The hesitancy of parents to entrust their children to the education system in a new country was mentioned as a hindrance to school-family communication.

P8: "Children adapt quickly enough, but often parents, grandparents who are too scared for their children and do not trust the education system of another country and the people working there can be distant, which is understandable."

Type/channels of communication between school and family:

Regarding the channels of school-family communication, it was stated that schools and teachers are ready to meet face-to-face in almost every situation.

P9: "How do we communicate? I mean, we usually have open days, like open door days."

Online meetings are also available for refugee families who do not have the opportunity to come to the school for face-to-face meetings.

P4: "... of course we have an internet platform where parents can see grades and communicate with teachers. Sometimes we communicate by phone, sometimes we write e-mails, you know."

The participants were asked "*What is the level of adaptation of refugee students to the culture of your country? What would you suggest to improve this?*" the opinions on the question are as follows:

Table 9

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' opinions on the sixth question

Code	Category	Theme
Sufficient adaptation to culture	Cultural adaptation levels of refugee students	Current status of refugee students' cultural adaptation
Inadequate cultural adaptation		
Seeing Lithuania as a transit country and downplaying culture	Factors that negatively affect cultural adaptation	
The negative effects of war on refugee students		
Language barrier	Factors that helps cultural adaptation	
Cultural proximity		
Shared history	Recommendations for cultural adaptation	Increasing cultural adaptation in the future
Help of social organizations		
Conducting governmental work on cultural adaptation		
Continuous communication with families and students		

Cultural adaptation of refugee students:

It is seen that the opinions regarding the adaptation of refugee students to the culture are generally positive.

P13: "Under the patronage of Nausėdienė and Zelenska, a lot of work is taking place for the integration of refugees into our country. I think we are seeing the results of this."

In some cases, opinions were shared that adaptation to the culture was not sufficient and that the necessary effort was not spent on this issue.

P2: "...I can say that not all of them do it sincerely."

Factors that negatively affect cultural adaptation:

The barriers to cultural adaptation are seen as disregard for culture because refugees see Lithuania as a transit country, adaptation problems due to the effects of the war, and language barriers.

Teachers have observed that families and students who think that they are not permanent in Lithuania are not willing to make the necessary efforts to adapt to the culture.

P9: "I think they are trying. As I said, Lithuania is just like a bus stop. So they do things like at a bus stop."

Teachers are aware that refugees come to their countries after overcoming traumatic events, which is an obstacle to their adaptation to the culture.

P5: "... one of my students witnessed the death of his loved ones. It is not appropriate to expect more from him for now."

The language barrier, which has already been mentioned on several occasions, is said to be one of the major obstacles to cultural adaptation.

P12: "...you cannot learn culture without learning a language."

Factors that facilitate cultural adaptation:

Cultural proximity was mentioned as one of the factors that increase cultural adaptation.

This was mentioned for Ukrainian and Belarusian refugees.

P1: "...besides that, I think Ukrainian and Lithuanian cultures are not that far from each other, so it is normal that the adaptation scale is very high."

Having a common history as well as a common culture is one of the factors that accelerate cultural adaptation.

P13: "Especially our senior students are aware of historical facts. They know what the common sufferings of years ago and today mean."

Recommended actions for cultural adaptation:

In the answers given to the question of what should be done to increase cultural adaptation, it is stated that social organizations such as Red Cross, Caritas, Ukrainos Centras can be effective.

P1: "The activities organized for children at the Ukrainian Center in our city help to fuse cultures."

There are also teachers who believe that it is the government's duty to promote cultural adaptation.

P6: " ... I think these will be the most important for refugees to live comfortably. It is important that the steps taken by the government here are permanent and continuous."

Teachers who thought that being in constant communication with the family and students would increase adaptation to the culture shared these thoughts.

P14: "To develop this, the relationship with the family, support and tolerance, patience, companionship and individual attention and guidance are very important."

The opinions of the participants regarding the question "*As a teacher who teaches refugee students, what would you suggest to be changed and improved for refugee education?*" are as follows:

Table 10

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' opinions on the seventh question

Code	Category	Theme
Providing teaching materials for refugee students	Requests for improved refugee education	Conditions to be improved and changed in refugee education
Adapting of existing material for refugee students		
Improving the framework for refugee education		
Providing refugee students with the opportunity to actively use Lithuanian	Recommendations for teachers and students	
Providing support to refugees in their mother tongue		
Enhancing teachers' competencies for refugee education		

Demands for improved refugee education:

A wide range of ideas were shared in relation to situations and phenomena that need to be improved and changed in refugee education. The overall focus was on improving the overall experience of refugee education through improvements in the aspects of refugee education that are not working.

Although the lack of necessary materials in refugee education was also mentioned in the previous sections, teachers emphasized the importance of addressing this deficiency.

P7: "We try to create various tasks. We need various exercises, books, visual materials for refugees."

Another idea to overcome the lack of materials for refugee students is to adapt the materials already in use for refugees.

P8: "I think the books could be better adapted to the specific contexts of refugees at least."

It was emphasized in previous questions that Lithuania is not fully prepared for refugee education. Likewise, the need to improve the infrastructure for refugee education was also mentioned here.

P11: "I know who created the program for refugees and I know that these people are scholars. But I think they do not have enough experience to write this kind of program. So it is difficult to understand what the program aims and how to work with the program."

In order for refugee students to improve themselves in Lithuanian, it is one of the demands of the teachers to provide them with environments where they can use the language.

P12: "In addition to the work on refugees, there should be opportunities for students to actually use the language, which is often lacking."

Teacher and student-centered recommendations:

Providing mother-tongue education support and assigning teachers who speak the language of refugees to teach refugees are among the teachers' recommendations for refugee education.

P3: "The number of educational materials in the mother tongue of refugees should be increased."

In order to improve refugee education, teachers were advised to develop themselves in the competencies needed in refugee education.

Learning a second language, acquiring the pedagogical knowledge required in refugee education, attending seminars and conferences on the subject, and spending extra time and effort are all activities that teachers consider necessary for their colleagues.

P11: "A teacher should be a good pedagogue but an even better psychologist."

The opinions of the participants regarding the question "Is there anything you would like to add based on your own experiences regarding refugee education?" are as follows:

Table 11

Code, category, theme list of lithuanian teachers' opinions on the eighth question

Code	Category	Theme
Feelings towards working with refugees	Feelings on refugee education and thoughts about war	Things the teachers would like to add on the subject
Need for studies on refugee education		
Feelings towards war		
Insights on refugee education		
Considering previous answers enough	Nothing to add	

Refugee education and feelings and thoughts about war:

When teachers were asked what they would like to add, the responses generally centered around sharing insights and thoughts about the situation. At this point, teachers found it appropriate to share how they felt about working with refugee students.

P1: "Maybe I should mention the fact that I am quite lucky with my students emotionally. I have very good students and I believe that there are good experiences for them and for me."

Lithuanian teachers also indicate the need for more work on refugee education.

P 9: "As I mentioned before, this problem is new for us. I think your study is important in this sense because I have never been asked anything about this issue before."

Emotions and thoughts were also shared about the Russian occupation, which caused Lithuania to host refugees in numbers unprecedented in its history.

P4: "As you witness what refugees go through, your awareness increases and your reaction to those responsible increases. At the beginning of the semester, I told all the students that I condemned the

war started by Russia, so there would be no empathy from me towards Russian soldiers. So the pro-war Russian speaking students left my groups."

Teachers also evaluated their own performance and shared self-assessments on refugee education, a relatively new topic for Lithuania.

P9: "... we were not prepared for this situation. Neither was I. Two years later, I can say that we are ready. I think we worked quite well. I am more experienced now about what to do."

CONCLUSION

Academic Achievement and Classroom Adaptation: Refugee students are generally oriented towards academic success. Although they face problems such as not knowing the language when they first arrive, they can reach a sufficient level within a few months thanks to Lithuanian education programs. Especially the cultural proximity and Russian language skills of students from Ukraine and Belarus facilitate their integration.

Language Barrier: The difficulty in learning Lithuanian is an important factor affecting the educational process of refugee students. However, with intensive language training, this obstacle is usually overcome within 7-8 months. In some cases, students and teachers communicate through a common language, such as Russian.

Psychological States: Refugee students experience psychological problems due to war traumas, family loss and difficulties in adapting to a new country. Symptoms such as social isolation, trauma-related crying crises and withdrawal were frequently observed in these students.

Social Cohesion: Lithuanian students warmly welcome and support their refugee friends. This attitude facilitates refugee students' adaptation to school and society. Refugee students, especially from Ukraine and Belarus, are more successful in integration due to their cultural and historical proximity.

In and Out of School Activities: Refugee students can participate in school activities. However, in some individual cases, students prefer to stay away from activities. In Lithuania, initiatives that contribute to the social cohesion of refugee students are noteworthy, such as the Ukrainian Centre. This centre offers activities such as painting, handicrafts, games, dancing for various age groups.

Parents' Contribution to Education: Refugee parents are involved in their children's education. They meet regularly with teachers and are involved in their children's school activities. However, some parents are unable to contribute sufficiently to their children's education due to workload, language barriers or prejudices against education.

Educational Materials and Resources: Lack of educational materials has been identified as a major problem for refugee education in Lithuania. The materials need to be improved and increased in number to suit the needs of refugee students. Adaptation of existing materials to the education of refugee students is suggested by teachers.

Absenteeism Issues: In Lithuania, absenteeism was less of an issue, and refugee students were reported to participate more regularly in the education process.

Solution Suggestions: Language Education: It is important to create environments where refugee students can actively use Lithuanian. It was also stated that students should be able to receive educational support in their mother tongue. Material Development: It is essential that educational materials are developed and adapted to the needs of refugee students.

Teacher Trainings: It is important to increase the pedagogical and linguistic competencies of teachers who teach refugees. It is recommended that teachers learn a second language and attend seminars and conferences on refugee education.

Cultural Cohesion: Refugee students show a generally positive tendency to adapt to Lithuanian culture. Cultural and historical proximity are the main factors that enhance integration. It was stated that social support organizations should be activated and families should be in constant contact to increase adaptation.

The findings highlight both the strengths and challenges in Lithuania's refugee education system. It is recommended to strengthen both government policies and school-level practices to make the system more inclusive.

DISCUSSION

In Lithuania, the number of studies focused on refugee education, especially in the post-occupation period of Ukraine, is quite small. Almost all of the available studies are mentioned in the discussion section.

Orechova (2018), providing information on the period before the influx of Ukrainian refugees, notes that negative attitudes towards immigrants and the existence of a cultural hierarchy increased the likelihood of immigrant children choosing 'segmented' or 'ethnic' integration paths, which could pose significant challenges for Lithuanian society in the future (p. 247). This data could be a clue for the perspective of refugee students belonging to different ethnic groups other than Ukrainian refugees.

Students experience moderate and strong levels of foreign language anxiety when learning Lithuanian as a foreign language (Miškinytė & Vilkienė, 2023, p.157). This finding supports the conclusion that because of the difficulty of Lithuanian, refugee students have difficulties in learning the language and are more inclined to speak Russian, which they already know. The same study states that children should be encouraged to speak Lithuanian at an early age and be informed about its advantages (p. 158).

The study concluded that the attitude of society towards Ukrainian refugees is positive. However, there are also studies that emphasize the existence of the opposite situation. It is observed that the lack of social awareness and tolerance for Ukrainian refugee students makes daily life difficult (Bijekienė, Latysh & Didenko, 2024, p. 174).

Labokas (2023, p. 214) found that students evaluate their teachers in terms of personal trust and academic competence. In particular, it is stated that students who experience low alienation establish more positive relationships with their teachers at academic and personal level. Such trainings may enable teachers to reach refugee students more easily and students to trust their teachers. This result supports the finding of making students feel safe by constantly communicating with them.

Miškinytė & Vilkienė (2023) also state in their study that there is a need for professional development programs for teachers that provide effective methods for multilingual and minority groups (p. 159). In support of this opinion, Survutaitė (2023) states that teachers should be provided with training that offers effective teaching methods in multicultural classrooms (p. 165). The result of the need for multilingual and multicultural education, which teachers stated while expressing the aspects they want to be improved in refugee education, is in line with these data.

The dissemination of psychosocial support programs to facilitate the integration processes of refugee students is also recommended in the studies of Bijekienė, Latysh, & Didenko (2024). These are similar to the responses of teachers in this study to the question of what they would like to improve and change in refugee education.

Labokas (2023) states that educational policies that focus on the individual needs of students should be developed and implemented (p. 214). This suggestion supports the Lithuanian teachers' idea that there is a need for programs for refugees that focus on their needs.

Puleikiene, Grigaliuniene, Straupaite-Simonavice & State (2023) propose projects to increase the social cohesion of refugee, migrant and local youth by creating STEM/STEAM-oriented spaces. It is stated that the projects to be put forward will also enable the development of skills in areas such as science, technology, art, theatre, design and sports (p. 70). These suggestions support the findings and recommendations of the study.

SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions for refugee education in Lithuania are as follows:

- Intensive Lithuanian language courses for refugee students should be expanded. These courses would help students improve their Lithuanian skills and adapt to school more quickly. Also, increasing the number of teachers who speak Ukrainian or Russian could reduce the language barrier.
- Psychological support programs for cultural adaptation should be increased and counseling services should be provided to students on coping with war traumas. In addition, cultural integration activities can be organized to facilitate refugee students' adaptation to the local culture.
- Provide ongoing counseling and psychosocial support for refugee students. Special therapy and counseling sessions should be organized for traumatized students.
- Textbooks and materials for the education of refugee students should be rapidly developed and training resources for teachers should be provided. Existing materials should also be adapted to the needs of refugee students.
- Teachers should receive pedagogical and psychological training on refugee education and be supported in learning a second language. Participation in local and international conferences to specialize in refugee education should be encouraged.

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