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Abstract

With this study, it is aimed to determine the problems faced by school administrators from the point of view and to put forward the solution proposals they voiced. In this context, a data collection tool consisting of a semi-structured interview form was applied to the principals and vice principals working as administrators at different education levels in public schools. The data obtained from the participants were analyzed by content analysis method. In the research carried out, it was aimed to determine the problems faced by school administrators regarding refugee students and their solutions. The research was carried out using the basic qualitative research design, one of the qualitative research methods. The study group of the research consisted of 24 school administrators working at various levels in public schools in the city center of Niğde, which was determined by the easily accessible sampling method. The data were analyzed by content analysis method. As a result of the analysis, it was determined that school administrators faced problems such as language-communication problems, communication problems with families, discipline problems, and cultural conflicts related to refugee students.

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Keywords: *School administrators, refugee students, problem.*

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of history, people have had to go to places other than where they were either individually or in groups for various reasons. While this movement of displacement, which corresponds to migration, was carried out to meet basic needs such as shelter, nutrition and hunting in prehistoric times, it also occurred due to different purposes with the changes in needs over time. For example, it can be stated that the emergence of new lines of business along with the process of the industrial revolution in the recent era, the turmoils within countries and the wars have an impact on the migration of people. As can be understood from this example, many factors affecting human life can cause people to migrate from their places of residence to other places.

Today, it is seen that the process called globalization can affect the world rapidly and an event that occurs in one part of the world can have an impact on other regions in different ways. In fact, the globalization movement resulting from the development of information and communication technology all over the world (Nurdoğın, Dur & Öztürk, 2016) has also caused globalization to gain an international dimension. Migration may occur voluntarily for such reasons as education, health, the desire to live in better conditions or due to compulsory reasons such as population exchange, internal turmoil, war, etc. In the report published by the International

Organization for Migration (2022) in 2020, it is stated that there are approximately 281 million voluntary or compulsory international migrants, which corresponds to 3.6% of the total world. The increasing conflicts, ethnic or faith-based violence, human rights violations, economic crises and wars throughout the world (Çakran & Eren, 2017; Nurdoğın, Dur & Öztürk, 2016) have caused 27.1 million people (UNHCR, 2021) to leave their homes and valuable assets and become refugees abroad (Ruiz&Vargas-Silva, 2013; Şimşek, 2019) in the 21st century. It is understood from the data on migration that there exist about 4 million people from various nationalities as refugees and in asylum status in Turkey in 2022 (UNHCR, 2022a). When the relevant literature is examined, it is seen that, although they have legal

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differences, the concepts of refugee, asylum seeker and immigrant are often used interchangeably. For this reason, it is thought that it will be useful to mention the difference between these three concepts for the clarification of the subject in this section of the study. Refugee refers to people who have fled from war, violence, conflict or persecution and crossed the border to live safely in another country (UNHCR, 2022b). On the other hand, asylum seekers are referred to as people who meet the conditions required by international law but whose asylum request has not been finalized yet (UN, 2006).

In other words, people who have gained legal status together with the right to be protected by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees are defined as refugees while those who have acquired short-term accommodation without a legal status are defined as asylum seekers (Nurdoğan, Dur, & Öztürk, 2016). Immigrant, on the other hand, is a comprehensive concept that includes the concepts of both asylum seeker and refugee (Çakran & Eren, 2017). Immigrant is defined by the Turkish Language Association (2022) as “a person, family or community who leaves their own country and goes to another country to settle in”.

In other words, immigrants are the people who migrate from their own countries to another country in different ways because of financial reasons or dissatisfaction with the society they live in whereas refugees refer to the people who leave their assets and go to a safe country involuntarily due to fear of death (Ziya, 2012).

In order for refugees to continue their lives, first their basic life needs such as nutrition, shelter, security and health and then their social needs such as socialization and education for the processes of adaptation to the host society must be met (Tosun, Yorulmaz, Tekin & Yildiz, 2018).

That’s because meeting their needs plays a big role in their getting used to the host society. However, refugees may experience some difficulties in adapting to the new society (Birman, 2002) as they encounter different linguistic, cultural and educational systems different from theirs (Zayimoğlu-Öztürk, 2018).

The difference between the educational level in the host country and the educational levels of the immigrants can affect both the immigrants and the host country (Eren, 2015). Considering that

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refugee children are the most affected by migration (Sarier, 2020), depriving them of educational opportunities may cause various problems for not only them but also the host society they live in (Seydi, 2014). In order to overcome these problems and accelerate the adaptation process of refugees to new living conditions, educational policies of countries should be arranged in a way that will enable refugees to adapt to the social structure (Rakhmonov, 2021; Şahin, 2020; Yavuz & Mızrak, 2016). Because of the fact that Türkiye houses lots of refugees within its borders lays the responsibility of providing a quality education for them, refugee students receive education at various levels of education as mainstreaming students (Sarier, 2020).

This integration without an adaptation process caused both refugee students and other stakeholders to face problems arising from the educational system, teacher perceptions (Şahin, 2020), adaptation processes, and cultural conflict (Tosun, Yorulmaz, Tekin, & Yıldız, 2018).

School administrators, who are primarily responsible for the functioning of the education-teaching process, have to deal with and find solutions for almost all of these problems. It is thought that it is essential for school administrators to interact and communicate with the teachers as well as the refugee students and their families during the detection and solution of the problems experienced.

However, when the relevant literature is examined, it is an important shortcoming that there are limited studies on the subject (Bucak, 2021; Levent and Çayak, 2017; Topaloğlu and Özdemir, 2021, Yurdakul and Tok, 2018). The aim of this study is to contribute to the elimination of this deficiency. For this purpose, answers to the following sub-problems were sought in the study:

1. What are the problems faced by school administrators regarding the families of refugee students?
2. What are the problems faced by school administrators regarding the adaptation process of refugee students to school?
3. According to school administrators, do refugee students have positive or negative effects on the education process?

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4. What are the problems that school administrators encounter regarding refugee students?
5. What are the school administrators' solution recommendations for the problems they face?

2. Method

2.1. Research methodology

This research, which was carried out in order to determine the problems faced by the principals and vice principals working as school administrators in public schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education regarding refugee students of different nationalities studying at their schools, was designed with a basic qualitative research design, one of the qualitative research methods. Basic qualitative research is concerned with how people interpret life, construct their world, and interpret their experiences. The aim here is to explain how people comprehend lives and experiences (Merriam, 2009). In this research, the basic qualitative research design was preferred since it was aimed to determine how school administrators interpret the problems they face with regarding refugee students and how they interpret their experiences with these problems.

2.2. Study group

In determining the study group of the research, criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was preferred. Criterion sampling is defined as the type of sampling created according to the criteria determined by the researcher (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). In this research, working as a school administrator in a public school located in the city center was determined as the basic criterion. In this context, the study group of the research consisted of 24 school administrators working as principal and vice-principal at various educational levels in public schools in the city center of Niğde.

2.3. Data collection tool

The data of the research were collected by semi-structured interview. The purpose of the semi-structured interview, which is generally used in qualitative or mixed research, is to reorganize the interview

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questions prepared by the researcher or researchers in line with the answers received by the participants (Sönmez & Alacapınar, 2011). In this study, draft interview questions were prepared by the researchers. These interview questions were first directed to 2 assessment and evaluation experts and 2 faculty members working in different fields in Faculties of Education for the content validity. With the feedback from the experts, the interview form was presented to 1 faculty member working in the field of Turkish education for language suitability. According to the feedback received, the interview form was finalized to be directed to the participants of the study.

2.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis technique was used in the analysis of the data obtained through semi-structured interviews. Descriptive analysis aims to present the data to the reader in an understandable and usable format (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). The data collected within the scope of the research were typed out and analyzed by the researchers based on the previously determined themes. In order to ensure the consistency of the research, the relevant data were also directed to a different researcher. In this context, the data with consistency were summarized and interpreted in line with the themes. In order to ensure external validity, the opinions of the participants were directly quoted. For the external reliability of the research, the data collected during the process are kept by the researchers.

3. Findings

3.1. Problems that School Administrators Encounter with regarding Refugee Students' Families

Almost all of the participants stated that they experience various problems with the families of refugee students at their schools. When they were asked what these problems were, it was seen that communication problems mostly arising from speaking different languages were mentioned as the most common problems. It was stated by the participants that the difficulty experienced by refugee families in speaking Turkish is the most common problem between school and family. Some of the participants stated that, for the solution of this problem, they received support from the relatives of

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refugees who speak Turkish. For example, P21 expressed the problem he experienced and how he tried to solve this problem by saying; “*We often cannot communicate with the parents of refugee students. We cannot make ourselves understood, and they cannot tell us their problems. We are trying to solve the communication problem with the students*”. P19 stated that the communication problems experienced with the parents hindered the increase in students’ academic success. P17 and P15 asserted that the parents gave them an interpreter’s phone number so they could minimize the language problem experienced. P12 was the only participant who stated that they did not experience any problems with the refugee students’ families.

3.2. Problems Encountered by School Administrators in the Adaptation Process of Refugee Students to School

During the interviews, some of the participants (P1, P12, P15, P17, P21, P23, P24) stated that refugee students can adapt to school very easily. On the other hand, P2 enounced that refugee students have difficulties in adapting to school, so they should take a preparation before starting primary school education. P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P13, P14, P16, P19 and P20 asserted that they had difficulties due to cultural and language differences. P19 expressed the problems they encounter by saying, “*Due to the fact that refugee students do not know how to speak Turkish and their understanding of culture is different, adaptation processes to school take a long time. While our teachers make the necessary effort towards this issue, refugee students do not.*” Some participants (P5, P11, P22) stated that students had adjustment problems at the beginning of the education process, but this problem worked itself out over time. For example, P22 said, “*Both students and we have a lot of trouble in terms of adaptation to school in the first year. They are making progress in the following years.*” And claimed that the adaptation problem decreased in time. P18 stated that most of the students were born in Turkey, so they did not encounter many problems in the integration process, but they were sometimes excluded by Turkish students.

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**3.3. Positive and Negative Effects of Refugee Students on
Educational Process According to School Administrators**

The participants stated that the increase in respect for the Turkish nation, the students getting to know their friends from different cultures, learning to respect them, helping and solidarity are positive effects of the refugee students on the education process. For example, K1 mentioned their positive effects saying, *“We generally observe positive effects. Our children get to know children from different cultures. Hearing a different language, our students see that not everyone in the world speaks the same language, that people can have different colours, and that races have different characteristics.”* Similarly, P18 said, *“I think it is positive because students meet students from different cultures. Last year, we had a student from Kazakhstan. Despite the communication problems, they got along with the children in a very short time. But the same is not possible for Syrian students.”* With his words, P18 mentioned the positive effect of intercultural differences on students but added that this situation is not valid for every culture.

The negative effects of refugee students on the education process that were mentioned by the participants were that the refugee students disrupt the education order of the classroom, do not obey the dress codes, have poor cleaning habits, cannot adapt to the classroom because they do not speak Turkish, have deficiencies in nutrition and clothing due to financial difficulties, experience cultural conflicts, do not understand the subjects because they do not speak Turkish and fall behind their friends, exhibit inappropriate behaviours, have conflict with other friends, lay out in lessons, cause conflicts due to groupings, want to continue the behaviours belonging to their own culture, are exposed to conflicts because of Turkish students’ preconceptions, show little interest to lessons and are excluded by their friends. For instance; P6 said, *“Since refugee students display maladaptive behaviours, they are having problems with other students and in school issues.”* The participant P10 also mentioned the negative impacts of refugee students on the educational process saying, *“Unfortunately, the number of students who adapt to the school and really want to be in school is very few. That's why we have*

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absenteeism and behaviour problems. This situation negatively affects the education process.” On the other hand, P15, P17 and P23 enounced that they did not observe any negative effects of refugee students on the education process.

3.4. Problems That School Administrators Experience regarding Refugee Students

Participants stated that they experienced several problems regarding refugee students such as disciplinary problems (P2, P4, P5, P8, P10, P11, P12, P16, P18, P19, P21, P23), communication-language problems (P2, P4, P5, P7, P8, P11, P24, P22), learning difficulties (P2, P3, P4, P19), lack of cleaning habits (P10, P16, P19), absenteeism (P10, P15) and cultural differences (P24). However; P6, P15 and P17 asserted that they did not encounter any problems. For example; P19 said, *"There is a grouping among refugee students and they do not obey the school rules."*, and P21 *"We encounter disciplinary problems very often. There are incidents of fighting in our school."* expressed the discipline problem they experienced. P1 handled the issue from a different perspective by saying, *"We have a language problem at school with refugee students. Some refugees work as translators for a consideration for those who do not speak the language. A different sector emerged within the school."*

3.5. School Administrators' Solution Recommendations for the Problems They Encounter

Some participants made such recommendations as opening programs for the rapid integration process of their families (P4, P19, P20, P23, giving education to refugee students on basic language and speaking skills and Turkish culture before they start school, (P1, P2, P6, P7, P8, P11, P15, P16, P19, P20, P21), giving seminars to teachers on the education of refugee students (P19), helping refugee students with economic problems (P11, P19), providing psychological support for refugee students (P19), organizing various activities, games and competitions to adapt refugee students to school (P18), and providing education in separate schools or classrooms (P4, P5, P10). P2 said, *"I think that refugee students should be educated in separate classes. The hospitality and values of the Turkish nation must also be explained to them, and the school rules must be taught."* P4 and P8

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also offered solutions by saying “*Parents of refugee students can be given courses and the problem of integration with other parents can be solved.*” and “*Refugees should learn Turkish first and start school later. It is not possible to realize education without learning a language.*” respectively.

4. Conclusions

The conclusions reached based on the findings obtained in this study can be expressed as follows:

When the participants’ opinions on the problems faced by the school administrators regarding the families of the refugee students are examined, it is seen that the majority of them stated that they had communication problems due to language differences. Similarly, it was determined in the study conducted by Çolak and Tüzel-İşeri (2022) that the communication problem related to refugee families is among the problems expressed by school administrators.

In response to the question about the problems that refugee students face during their adaptation process to school, some participants stated that refugee students did not experience adaptation problems while others enounced that they had adaptation problems due to cultural and language differences. Some participants asserted that the problem of adaptation, which was experienced in the beginning, was resolved over time. In the studies conducted by Bucak (2021), Çolak and Tüzel-İşeri (2022), and Levent and Çayak (2017), it was concluded that school administrators stated they had an adjustment problem with refugee students. According to the findings as to school administrators’ opinions about the positive effects of refugee students on educational process, it was revealed that there was an increase in refugee students’ respect to the Turkish Nation. It was also found that students who became familiar with their peers from other cultures learned to show respect to them and that cooperation and solidarity improved among students. As for the school administrators' opinions about the negative effects of refugee students on the education

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process, the problems mentioned were refugee students' disrupting the education order of the classroom, not following the dress codes, having poor cleaning habits, not being able to adapt to the classroom because they do not know Turkish, deficiencies in nutrition and clothing due to financial problems, cultural conflicts, falling behind their friends in terms of the course subjects as they don't understand them, exhibiting inappropriate behaviors, having conflicts with other friends, absenteeism, groupings, sticking to the behaviors belonging to their own culture, conflicts among students, having little interest in the lessons, and being excluded by other students. In addition, groupings resulting from the prejudiced behaviours of the Turkish students were also mentioned as a problem. Levent and Çayak (2017) found that language difference is expressed as a problem experienced by school administrators. In the study conducted by Chios (2016), it was determined that most of the school administrators asserted that refugee students disrupted not only the flow of their own schools but also the order of existing students. Agcadağ-Çelik (2019) and Topaloğlu and Özdemir (2021) found in their study that refugee students exhibited violent and inappropriate behaviors. Similarly, based on the opinions of school administrators who participated in their researches, Topaloğlu and Özdemir (2021) and Yurdakul and Tok (2018) also concluded that refugee students were generally indifferent to the lessons. Regarding the sub-problem of the problems they observed in refugee students, the school administrators stated that they experienced disciplinary problems, economic problems, communication-language problems, learning difficulties, lack of cleaning habits, absenteeism and cultural differences. Similarly, in the studies carried out by Bucak (2021) and Çolak and Tüzel-İşeri (2022), the problems observed by school administrators were refugee children's school attendance problems, disciplinary problems, cultural incompatibility, economic problems and language differences. Erdem (2017), on the other hand, determined in his research that the communication problem arising from language differences in the education process with refugee students is the most common problem. These results reveal that the problems regarding refugee students are similar to each other. As regards to the solution offers for the problems they experience, school administrators recommended that

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various programs should be opened for a rapid adaptation process, lessons on the basic language, speaking skills and Turkish culture should be provided for refugee students before they start school, teachers should be given seminars on the education of refugee students, refugee students experiencing economic problems should be supported economically, psychological support should be provided for refugee students, various activities, games and competitions should be organized so that refugee students can adapt to school, and refugee students should receive education in separate schools or classes. In the study conducted by Çolak and Tüzel-İşeri (2022), school administrators also made similar recommendations such as opening language courses, conducting socio-cultural and school activities, organizing adaptation seminars, offering guidance and psychological counseling services and providing economic support.

The recommendations made based on the results of this research are as follows:

- Courses can be opened for families of refugee students at public education centers so that they learn Turkish,
- Interviews can be held with the families of refugee students in order to identify and resolve the problems experienced.
- The integration process can be carried out in a more comprehensive way.
- In order to minimize the problems experienced with refugee students, meetings can be held with Turkish students and their families within the scope of school-family cooperation.
- In order to solve the language problem encountered, courses for speaking, reading, understanding and writing in Turkish can be provided on the weekends from the moment refugee students start their education.
- Activities can be organized to ensure integration or social cohesion between refugee and Turkish students.
- It can be ensured that school administrators receive in-service training to solve the problems they encounter with refugee students.

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