Future Expectations of Syrian Secondary School Students Living in Turkey: A Phenomenological Study

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Future Expectations of Syrian Secondary School Students Living in Turkey
A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the future expectations of Syrian secondary school students living in Turkey. Considering the fact that these students, who constitute the study group in this research, will be teenaged adults in the next ten years, they will significantly affect the future of Syria, if they return to their home country, or of Turkey, if they stay here. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to identify the future expectations of these students. The issues that are investigated in this study are the migration experiences of Syrian secondary school students, the education they will receive within the scope of their expectations for the next year and for the next ten years, their vocational preferences, the places where they are planning to live, the support and barriers they face while they try to reach their expectations, and the changes that they want to make about their life. The study findings put forward important results that should be considered during the process of planning the education and psycho-social support to be rendered to Syrian secondary school students.

Introduction

A great number of Syrians have migrated to Turkey to reside in the country due to the domestic turbulence in Syria. Syrians have begun to settle in Turkish cities that are located alongside the Turkish-Syrian border, as these cities are close to them, their relatives are already living here, and these cities are de-conflict zones (Deniz et al., 2016). The domestic turbulences that started with riots against the Syrian government in 2011 grew so much that Syria turned into a battlefield, and so, millions of people began to worry about their safety (Emin, 2016). As the domestic turbulence in Syria goes on, the number of Syrian people in Turkey is increasing day by day, and Syrian immigrants are moving from borderline cities to many other cities around Turkey (Köksal et al., 2017). Since the very beginning of this migration, Turkey has made massive investments to provide the Syrian immigrants with various rights, with the right to life being first. Turkey is the country that has supported the Syrians the most during the Syrian domestic disturbance and hosts the greatest number of Syrians during this time (A World at School, 2015). According to the United Nations Human Rights Council, the initiatives adopted for Syrians in Turkey include taking registers within the scope of temporary protection; actions of educational, economic, psychosocial, and legal assistance; transactions of moving to other countries; and providing information about rights and responsibilities (UNHRC, 2020).
According to the Temporary Protection Regulation that was introduced on October 22, 2014, Syrian refugees are within the scope of “temporary protection” (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2020). Temporary protection is described in the International Terminology and Typologies of Migration (IOM) as the regulations and arrangements made by the government to provide people who have run away from conflict or violence zones en masse with temporary protection without putting them through the individual status determination process in advance (Perruchoud and Redpath-Cross, 2011). According to the data provided by the Directorate General of Migration Management affiliated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the number of Syrian refugees who hold the status of temporary education in Turkey by 2020 is 3,576,344 in total. The number of school-age Syrian children is 1,176,136 (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2020).

The immigration data in Turkey show that the number of teenage adult Syrians will increase in the future (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2020). Considering the fact that Syrian children who are school aged now will be the teenage adults of the society in the next ten years, it is essential to identify the future expectations of these children. Moreover, it is thought that identifying the future expectations of Syrian children will contribute to the process of planning support programs to be rendered to these children for their education. This is why this study examines the migration experiences and future expectations of eighth-grade Syrian children.

The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. How do Syrian students view the process of coming to Turkey?
2. What are the views of Syrian students about current living conditions?
3. What are the expectations of Syrian students for the next year?
4. What are the expectations of Syrian students for the next decade?
5. What are the things that Syrian students want to change in their lives?

**Literature Review**

**Social Structure of Syria**

Syria is an area that researchers have difficulty reaching due to the political turmoil in the country. Therefore, sociological research based on empirical studies is quite insufficient in this region (Eijk, 2013). “Personal Status Law” is the term for the laws that govern social issues in Syria, including family, marriage, divorce, guardianship, custody, and inheritance in social life. This law applies to Muslims in Syria. Those outside of the Islamic faith are subject to their personal status laws and are excluded from the Muslim personal status laws (Berger, 1997).

There is a patriarchal social structure in Syria. Male domination is prevalent in many issues such as family, the economy, religion, and politics. Muslim men are not allowed to marry any woman who does not belong to one of the monotheistic religions. It is not legal for Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men. Children born of illegal marriages are also not considered legal. According to the Personal Status Laws, the age of marriage is eighteen for men and seventeen for women. However, with the consent of
the relevant guardians, there is no harm in marrying thirteen-year-old girls (Maktabi, 2010). The guardians of girls are men; women cannot claim rights on issues such as divorce, custody, guardianship, and inheritance; and women do not have the right to make independent decisions. These show us male domination (Berger, 1997).

To reduce inequality between women and men, the Syrian state signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2003. However, despite increased access to higher education and wage employment, women are underrepresented in public and political life (FIDH, 2012). Many women do not fully know their legal rights in Syria. In addition, women renounce these rights due to social or family pressures. The reliance of women on men is maintained through social pressures as well. Domestic violence is widespread throughout Syria, but there is no penalty, as there is no law criminalizing domestic violence. There is pressure for women to fulfil their domestic responsibilities and comply with social norms in a way that maintains “family dignity” (Freedom House, 2010).

Because the war began in such a social structure, women, men, and children have had brutal experiences. The war has caused men to die and women to face risks in their gender-specific duties, such as domestic roles and care. Even more painfully, the war traumatized children (Deacon & Sullivan, 2009). These challenging situations have led Syrians to emigrate from their countries.

Integration and Future of Syrian Immigrant Students in Turkey

Education plays an important role in reintroducing immigrant students to society. A continuous education policy that addresses Syrian students will prevent the loss of a generation, and they will be able to adapt to society more easily and quickly (Cengiz, 2018). Studies have begun for the adaptation of Syrian immigrant children in Turkey. The first years of the migration were the years when it was thought that this migration was a temporary process, so the educational activities designed for Syrian children were carried out only in refugee camps where they lived at the time. Education services to be given to the Syrian children are secured with regulation number 2014/21, titled Regulation Regarding Educational Services for Foreigners. Syrian children receive education in refugee camps (temporary education centers), outside of these camps (state schools), and at private schools opened by the Syrians. Temporary education centers comprise primary and secondary education and teach Arabic to school-aged Syrian children (Ministry of Education, 2014). These centers follow the Syrian curriculum and use volunteer Syrian teachers. However, after Syrian immigrants began to move to cities all around Turkey, Syrian children also began to receive education at state schools in the cities where they live and in the same classes as their Turkish peers (Ministry of Education, 2017). Hence, students with different social identities and mother tongues—in other words, with different cultural backgrounds—started to join educational activities in the same class (Türk et al., 2018).

Schools play an important role in ensuring that immigrant children settle down in the country, adapt to the society, and develop a sense of belonging (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). The Turkish Ministry of National Education provides Syrian students with educational opportunities to prevent these children from becoming a lost generation and to help them have better living conditions in future years (Yüce, 2018). According to a report issued by Turkey’s Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) in 2017 about aid given to the Syrian immigrants, 80,742 Syrian children receive their education at
temporary refugee centers affiliated with AFAD, and 508,846 Syrian children ranging from preschool to high school go to school thanks to the cooperation established with the Ministry of National Education. However, the services of protection, health, and education for immigrant children have not reached the expected level, despite all these steps. For this reason, Syrian children face threats such as exclusion, being forced to work, marriage at a very early age, and sexual abuse (Harunoğulları, 2016). Immigrant Syrian children are very important for the future of both Syria, if they get back to their home country, and Turkey, if they stay here.

The Turkish Linguistic Society (2011) describes the concept of expectation as “the thing that is expected to occur” at an individual level. Similarly, expectation is defined in Oxford University Press (2002) as “belief that something will happen because it is likely” or “a strong belief about the way something should happen or how somebody should behave.” On the other hand, future expectations are cognitive maps that consist of views, interests, and anxieties individuals have about their future (Şimşek, 2012). Future expectations are important because expectations are the strongest motivations for making decisions and facing the future (Nurmi, 1991). Future expectation was first conceptualized in studies carried out by Frank (1939), Israeli (1936), and Lewin (1948). These studies focused on conceptualizing the term of future expectation and its developmental functionality. In brief, future expectation can be explained as the assumption that “the things that will be experienced in the future will occur in the future, this term is related to different study disciplines and these disciplines can be about an individual or a society” (Seignier, 2003). Future expectation is one of the elements that affect an individual’s current life as well as their future life. Life experiences lead to changes in the quality of these expectations. When past experiences are pleasant, the level of expectations gets higher, and individuals display better performance regarding their future life (Tuncer, 2011).

The literature shows that studies about immigrant children mostly focus on educational processes (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Sinclair, 2007), school orientation periods (Li & Grineva, 2016; Bang, 2017), and the problems immigrants face in the education process (Bugay et al., 2016; Culbertson & Constant, 2015; Watkins & Zyck, 2014; Measham et. Al., 2014; Stewart et. Al., 2015). On the other hand, studies about Syrian immigrants that have been carried out in Turkey mostly focus on social harmony (Akdeniz, 2018; Akıncı et al., 2015; Bulut, 2015; Akkoyunlu Ertan & Ertan, 2017; Nurdoğan et al., 2017), life conditions and problems faced by immigrants (Çetin, 2016; Ergün, 2018; Kağnıcı, 2017), problems faced by Syrian students in educational environments (Aksakal, 2017; Ereq, 2016; Mercan Uzun & Bütün, 2016; Yüce, 2018), and relations with other people present in educational environments (Erdem, 2017; Levent & Çayak, 2017; Şensin, 2016; Türk et al., 2018).

There are very few studies that examine the future expectations of Syrian immigrant children (e.g. Yıldız, 2013; Erdoğan, 2014; Kanak & Özen, 2018). The findings of a study carried out by Yıldız (2013) show that the longer Syrian refugees live in Turkey, the more they expect to find a job in the future. Furthermore, they hope that the society in which they live will not exclude them in the future. According to Erdoğan (2014), Syrians living in Turkey are happy and satisfied to be in Turkey. They would like to go back to their home country one day in the future if possible, but they feel that this possibility is lessening day by day. Moreover, it is found out at the end of this study that they are expecting to be granted citizenship right by Turkey. Kanak and Özen (2018) state that the level of future expectations of Syrians living in Turkey under temporary protection and their level of satisfaction with their current living conditions are high despite this compulsory “visit” they are experiencing. According to this study, Syrian refugees in Turkey have strong goals and dreams about their future lives, and they are aware of what they and the future generations will experience in the future.
Method

Research Model

This is a qualitative study that aims to identify Syrian students’ expectations about their future life that will start after completing a compulsory education period. In this sense, the research design is phenomenology. Phenomenological design is used to see in detail how a specific group experiences a certain phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). This study comprehensively addresses the migration experiences and future expectations of students who have moved from Syria to Turkey.

Study Group

The study group is composed of 15 Syrian students who are registered for eighth-grade classes at secondary public schools of the Turkish Ministry of National Education in the academic year of 2018–2019. The method of criterion sampling, which is a purposeful sampling method, was used to determine the participant students. Criterion sampling is preferred by researchers when they want to obtain the data they need, and it helps to determine the participants who meet a series of criteria that have been specified beforehand in line with the purpose of the study (Fraenkel & Vewallen, 2008). The previously specified criteria for the study’s sample include that the students had migrated to Turkey from Syria, they were in eighth grade during the study period, they were fluent in Turkish, their parents allowed them to participate in the study, and they were voluntarily willing to join the study.

The participant students were coded as S1, S2, S3, etc.; nine were female, while six were male. The students’ ages ranged from 13 to 15.

Data Collection

The data about the future expectations of students were gathered via semistructured interviews. An interview form was created by the researchers for this purpose. The researchers drew on the literature and on expert views while creating the interview form. The form consists of five open-ended questions. The interviews were done in April and May, 2019. Participant students’ parents were informed about the process, and they were asked to fill in an approval form before the interviews started. The interviews were audio-recorded upon participants’ permission, and each interview lasted 30 minutes on average.
Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze the data. Content analysis requires gathering similar data within certain concepts and themes and then arranging, interpreting, and explaining them in a way that is easily understandable (Creswell, 2014). Within this scope, first, the audio-recorded data were transcribed. The transcribed documents were analyzed by the researcher and field expert before codes and themes were identified with the data. The inter-coder reliability was calculated by using the formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), and the level of agreement among the coders was found to be 83.4%. When there was no agreement among the coders, the codes were examined and discussed by the researcher and field expert once more to reach an agreement (Silverman, 2005).

Validity and Reliability

Issues of validity and reliability are handled differently in qualitative studies than in quantitative studies. According to Erlandson et al. (1993), the strategies that are used to test the validity and reliability in qualitative studies are (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) consistency, and (d) confirmability.

**Credibility.** Credibility in qualitative research is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research, and it is related to presenting evidence of the validity of a study’s process and results (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation and expert checks were the methods used to ensure credibility in this study. It was possible to reach participants with different demographic qualities by means of triangulation. The method of expert checks made it possible to get feedback from three experts about the design and implementation of the study.

**Transferability.** Transferability in a qualitative study is the equivalent of external validity in a quantitative study; it refers to the generalizability of the study results. Generalizability in qualitative research is different from generalizability in quantitative research. In qualitative research, generalizability does not mean that the results obtained with a specific sample can be generalized to other samples; instead, it means that it is possible to reach temporary judgements about the applicability of the results in similar conditions (Creswell, 2014). Erlandson et al. (1993) recommend two strategies for transferability: “detailed description” and “purposeful sampling.” In this study, detailed description was adopted by presenting the views of the participants via direct quotations without adding any comment and sticking to the nature of the data, and purposeful sampling was used by means of considering certain criteria while choosing the study sample.

**Consistency.** This is the equivalent of internal reliability in quantitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). While reliability in a quantitative study means getting the same survey results in different measurements that are repeated with specific intervals, it is not possible to repeat a measurement in a qualitative study. This is because phenomena and events change all the time. In this sense, reliability in qualitative research means reflecting the current changeability to the research. Erlandson et al. (1993) suggest the strategy of consistency analysis to achieve consistency in the study. Consistency analysis means that an expert researcher, as an outside eye, watches to determine whether the study procedures
are carried out in a consistent way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the researchers received feedback from two academics, experts in the fields of psychological counseling and guidance and assessment and evaluation, respectively, about the design of the study, the development of the data collection tool, the collection of the data, the analysis of the data, and the evaluation of the findings. Moreover, inter-coder reliability was calculated according to the formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) to achieve consistency during the analysis.

Confirmability. This is the equivalent of objectivity or external reliability in a quantitative study. Although it is important in qualitative research to keep the researchers’ subjective judgments, beliefs, and assumptions away from the study results, as is the case in quantitative research, it does not seem possible to achieve this completely in a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, Erlandson et al. (1993) suggest confirmation analysis to achieve this. According to this strategy, the raw data of the study and the study findings should be kept for later analysis by an outside expert. For that reason, the raw data, data collection tools, and results of the analysis are kept to ensure confirmability when necessary.

Results

In this part of the study, the results obtained from the semi-structured interviews with eighth-grade Syrian students are given under five themes: (i) the period of arrival in Turkey, (ii) current life conditions, (iii) life expectations for the next year, (iv) life expectations for the next ten years, and (v) things they want to change about their life. Each theme is also composed of sub-categories varying in number.

The Period of Arrival in Turkey

The views of the participant students about the period of their arrival in Turkey are presented under three sub-categories: how long they have been in Turkey, “the people with whom they came to Turkey, and the reason why they chose Turkey.

How long they have been in Turkey. During the interviews, the Syrian students were asked when they had come to Turkey and how long they had lived here. Participants stated that they had been living in Turkey for 5 years (f=8, 53.33%), 4 years (f=3, 20%), 3 years (f=3, 20%), and 6 years (f=1, 6.66%), respectively.

The people with whom they came to Turkey. Most of the participants stated that they had come to Turkey with their nuclear families consisting of parents and siblings (f=11, 73.33%). Some participants came to Turkey with close relatives, such as uncles, aunts, grandparents (f=3, 20%), or with other acquaintances, such as neighbors (f=1, 6.66%).
I came to Turkey with my father, my mother, two siblings and my aunt’s son. There were also distant relatives with us. With distant relatives, I mean, the relatives of my aunt’s husband. They were also with us. (S3)

The reason why they chose Turkey. The reasons why the Syrian students chose to come to Turkey differ from each other. These reasons include having relatives who had come to Turkey before them (f=4, 26.66%), having the fear of war or death in Syria (f=3, 20%), thinking that Turkey is a safe region (f=2, 13.33%), thinking that they can easily move to Europe (f=2, 13.33%), thinking that life conditions are better in Turkey (f=1, 6.66%), having economic problems in Syria (f=1, 6.66%), being left alone in Syria because relatives there had moved to other countries (f=1, 6.66%), and having some information about Turkey beforehand (f=1, 6.66%).

My eldest brother and the other brother younger than him were already working in Turkey. My mother wanted to come to Turkey to look after them, I mean, help them with cooking, laundry, and so on. And there was a war in Syria. My father also didn’t want to stay there anymore. (S8)

My two brothers were living in Turkey. My mother was missing them a lot. Also, we were poor in Syria. My father thought he could find a job here in Turkey. And my younger brother was born. He was crying because of bomb sounds; he was about to get sick; we were scared of losing him. Therefore, we decided to come to Turkey. (S12)

Current Life Conditions

The participants’ views about their current life conditions are presented under three sub-categories: home conditions, the people with whom they are living in the same house, school environment, and out of school time.

Home conditions. Most of the participant students stated that their home conditions were bad (f=9, 45%). They reported living in shanty houses, they had heating problems, and they had difficulty in fitting in the house because of the high number of people living there. However, it was found out at the end of the study that there were also some students who were happy with their home conditions (f=6, 30%) and who were expecting better conditions at home (f=5, 20%).

Our home environment is very hard. We are trying to tolerate the conditions in this house. It is not a good place. It does not get warm in cold weather even if we buy coal to burn. (S2)

We are living in an old house now. It is not a good house, but we will move to a bigger house with natural gas. We are saving money. (S6)
School environment. The participant students describe school as a place where there are good human relations (f=5, 26.31%), a place that they like (f=4, 21.05%), a place where they have friends (f=3, 15.78%), a place where they are not reprimanded but only warned (f=2, 10.52%), a place that is tidy (f=2, 10.52%) and a place where teachers are very nice (f=1, 5.26%). However, some of the Syrian students saw school as a place where they had communication problems (f=1, 5.26%) and a place that is worse than their previous schools (f=1, 5.26%).

My friends and teachers are nice, but they can be better. I was better at my school in Syria. I sometimes have problems with my friends here. (S1)

In fact, I love my school. I want to speak German, Turkish and Arabic, Korean, I mean, foreign languages. I like school. Teachers are very nice. (S5)

Expectations for the Next Year

The participants’ life expectations for the next year were mostly about continuing high school education (f=12, 80%). However, some students also stated that they would not proceed into high school education (f=1, 6.66%) and would work (f=1, 6.66%). Moreover, there are students who have not decided what to do next year (f=1, 6.66%).

I am planning to be a tailor. I know tailoring. There are tailors in Siteler. I can also go there and be a tailor. (S4)

I will go to high school. My father lets me go to high school, but my sister didn’t want to go to high school. I will. (S6)

Expectations for the Next Ten Years

The views of the participant students about their expectations for the next ten years are presented under four sub-categories: occupation, the place to live, family support, and comparing to the dreams in Syria.

Occupation. When the participant Syrian students were asked which occupation they would be following after ten years, some of them stated that they had no expectation about having a job (f=3, 20%). Besides this, there were some other students who reported that they hoped to be a tailor (f=1, 6.66%), a hairdresser (f=2, 13.35%), a babysitter (f=1, 6.66%), a teacher (f=3, 20%), an engineer (f=1, 6.66%), a travel guide (f=1, 6.66%), and a translator (f=1, 6.66%). Moreover, some students thought they would have any job (f=2, 13.35%). The students who do not intend to work in any job and who plan to work in jobs such as tailor, hairdresser and babysitter are female students.
I don’t think that I will be a teacher or a lawyer. Because that’s too difficult for us. We are not expected to have a job in our families. I will be at home. (S14)

I see myself as a hairdresser in the future. An acquaintance has just become a hairdresser. I think that I can also be a hairdresser. (S9)

The place to live. Participants expressed that they expected to be living in Turkey (f=8, 53.33%), Syria (f=3, 20%), Germany (f=2, 13.33%), and France (f=2, 13.33%) respectively. Those who thought they would be living in Turkey stated that they hoped to be living in the capital city of Ankara (f=4, 50%), İstanbul (f=3, 37.5%), or İzmir (f=1, 12.5%).

I will be living in Turkey after ten years, with my family. (S11)

I have a dream that I will be married, living in Germany, at a green place full of trees. I have heard that it is a nice place. (S5)

Family support. Most of the students stated that their family would support them no matter what their decision about their future expectations for the next ten years was (f=6, 40%). Besides this, some of the students expressed that their families would want them to continue their education (f=3, 20%), whereas some others stated that they would not want them to continue their education (f=4, 6.66%). Moreover, some students stated that their families would get upset because of their future decisions (f=2, 13.33%).

My family don’t want me to go to another school. This school is nice, and I am treated well here, this is a safe school. I haven’t told them about my dreams to be an engineer and go to France. My father says that I can teach Kur’an to children as a profession. My father also wanted to be an engineer, but he couldn’t. (S2)

My father and mother told me that I can choose what I want about this. I mean, they say it is up to me. My brother is also attending high school. He will also choose what he wants. He is in ninth grade now.” (S9)

Comparing to the dreams in Syria. When the students were asked to compare their future expectations for the next ten years in Turkey to the expectations they used to have in Syria, they stated that they had no future expectations when they were in Syria as there was war there and they were too young when they lived there (f=9, 60%) and that their future expectations changed in Turkey (f=3, 20%). On the other hand, there are some other students whose expectations in Turkey were similar to the ones they had in Syria (f=3, 20%).
I attended school until fifth grade in Syria. When I was there, I was wishing to be a teacher or doctor. Then, I started 6th grade in Turkey. I want to be a teacher here, as well. (S10)

Yes, they are similar. While I was in Syria, I was hoping to come to Turkey. And now, I want to go to Germany. I want to go to Berlin, because I have relatives there, and there are sea and green places there. (S15)

Things They Want to Change About Their Life

The Syrian students stated that if they had a chance, they would like to prevent the war in Syria (f=5, 27.80%), ensure that they are with their loved ones (f=3, 16.66%), improve their life conditions (home, school, goods, etc.) (f=3, 16.66%), have their uncle alive (f=1, 5.55%), prevent their parents’ divorce (f=1, 5.55%), live in Syria instead of Turkey (f=2, 11.11%), or change some personal qualities (f=1, 5.55%). However, some students expressed that they would not like to change anything (f=2, 11.12%).

I wish there were no war in Syria. I wish my uncle were alive now. (S2)

I am a very calm and quiet person. I would like to be a more sociable and energetic person. I would like to change myself. I had two friends in Syria. They were very calm. I was like them, I liked them very much. But I don’t know if they are alive or dead now. I would like to see them very much. I used to get on very well with them. But everyone at my school in Turkey is so energetic. I have to change myself to make friends here. (S5)

Discussion

In this section, the study results are discussed and interpreted in light of the previous studies in the literature.

According to the study findings, the time period of participants’ stay in Turkey ranged from 3 to 6 years. As a result of growing turbulence that commenced in 2011, mass migrations began, and Turkey opened the doors to people who had to run away from Syria. Thus, millions of Syrians took refuge in Turkey (Emin, 2016). Although the fighting in Syria was not so bad in the earlier years, it became apparent in 2014 that de-escalation of the conflict was not possible in Syria, and more and more Syrians began to come to Turkey. The fact that almost 90% of the participants came to Turkey in 2014 or later is parallel with the other study results in the literature (Erdem, 2017). These results indicate that most of the participants completed primary school in Syria and started to receive secondary school education in Turkey.

Another study finding shows that the eighth-grade Syrian students who participated in this study had mostly come to Turkey with their nuclear family, consisting of parents and siblings. Moreover, some of
them came to Turkey with their close relatives or other acquaintances. In light of this finding, it is thought that Syrian families have chosen to come to Turkey with their families and acquaintances to protect themselves from negative and risky life experiences, to feel safe, to increase their life resources, and thus to make the adaptation period easier. In line with this, network theory in the literature of migration states that the network of migration relations plays an important role in adapting to the place where the immigrants go, decreasing the disturbance and expense produced by the process of migration (Gurak & Caces, 1992; Vertovec, 2003; Abadan-Unat, 2002; Dustmann & Glitz, 2005).

According to the study data, the reasons why Syrian families chose to come to Turkey vary. These reasons include the facts that the students have relatives in Turkey, there is a fear of war or death in Syria, Turkey is a safe place, it will be easier to move to Europe from Turkey, life conditions are good in Turkey, they had economic problems in Syria, and they already know something about Turkey. Yıldız (2013) analyzed the reasons why Syrian refugees chose Turkey. According to this study, these reasons include the sense of trust or sympathy in Turkish government, that Turkey is close to the border, and they feel close to Turkish people. Moreover, the reasons to choose Turkey include that conditions are good in Turkey and they have relatives in Turkey. Kultas (2017) found that the main reason why Syrians chose to migrate to Turkey was the war that started in Syria. Besides the main reason of war in Syria, which was expressed by all the participants, another important reason for their move to Turkey is Turkey’s being a safe and secure country to live. The study also found that the fact that Turkey is close to Syria in terms of geographical location and shares a border with Syria is another factor that encouraged Syrians to migrate to Turkey. Other studies examining the reasons for migration to Turkey also confirm this study finding (Cengiz, 2015; Apak, 2015; Neccar, 2016; AFAD, 2017; Erdem, 2017; Şahin & Aydemir, 2018; Bakioğlu et al., 2018). Based on the findings of previous studies and the current findings, it can be said that Syrian immigrants mostly choose Turkey for safety, economic, educational, health, geographical, political, and cultural reasons. Thus, it is clear that the study findings are similar to the findings in the literature.

The current results show that Syrian students in Turkey were mostly unhappy with their home conditions. In addition to this, there were also participants who were pleased with their home conditions as well as those who think that their home conditions should be better. In the field research carried out by AFAD (2017) with the participation of 2,435 Syrians living in camps in Turkey (tent cities and containers set up by the Turkish government) and living outside these camps, home conditions, the quality of houses, and houses’ basic needs were evaluated successfully. While the quality of houses (e.g., size, convenience, safety, soundness, appropriateness to the climate, appropriateness to family life) were seen as sufficient and insufficient by 51.8% and 48.2%, respectively, of those living outside of refugee camps, 54.7% of those living in refugee camps thought these qualities were sufficient, and 45.3%, insufficient. Furthermore, 50.8% of those living outside of the camps thought that the basic needs of a house (fuel, food, sleeping goods, furniture and home appliances, clothing, prayer equipment, materials for social life) were sufficient, and 49.2% stated that they were insufficient. On the other hand, 77.8% of those living in the camps thought these basic needs were sufficient, whereas 22.2% thought they were insufficient. As the results of this field study indicate, the level of satisfaction of those living in refugee camps is higher than that of those living outside of camps. Comparing the results of the field study with the current findings, and considering the fact that the Syrian eighth-grade students who participated in this study lived in houses they had found through their own means outside the camp, the results of both studies are similar in that Syrians living outside refugee camps are less satisfied with their home conditions. Researchers think that this difference in perception of living conditions inside and outside of the camp because living quarters in camps are established and maintained regularly by the government. Yıldız (2013) carried out a study in which 64% of Syrian refugees stated that their first
and foremost life problems are about physical conditions (sheltering, heating, infrastructure, etc.). This finding also supports the findings of this study.

The current participants saw school as a place that is very nice, which they like very much, where they have friends, where they are not reprimanded but only warned, which is tidy, and where teachers are nice people. These findings show that the participants were generally happy with their school environment. In research conducted by Karr et al. (2020), the authors found that school, which includes social connections and friends, creates emotional support and increases the sense of belonging. A study by Özdemir and Kalaycı (2013) shows that satisfaction with school predicts participants’ commitment to school. Other studies in the literature show that school commitment decreases the frequency of school dropouts (Janosz et al., 2008; Sinclair et al., 1998). The findings of this study show that some of the participants thought that schools are difficult and are worse than their previous schools. Kultas (2017) and AFAD (2017) both posit that Syrian students in Turkey have some problems at school, and the first and foremost of these problems is the language barrier. The participant children expressed having communication problems resulting from having different mother tongues as well as difficulty in understanding lessons since they know only little Turkish. Samsun and Mebrek (2018) also carried out a study in which Syrian students stated that they were subject to discrimination and exclusion at school. The literature emphasizes that such negative cases will result in students’ dissatisfaction with school and will lead to school dropout (Şimsek & Şahin, 2012). Watkins and Zyck (2014) state that Syrian refugee children who are not included in schooling or who draw away from school tend to marginalize, join radical groups, and display risky and dangerous behaviors.

According to another of our findings, eighth-grade Syrian students’ plans for the coming year mostly focus on continuing their education in high school. The fact that most of the participant students were planning to continue their education shows that they have a high level of motivation to be involved in educational activities. As is clear in the previously stated findings, the fact that they have a positive attitude toward their current schools may be influential in their decision to continue their education. The number of participants planning to continue their education was higher than those who had negative expectations, and this shows that there is a hopeful Syrian teenage group. However, there were also students planning to stop their education to join work life, and some had not decided what to do yet. In a study by Kanak and Özen (2018), Syrian teenagers define their expectations for the coming year as “being successful at school and in life.” Based on the study findings, the necessary activities should be planned in line with students’ expectations for the coming year. Starting from the point of these expectations, Seydi (2013) argued that Syrian students in Turkey should receive psychological support first of all for the traumatic events they have experienced, and they should also be given the necessary support to learn Turkish.

Although there were participants who thought they would not be working in ten years, there were also others planning to be teachers, tailors, hairdressers, engineers, travel guides, or translators. Moreover, some participants thought they would have a job caring for children, and others simply expected to have a job. The students thought they would have a job that does not require higher education but only needs high school education. This may be because Syrian students’ academic success is low due to language problems (Gür, 2018; Kultas, 2017) and because they do not know much about university entrance requirements for jobs that need higher education.
Moreover, the most important barriers for Syrian students to continue their education are that Syrian children, especially girls, are forced to get married at an early age (Dorman, 2014; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; UNESCO, 2014) and boys have to work illicitly (Erdoğan & Unver, 2015). In addition, female students want to work in professions such as tailoring, hairdressing, and childcare in such a way that they can take on the domestic roles attributed to women by the Syrian culture (Freedom House, 2010). This shows that they are planning their future in a way that supports their culture. However, some participants were also dreaming about university education. One study by Kayabağdas and Demir (2018) shows that Syrian students are dreaming about becoming teachers, doctors, police officers, or artists. The differences between the Syrian students are thought to result from their families’ socioeconomic conditions.

The Syrian students in this study dreamed that they would be living in Turkey, Germany, France, or Syria in ten years. Almost all the families and children who participated in Kultas’s (2017) research stated that they were not planning to move to another country. Nearly three-fourths of the participants stated that they would like to go back to their home country upon the end of war in Syria, but they were planning to stay in Turkey until then. Yıldız (2013) found that 35% of Syrian refugees would like to stay in Turkey forever if they were provided with suitable conditions. About 34% emphasized that they would not like to stay here. The percentage of those who were hesitant about this was also not low. Erdem (2017) found that 86% of the Syrian participants wanted to have a future life in Turkey, whereas 12% of them did not. The field study conducted by AFAD (2017) also shows that 51% of Syrian refugees in Turkey were not planning to leave Turkey in the future. Considering the study findings in the literature and the results of this study, it seems that Syrian refugees see Turkey as a country with a high level of welfare, that is comfortable to live in, where they can bring up their children (Apak, 2015). Moreover, some study findings indicate that Syrians would like to move to other developed countries, such as Germany, England, the US, and France, in the future (Erdem, 2017). Based on these results, we posit that migration to developed countries will continue in the future.

Most of the Syrian students who participated in this study thought that they would get support from their families for reaching their future goals. They stated that their families would agree with their desire to continue their education. However, other participants expressed that they did not think they would receive support from their families. The literature shows that the social support perceived by teenagers has an important impact on reaching their future expectations; the higher the level of perceived social support is, the less adaptation problems there will be, and thus, the more positive these teenagers’ future expectations will be (Bayoğlu & Purutçuoğlu, 2010). Other studies’ findings indicate that family support, as one kind of social support, is a statistically significant predictor of positive future expectations (Sulimani-Aidan & Benbenishty, 2011; Collins et al., 2008; Dubow et al., 2001). In addition, the collectivist nature of the Syrian culture, the importance of living together in the family, and the emphasis on protecting family dignity necessitate family support. Family support for children’s future expectations is an indication of their cultural structure (Freedom House, 2010). Based on the findings of this study as well as other findings in the literature, we argue said that those Syrian students who can get enough family support will have positive future expectations and will be more likely to reach them.

According to the study findings, when the participant students were asked to compare their dreams after they came to Turkey with the ones they had in Syria, they mostly stated that they did not have dreams in Syria or that the content of their dreams changed after coming to Turkey. Tarhan and Bacanlı (2016) found that future expectations and dreams created hope and that dreams were a prerequisite for hope.
According to Staats and Stassen (1985), hope can be described as the dominance of positive future expectations over negative ones. In this sense, it can be clearly stated that dreams, hopes, and future expectation are interrelated. When the migration experience is addressed in this context, unwilling or compulsory migrations represent disengagement from personal history, life story, the culture and land where one is born, and, most importantly, from hopes for immigrants, no matter what the direction of the migration is (Özpolat, 2018). For this reason, the traumatic and compulsory migration experienced by Syrian participants makes it difficult for them to dream or cause them to change their previously held dreams. The statement, “No one in this world cares about us. We don’t have homes, we don’t have futures, we don’t have dreams,” uttered by a participant of Yunus’s (2012) study on Arakan Muslim immigrants, also supports this study finding. However, when people’s dreams change with migration, this change can also be positive, not only negative. In fact, a target country’s policies addressing immigrants and the opportunities these countries provide to the immigrants can help open the door of a new life for immigrants. Hence, immigrants can have new hopes, dreams, and positive future expectations. AFAD (2017) reveals that almost 48% of Syrians were hopeful about their future. Yigit and Tatch (2017) show that the Syrian refugees living in America have a potential for hope, future plans, and a new and meaningful life.

According to the current findings, eighth-grade Syrian students in Turkey would like to prevent the war in Syria, be with their loved ones, have better physical conditions, and avoid losing their relatives if they had a chance to change something. What the participants wanted to change is related to the psychological and physical traumas resulting from war conditions. Alcock’s (1941) study shows that children who are victims of war and who have to move away from their houses because of war have psychometric and neurotic symptoms. Similarly, Barbara (2006) underlines the fact that the loss and problems in children’s lives because of war can lead to depression and anxiety. These psychological symptoms can worsen when they experience violence because of their lives as refugees after the war. Therefore, the students wanted to change the bad life experiences they have had to get rid of the impact of war and migration, if they could. According to a report issued by Save The Children (2019), the most important expectation of Syrian children from adults and international society is ending the war and ensuring the security of children. This expectation is in line with what the participant students in this study would like to change if they could.

Conclusion

This study investigated the future expectations of Syrian eighth-grade students living in Turkey based on interviews with the students. According to the results, most of the students who are about to finish secondary school are planning to continue their education at high school. Some participants are planning to finish their educational life and start work life. For those students not planning to continue their education, the socioeconomic conditions of their families are influential on this decision. This is because if families are poor, boys often start to work to contribute to the family budget, while girls get married at an early age.

The Syrian students who participated in the study expressed their future expectations for the next ten years, which can be classified under the sub-categories of occupational expectations, the place they want to live, family support for their future expectations, and comparing the dreams they have in Turkey with the ones they used to have in Syria. The study findings show that almost half of the participant students expect to have a job requiring higher education, such as teacher, engineer, translator, and travel guide,
whereas the other half expect jobs like a hairdresser, tailor, and babysitter, which do not require higher education. This difference results from factors such as students’ level of academic success, whether they have overcome the language barrier, and their families’ socioeconomic conditions. Some participants stated that they will stay in Turkey, whereas most others expected to move to European countries such as Germany and France. On the other hand, there are few students who want to go back to Syria. These results indicate that Syrians see Turkey as a country where they can build their future and bring up their children, whereas the migration will continue flowing toward the more developed countries in Europe. Most of the participants hope that their families will support them in reaching their future goals. They state that the family support will mostly be for continuing their education. Family support, which is accepted to be a basic social support, will be influential in students’ reaching their future expectations. Moreover, because of the war conditions, the participant students did not have any future expectations when they were in Syria, but they began to have more positive future expectations after they migrated to Turkey. In other words, migration to Turkey has increased Syrian students’ future expectations.

According to another study result, Syrian students would like most to stop war if they had a chance to change something. This is followed by preventing loss in the family and improving current living conditions. The things that students want to change about their lives are believed to point out their severest traumas and the sources of these traumas. The traumatic effects of war on children leave permanent damage to their physical, psychological, and moral development. For this reason, conducting individual or group psychosocial support activities for children will be an important factor in looking to the future with hope. It is considered important for the future of children to regain the basic sense of trust, to prevent the disruptive effects that may arise from post-traumatic stress reactions, and to restore their pre-trauma functionality levels.

In the future, Syrian students in Turkey should be provided with career counselling throughout their educational life to build their career in line with their future expectations. Within the scope of this service, eighth-grade students should be directed to high school considering their interests, abilities, and values. Psychological counselling and guidance services at schools should provide students with a program to introduce jobs to help students choose the best job for themselves. Also, school psychological counselling and guidance services should plan programs for Syrian parents about communication among family members, parents’ attitudes, higher educational institutions and entrance requirements, and qualities of developmental stages within the scope of counselling services. Besides these, students should be provided with a variety of psychosocial support, including individual or group counselling, to heal the effects of trauma resulting from war and losses in the family.

Limitations

Although this study has important findings as to the future expectations of Syrian students who are refugees in Turkey, there are some limitations. First, the data for this study were obtained via the participants’ self-reporting. This might have directed students to report pieces of information that are expected and accepted in social terms. Another limitation is that because the researchers adopted a qualitative method, the aim was not to generalize but to obtain information in depth as a qualitative method. Therefore, the study findings, drawn from a small group of participants, cannot be generalized for all eighth-grade Syrian students in Turkey as the study group. Based on this, the authors recommend that other researchers carry out quantitative studies whose results can be generalized with more Syrian students as participants.
Note: The interviews for this study were held in April and May 2019. The reporting process for this study was completed between September 2019 and March 2020.

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