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Education problems faced by parents of international students in Turkey

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Abstract. This study aimed to identify the problems parents of foreign citizens in Turkey face when receiving general education and to provide suggestions for their solution. This study used a qualitative research method, a holistic pattern of multiple states, and an easily accessible sample of states. The study's working group consisted of 10 parents of students aged 6 to 11 years old with foreign nationals in the 2020-2021 academic year in public schools in the provincial center of Antalya. The research data was collected using a semi-structured interview form and analyzed using descriptive and content analysis. As a result of the study, parents of foreign citizens expressed their opinions about the insufficient number of Turkish lessons, language problems, adaptation, problems of communication between parents and teachers, and problems of school management with parents. The proposals of foreign parents to solve the problems that arise during education first explain the preparation for the Turkish language for foreign students or its provision in October as an additional course.

Keywords: Elementary school, foreign student, international students, parents

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Introduction

International migration is developing rapidly every day in a globalizing world. Along with free migration, forced migration of countries for political and social reasons also largely occurs. In general, migration is the separation from the geographical and social-cultural environment and settling in another geographical and social-cultural environment (Durugönül, 1997). According to Koçak & Terzi (2012), migration is defined in various sources as a geographical, social, and cultural displacement movement that may result in repatriation or permanent settlement of individuals individually or as a family, depending on several reasons, for their own volition or compulsion. On the other hand, the concept of migration can be described as a social mobility as much as the displacement of people and groups of people individually or en masse is a demographic mobility. Because migration is a multidimensional event, it also brings legal, educational, cultural, and psychological problems (Tezcan, 2000). The most basic factor at the root of the migration phenomenon is that individuals go to more favorable places to make a living economically and settle in a new place by taking advantage of the opportunities here. We can say that the decrease in the importance of the borders between countries after the Cold War and the facilitation of transportation and communication with the developing technology era caused the international migration problem to progress more. At the same time, migration policy and immigration administration worldwide have started to follow different paths. Even if customs controls are maintained at the highest level in the era of advanced technology, uncontrolled migration is observed in many countries. For example, the Mexican and US borders are among the most stringent border controls: high and durable wires, high-end control devices, high lighting devices, night vision cameras, and human tracking devices (Nevins, 2002). A similar situation is observed at the European Union territories' borders, especially at the Strait of Gibraltar and the phase borders with Spain. At the same time, the new players in migration control, air companies, have also taken on the task of verifying and confirming the passengers' right to travel to their destination (Guiraudon &

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Joppke, 2001). No matter how strong the border control is, the number of illegal immigrants is still very high, even if countries harden their domestic policies against legal and illegal immigrants and, in many cases, even send them back to their countries. However, sending back incoming migrants should only be applied in special situations such as armed conflict and war. Still, today, it is becoming a situation that countries often use (Schuster, 2004).

Migration is divided into classes according to the causes of the species. In general, if we divide them into permanent and temporary migration, both are seen in high numbers at the borders of Turkey. Especially for migrants who use Turkey as a transfer country, their stay in Turkey is getting longer, as it has become difficult for them to cross to Europe legally and illegally in recent years. Therefore, many migrations that are determined to be temporary become permanent. At the same time, immigrants from other countries are temporarily named in the registration and stay in the country with a residence permit. Still, the number of foreigners who stay for ten or twenty years by extending their residence permit when it expires is not tiny. July 19, 2024, according to the data published by TUIK, when we look at the incoming migrant age group, we can see that the group between the ages of 0-20 is superior. Therefore, one of immigrants' biggest problems is covering this age group. As it turns out, education is the most important problem for the group between the ages of 0 and 20. Therefore, one of immigrants' biggest problems is covering this age group. As it turns out, the most important problem of the group between the ages of 0-20 is education.

One of the important turning points in terms of immigrant education in Turkey was admitted to the European Union in 1999, and the most important obstacle in front of it was the “migration” policy. For this reason, the government has carried out extensive research on this issue, and studies have been carried out to answer the problem of how migration management can be managed; in the partnership document signed between Turkey and the Council of Europe in 2001, Turkey stated its goals on migration management as follows.

1. "To prevent illegal migration, the adoption and implementation of EU Legislation and practices on migration (admission, readmission, deportation).”
2. "Improving the capacity of public administration for the adoption, implementation, and administration of the Acquis, especially through education, including the development of effective border controls to prevent illegal migration and illegal human and drug trafficking, ensuring appropriate coordination between ministries (Law on Foreigners and International Protection, 2013).”

Today, many studies and arrangements are being made in Turkey regarding education for foreigners. However, compared to developed countries, it is still insufficient. One of the biggest problems with education for foreigners is language. Turkish lessons are insufficient or even absent for foreigners, especially in public schools. Another problem is integration. The integration process of newly arrived foreign students has been very long and difficult.

While conducting our study, the number of migrants arriving in Turkey from both Ukraine and Russia increased after Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. In particular, the region where we conducted the study (Antalya, Konyaalti) has become the region that receives the most migration. This situation has increased the value of our work even more.

Methodology

We have chosen a qualitative research method, a descriptive phenomenological design, based on interpretive paradigm (Gunbayi & Sorm, 2018). The phenomenological design emphasises on topics that are known but require in-depth and detailed investigation based on perspectives and opinions of people what experienced (Polkinghorne,1989). We aimed to identify the problems parents of foreign citizens in Turkey faces when receiving general education and to provide suggestions for their solution based on the perspectives and experiences of participants.

Sampling

The working group was formed by the parents of 10 foreign students between the ages of 6 and 11 who were educated in public schools in Konyaalti district in Antalya province in Turkey from Dec. 2020 to 2021. The appropriate sampling method was selected to provide ease of access to the participants, and they were not asked their opinions on the subject before the interview. All 10 foreign parents participating in the study are women.

Data collection

In a qualitative study, participants are asked open-ended questions so that they can formulate their experiences without being limited by the researcher's point of view or the results of previous research (Creswell, 2012). Thus, the research data was obtained using semi-structured open interview forms. The questions asked to the participants were prepared after a literature review and verification by two experts. A pilot interview was conducted with 2 participants to pre-edit the questions and make corrections. All participants spoke Russian, so the questions were translated into Russian, and they were consulted and confirmed by a Russian grammar specialist to confirm that the translation was clear and understandable to the participants.

Ethics statement

The ethics committee approval of this research was obtained from the Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Akdeniz University at the 18th decision meeting dated December 13, 2023, numbered 420. In accordance with scientific research ethics, an informed consent form was taken from the participants before the interview, and code letters were used instead of their real names because the parents of the students participating in the study wanted their names to be kept confidential. Since the parents' language participating in the search is Russian, an expert linguist translated the approval form into Russian and presented it to the participants.

Data analysis

After the interview, the recorded audio files were translated from Russian into Turkish and transcribed verbatim using NVIVO 10 software and then analyzed using thematic, descriptive, and content analysis methods (Kelle, 1995; Cohen, Mansion, and Morrison, 2007; Gunbayi, 2018). The results obtained because of thematic, descriptive, and content analysis were understood and interpreted.

Findings

The foreign national parents who participated in our research were asked about the problems they faced. Of the 10 foreign parents participating in the study, three foreign parents stated that they did not have any problems. In comparison, two foreign parents said that they only had some language problems in the first periods and no longer had any problems. The remaining five foreign national parents explained that they were experiencing some problems, and their opinions were collected in 4 categories. The first category is insufficient Turkish courses, the language problem, the second category is the problem of adaptation, the third category is the teacher communication problem with the parent, and the last category is the school management communication problem with the parent.

In our study, when we studied the opinions of parents of international students regarding the adaptation challenges faced by these parents were the most significant, at 50%. Five out of ten foreign parents reported experiencing difficulties. The opinions of the participants are presented below.

> *The problem of adaptation has been challenging for us. As I mentioned before, when we first arrived, my child was excluded from the classroom, and there was even an incident involving another child. For instance, I still notice that every time I go to pick up my child from school, foreign students always form a separate group; they consistently stay on the sidelines. In summary, the first two years were very difficult for us (KT 1, 1).*

At first, yes, we had a little problem because I also didn't have Turkish at the same time. I was able to say the first half. Because when I was in the first grade, my child was the only foreign student in the class. I think if extra Turkish is given, the adaptation problem will be solved in schools. For example, when we first started school, we had a lot of arguments with other children. Because they also rightfully did not understand my child. Of course, there were arguments because ours didn't understand either, but luckily for my class teacher, he would step in and solve problems very well on this issue. That's why we didn't have any big problems (KT2.4).

Yes, we had problems adapting. We didn't know different cultures, different people, or language, but it passed (KT.3).

We had problems adapting. Besides, she didn't want to go to class, she couldn't talk to anyone during recess. After all, the child wants to play with someone who understands the language, he wants to talk. But I can say that we solved it in the second half of the year (KT.4).

We knew Turkish when we moved here, but we had some adaptation problems due to place and culture differences, but it didn't last long (KT.5).

Next, as you can see from the opinions of foreign student parents about adaptation problems among the problems they face, Turkish lessons are not sufficient or there is a language problem. Turkish lessons are insufficient for foreigners according to 4 foreign parents of the participants and newly arrived foreign students should be able to take extra Turkish lessons at the school.

When we first arrived, my child did not know Turkish. We used to sit together and study from books; it was very difficult with my child; he cried a lot and did not understand anything. Of course, it passed, because children learn quickly. The only thing that upset me was that no one from the school tried to help and even got angry at us, saying, "If you don't speak Turkish, why do you live here?" For example, there is a girl in my son's class who does not speak Turkish at all and does not understand it at all. One day, a science teacher yelled at the girl, "You don't understand anything, how am I going to teach you how to do it?" I mean, teachers can also be very harsh and ill-mannered. Every day I ask, how was your day, what did you do? So, I see (page 1).

I think the biggest problem for international students starting their studies in Turkey should be the language. We've had some hard times too. It didn't take long to learn Turkish, because our father speaks Turkish at home, but some children go to school without fully knowing Turkish, and I know many such families. One day, while waiting for my son to leave the classroom, I heard an elderly Russian lady say to her grandson, "If you don't understand anything at all, just sit down, what should we do?" Thus, the child will sit in class, not understanding anything (KT4).

In their opinions about the communication problem between the parents of a foreign student and the school administration, 2 participants stated that there are problems with the school administration.

Let me explain our communication with the school administration with an example, one day my child did not come from school, it was past the time. I was very curious, I went to school and there they told me, your child is in the principal's room. There have been some incidents. When I said why didn't you let me know. We don't have your phone, they approached you with an accusatory attitude, saying that you didn't give it, but we give you a contact number every year, even I write and give it with my own hands (KT 1).

I can say that we have no communication with the school administration at all. When my child has problems with other students, the classroom teacher talks to us while the school principal talks to the parents of those students. The reason is that we are strangers (KT 2).

Discussion and Conclusion

We can say that globalization has also accelerated with the easing of communication and transportation in recent years. However, one of the biggest problems in the world is the education and integration of foreign students. Different education systems are being implemented in various countries in this regard. Different methods are observed, especially in countries with a very high migration rate. Because it has been seen that students' academic achievements are low due to their native languages and cultural differences, they cannot adapt to the education system, they do not attend activity and skill classes, they have difficulty understanding, they do not fulfill assignments and responsibilities (Polat, 2017). While immigrant families struggle to adapt to the social and cultural environment in the country they came from; children must adapt to the new socio-cultural environment and the school system in this environment (Nar, 2008).

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has four basic needs and rights: "life, participation, protection, and development". Every child has needs such as nutrition, sleep, ability to move, and protection since birth. However, the child's right to education has also been defined as a fundamental right and it has been requested that all children in the countries that are parties to this agreement benefit from these rights equally (Gencer, 2017). However, in many countries, education is still not offered to everyone on equal terms. All foreign students in Turkey have the right to receive education. However, there are no programs that will facilitate the adaptation processes of foreign students. One of the most important problems is the problem of foreign students not knowing the language.

We have tried to identify these problems in our research. As a result of the interviews conducted with foreign parents during the study, it was revealed that the biggest problem of students is adaptation. During the interview, it was revealed that foreign students do not know Turkish at the root of the adaptation problem. Because Turkish preparatory courses are not offered in foreign student education planning in Turkey, however, it has been seen that language preparatory classes for foreign students who do not master this language of education make the adaptation of children very easy. For example, this application gives good results in Germany and in many European countries. At the same time, compulsory Turkish education should be provided for foreigners in kindergartens and primary schools; there should be certain hours. Such practices are being implemented in many countries for children and adults, thus addressing the problem of integration and adaptation. For example, the Ministry of Migration and Administration of the Russian Federation is preparing a law for applying language exams for residence permits and work permits for foreigners, and according to preliminary studies, children of foreign families will thus be more successful in learning the local language. Other problems faced by foreign parents during the study were the problems of communication between the parent and the school and the school administration. According to the opinions of the participants, the approach of the school administration and the teacher towards foreign parents may be different from time to time. For example, one participant's opinion (KT 2): "Actually, I can say that we have no communication with the school administration at all. When my child has problems with other students, the classroom teacher talks to us while the school principal talks to the parents of those students. The reason is that we are strangers". Such situations should not be experienced to increase the positive approach of both parent and student about the school. The communication and communication mechanism should be the same for all students. For this reason, different approaches should be followed to solve the problem of communication with foreign parents and foreign students in this regard.

According to the World Migration Report (2022), 281 million people live in a country other than their country of birth in 2020, and according to the 1990 report, this decade has seen an increase of 128 million. For this reason, if we assume that this number will increase many times in the coming years, the problem of integration and adaptation of foreign students will certainly take an important place in education all over the world.

Due to Turkey's geographical location has always been a country that hosts people of different nationalities. Recently, the number of foreign national immigrants has been growing rapidly throughout

the country due to political reasons in some countries bordering Turkey. At the same time, Turkey's climatic conditions and natural riches attract the attention of people worldwide and lead to the idea of permanent settlement. For this reason, some system changes need to be made for foreign students in terms of education. The fact that foreign students are successful in education, easily integrated, and undergo a rapid adaptation process shows that foreign students play an important role in ensuring social and economic development for countries hosting foreign immigrants, as well as rights and law, gender equality in society in general (Omlechenko, 2018).

We can emphasize that in recent years, only asylum seekers from Syria have remained on the agenda, while migrant children from other countries have been ignored. For this reason, while focusing on the educational process of migrant children, who seem to be too numerous, we should take some concrete steps by considering the place and problem of migrant children who are being found in our country in the education system, considering the reforms made in other countries. New models must be produced. We can see that certain foreign students are the majority in some regions. As a result of the beginning and continuation of the Russian-Ukrainian war since the beginning of the year, the number of migrants from these two countries is increasing day by day in Antalya province, and it is known that Ukrainians who emigrated to Europe at the beginning of the war have started migrating from Europe to Turkey in recent months because they see it as more advantageous in terms of housing and finding a job. The prolongation of the war and the excessive material and moral damage to the territory of Ukraine indicate a prolongation of the return processes of incoming Ukrainian migrants. For this reason, the issue we are dealing with is considered one of the current issues of the Turkish Education System.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of our study, several key issues have been identified regarding the challenges faced by foreign national parents of international students in Turkey. To improve the educational experience of these students and their families, the following recommendations are proposed:

Enhancing Turkish Language Support

- Schools should offer additional and more comprehensive Turkish language courses for international students, especially in their initial years of schooling.
- A dedicated language support program should be implemented, including intensive Turkish language classes and tutoring sessions.
- Specialized teachers or teaching assistants proficient in multiple languages should be assigned to assist non-Turkish-speaking students.

Improving Adaptation Support Programs

- Schools should develop structured orientation programs for international students and their parents to facilitate smoother cultural and academic integration.
- Peer mentoring programs can be introduced where local students assist international students in adapting to the school environment.
- Extracurricular activities should be designed to encourage interaction between local and international students, fostering friendships and reducing social exclusion.

Strengthening Teacher-Parent Communication

- Teachers should receive training on cross-cultural communication and sensitivity to better understand and support international students and their families.
- Regular meetings between teachers and foreign parents should be scheduled to discuss the progress and well-being of international students.
- Bilingual communication tools, such as translated newsletters and digital platforms with multilingual support, should be introduced to bridge language gaps between parents and teachers.

Enhancing Communication Between Parents and School Administration

- Schools should establish a clear communication protocol to ensure that parents are promptly informed of any issues concerning their children.
- A designated school liaison officer for international students should be appointed to address concerns and facilitate communication between parents and school administrators.
- A multilingual school helpline or parent support group should be set up to assist foreign parents in understanding school policies and procedures.

Creating an Inclusive and Supportive School Environment

- Schools should implement anti-discrimination policies and awareness campaigns to prevent exclusion and promote diversity.
- Teachers should be encouraged to use inclusive teaching strategies that consider the needs of non-Turkish-speaking students.
- Schools should provide psychological and social support services to assist international students who struggle with adaptation issues.

By implementing these recommendations, schools in Turkey can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for international students and their parents, leading to better educational outcomes and a more harmonious school experience for all.

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Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest has been declared by the authors.

Author Contributions

Zhyldyz Akunova: Conceptualization, data curation, investigation, methodology, writing original draft, review & editing

Süleyman Karataş: Data Collection, review & editing

Declaration of Competing Interest

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Ethics approval

In the writing process of the study titled "**Education problems faced by parents of international students in Turkey**", the rules of scientific, ethical and citation were followed; it was undertaken by the authors of this study that no falsification was made on the collected data. "Journal Action Qualitative & Mixed Methods Research [JAQMER] and Editor" had no responsibility for all ethical violations to be encountered, and all responsibility belongs to the authors and that the study was not submitted for evaluation to any other academic publishing environment.

Institutional review board (IRB) approval

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of this research was obtained from Akdeniz University Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the meeting of 18 decision numbered 420 on December 13th ,2023.

Data Availability Statement

Anonymized data from this study can be made available on request from cildizakunova@gmail.com.