

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Syrian Students in Turkish Universities: Turkish Students' Views and Challenges

Nihat Köse^a ^a Fırat University, Türkiye**ABSTRACT**

This study examines Turkish students' perspectives on Syrian students' experiences in Turkish universities. Using a phenomenological methodology, the semi-structured interviews with 34 Turkish students revealed that Syrian students face language barriers, cultural adaptation problems, economic difficulties, and discrimination. The findings reveal Turkish students to have both positive and negative attitudes toward Syrian students, with positive views such as hospitality, cultural richness, and solidarity, as well as negative attitudes regarding experiences such as language barriers and prejudices. The study suggests that language training and support programs should be increased, cultural integration activities should be organized, psychosocial support services should be provided, and economic support should be increased to support the integration of Syrian students into the university environment. These recommendations aim to increase Syrian students' academic and social success and strengthen Turkish students' positive attitudes toward these students.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received March 1, 2024

Revised May 27, 2024

Accepted August 14, 2024

KEYWORDS

Syrian students • Turkish students • phenomenology • thematic analysis

The civil war in Syria in recent years has displaced millions of Syrians and forced many of them to seek refuge in Türkiye. In this process, Türkiye has welcomed Syrian refugees and tried to meet their needs in various fields. In this context, Syrian youths have been allowed to study at universities in Türkiye in order to protect and maintain their right to education. However, this situation has had various impacts on both Syrian and Turkish students. Problems such as the adaptation issues, language barriers, and economic difficulties Syrian students experience have made university life difficult and affected their relationships with Turkish students. This study aims to examine Turkish students' perspectives on the situation of Syrian students in Turkish universities, the problems they face, and the effects of these problems. The study also aims to provide a framework for solving this important social problem by revealing Turkish students' attitudes toward and suggestions for Syrian students.

Both positive and negative developments have occurred in integrating Syrian students into the Turkish education system. According to studies, the biggest challenges faced during this integration include language

barriers, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of adequate physical infrastructure (Akçay & Serbest, 2022; Unutulmaz, 2019). For example, while the language barrier has negatively affected Syrian students' academic achievement, it has also complicated their ability to communicate with Turkish students (Akçay & Serbest, 2022). In addition, teachers and school administrators have indicated the cultural differences and occasional incidents of exclusion between Syrian and Turkish students (Unutulmaz, 2019). However, Türkiye's policies toward refugee education have improved significantly since 2016, and a more inclusive model has been adopted by enabling these students to receive education in public schools. Despite these developments, room for improvement still exists in areas such as language education and classroom capacity.

Educating Syrian students at universities in Türkiye has great importance for their future, as well as for the Turkish education system and society. This research aims to make important contributions in this regard. In particular, ensuring social cohesion and Syrian students' integration into university life play a critical role in pro-

CORRESPONDENCE TO: Nihat Köse, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Fırat University, Elazığ, Türkiye.E-mail: nkose@firat.edu.tr ORCID: 0000-0002-9891-1421**To cite this article:** Köse, N. (2024). Syrian students in Turkish universities: Turkish students' views and challenges. *TRC Journal of Humanitarian Action*, 3, 105–117. <https://doi.org/10.55280/trcjha.2024.3.1.0004>

viding social peace in the long term. Understanding Turkish students’ perspectives on Syrian students will help in developing policies and strategies to support this integration process (Ager & Strang, 2008). In addition, identifying the challenges Syrian students face in the educational process will help shape educational policies and practices according to these needs, which will also contribute to realizing the principles of equality and equal opportunity in education (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Another issue this study aims to address is determining Syrian students’ psychosocial support needs, as the traumas and adaptation problems Syrian students experience increase their need for psychological support. This research can help design psychosocial support services for Syrian students by evaluating these problems from the perspective of Turkish students (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). In addition, increasing Syrian students’ academic achievement and motivation will have important consequences for their educational success, both at the individual and societal levels. This study aims to identify ways to increase Syrian students’ motivation by examining Turkish students’ attitudes toward Syrian students and the effects these attitudes have on academic achievement (Betancourt & Khan, 2008). Importance is also had in noting the significant issue of increasing cultural richness and diversity. Syrian students’ contributions to the university environment increase cultural richness and diversity. Understanding how Turkish students approach this diversity will allow strategies to be developed for improving cultural integration (Fidan, 2014). Perhaps the most important issue is long-term social and economic development, and education is the cornerstone of social and economic development. Educating Syrian students will allow them to become active and productive members of society in the future. This research will contribute to achieving long-term development goals by revealing Syrian students’ obstacles and support needs on their educational journey (Kılıç & Koç, 2016).

Research on the problems Syrian students face in Turkish universities and their effects have made significant contributions to the body of knowledge in this field. Also, understanding Turkish students’ perspectives on Syrian students is critical for developing social cohesion and integration policies.

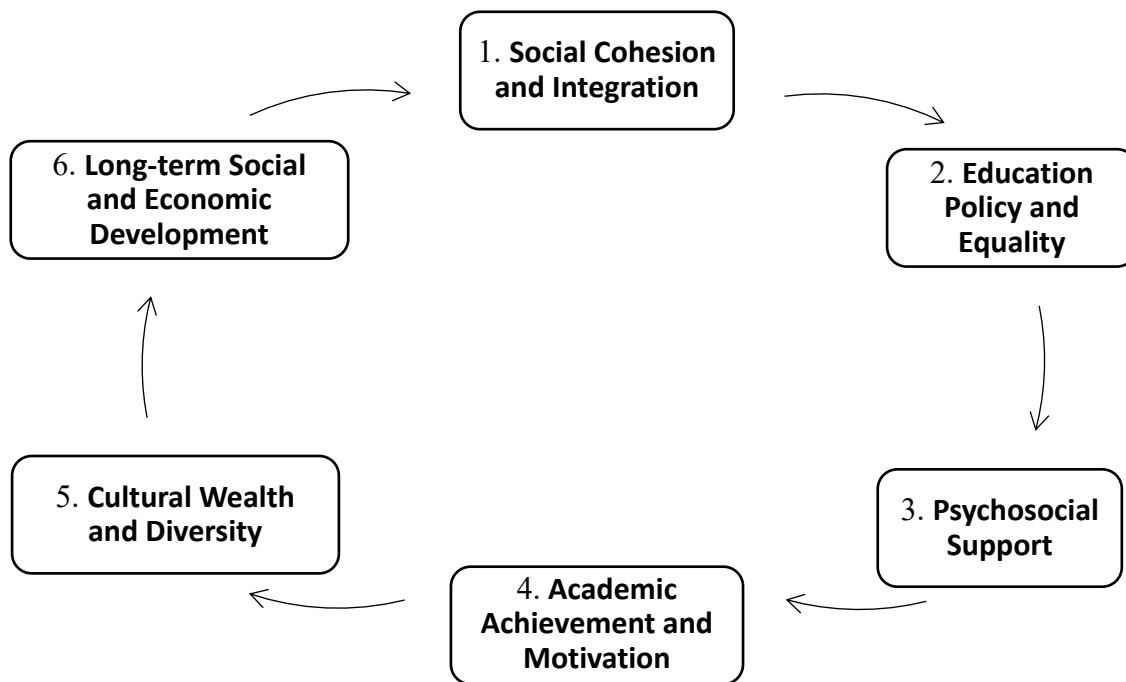


Figure 1. Areas for addressing Syrian refugee students.

Ager and Strang’s (2008) study on the integration of refugees emphasized how social cohesion plays a key role in successful integration. Integrating Syrian students into the university environment is an important step in ensuring social peace and harmony in the long run. Similarly, Berry (1997) emphasized the importance of mutual understanding and integration within cultural adaptation, and the current study views Turkish students’ attitudes towards Syrian students as a determining factor in this process. Dryden-Peterson (2011) discussed the difficulties refugees face in education and stated that education policies should be reshaped in order to overcome these difficulties. Ensuring equal opportunity in education is critical for increasing Syrian students’ academic achievement. In the same vein, Çelik and Öztürk (2017) emphasized the importance of adapting education policies to the needs of refugee students. Miller and Rasmussen (2010) emphasized the psychosocial support needs of refugees who’ve experienced war and trauma. The

traumas and adaptation problems Syrian students experience also increase their need for psychological support. Assessing these problems from the perspective of Turkish students can help in designing psychosocial support services for Syrian students. In this context, Erikson's (1994) theory of psychosocial development emphasized the importance of developing young adults' sense of identity and belonging. Betancourt and Khan (2008) examined the mental health and resilience processes of children who'd been affected by armed conflict. Based on these, increasing Syrian students' academic achievement and motivation of Syrian students will have important consequences at both the individual and societal levels. Similarly, Ryan and Deci (2000) emphasized the effects of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation on academic achievement, while Fidan's (2014) study on a local cooperation model for working with Syrian refugees in Kars emphasized the importance of cultural richness and diversity within integration. Syrian students' contributions to the university environment increase cultural richness and diversity, which have been found to broaden students' worldviews and reinforce a culture of tolerance (Banks, 2008). Kılıç and Koç (2016) discussed the effects of disasters and war on cultural heritage. Educating Syrian students will allow them to take part in society as active and productive individuals in the future and contribute to achieving long-term development goals, and Sen's (1999) theory of human development has emphasized the interconnectedness of education and economic development in this respect.

Present Study

This study aims to examine Turkish students' perspectives on the situation of Syrian students studying at universities in Türkiye. The research covers the problems Syrian students face, the effects these problems have, and Turkish students' attitudes toward these situations. The study discusses the main problems that Syrian students face in their university life in Türkiye, such as language barriers, social adaptation problems, and economic difficulties, and evaluates the effects these problems have on Turkish students. The study additionally investigates Turkish students' attitudes toward Syrian students and the effects their attitudes have on academic achievement and social relations. The study aims to contribute to developing policies and strategies that support social cohesion and integration by understanding Turkish students' perspectives towards Syrian students in depth. In this context, the aim is to increase cultural richness and diversity in the university environment, improve psychosocial support services, and ensure equal opportunities in education. The study uses qualitative research methods to analyze the data obtained through in-depth interviews with Turkish students. These analyses provide important findings for understanding the challenges Syrian students face and their coping strategies. The obtained data will guide the development of educational policies and provide a more inclusive educational environment in universities.

Method

Research Design

This study uses phenomenology, a qualitative research method, to understand the Turkish students' perspectives regarding the situation of Syrian students studying at universities in Türkiye. Phenomenology is a research design that aims to explore how participants experience a particular phenomenon and how they give meaning to these experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). This method aims to understand individuals' experiences, perceptions, and feelings in their lifeworld and generally provides rich data through in-depth interviews.

Participants

The study's participants consist of 34 Turkish students studying at universities in Türkiye. Of these participants, 21 are female and 13 are male. The purposive sampling method has been used in accordance with the research purpose to select the participants. Purposive sampling helps select individuals who best represent a particular phenomenon and who can provide the most appropriate answers to the research questions (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling also allows information-rich situations to be selected in order to achieve the purpose of the research. In this context, students with different demographic characteristics were selected to gain an in-depth understanding of Turkish students' experiences with Syrian students. Participants were selected based on a variety of variables (e.g., age, department, grade level). This diversity aims to increase the validity of the study by including different perspectives and experiences. Selecting the participant occurred in collaboration with universities' student affairs offices and student clubs. Interviews were conducted with students who agreed to voluntarily participate in the study. Each participant was provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, process, and data confidentiality, and written consent was obtained from them.

The selected group consists of students who frequently interact with Syrian students and who have significant observations about their university life in Türkiye. This allows for a comprehensive in-depth study of the phenomenon on which the research is focused. The participants have provided valuable insights into the challenges Syrian students face, their processes of social integration, and their academic performance. In this way, the study has obtained rich detailed data in line with its purpose.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected using a semi-structured interview form. This form consists of questions that allow the participants to express in detail their experiences with Syrian students and their thoughts about these experiences. Semi-structured interviews both provide a specific framework and allow participants to express themselves freely (Smith & Osborn, 2003). A semi-structured interview form asks participants questions around certain main themes while allowing them to describe their experiences and views on these themes in depth. This type of interview guides the researcher on specific issues while at the same time allowing participants to freely share their perspectives. This method combines the focused information provided by the structured questions with the rich and detailed accounts provided by unstructured interviews. When developing the interview form, the study reviewed the relevant literature and identified the questions that could best reflect Syrian students' university experiences. The questions on the form were designed to allow the participants to comprehensively express their interactions with Syrian students, their observations, and their thoughts on the subject. The following are samples of some of the semi-structured questions:

1. What do you think about your interactions with Syrian students?
2. What are the biggest challenges Syrian students face?
3. What effects have your interactions with Syrian students had on your academic and social life?

Data Collection

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in environments where participants felt comfortable and safe. This process was specifically organized so that the participants could express their views openly and sincerely. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Before the interviews began, the participants were given detailed information about the purpose of the research, its process, and the principles of confidentiality. The participants were informed that participation in the research was entirely voluntary and that they could leave the interview at any time. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were meticulously protected throughout the research (Creswell, 2013). Written consent was obtained from each participant before starting the interview. This consent form states that the interviews would be recorded using a voice recorder, that these recordings would only be used for research purposes, and that they would not be shared with third parties. The participants were assured that the interview recordings and transcripts would be kept confidential and anonymized and that their personal information would be protected. During the interviews, the researchers displayed a warm and supportive attitude to make the participants feel comfortable. The interview settings were chosen to avoid distractions and to allow the participants to speak freely, with quiet private rooms on university campuses generally being used. Each interview was conducted in line with the semi-structured questions. At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were briefly informed about the general framework and objectives of the research before being asked the questions. During the interviews, in-depth questions were asked in line with the answers the participants gave in order to discuss the topic in more detail. The participants' statements were recorded in their natural flow without any guidance. All interviews were recorded using a voice recorder. The use of audio recordings eliminated the need to take notes during the interview and allowed the researchers to communicate more effectively by making eye contact with the participants. In addition, audio recordings allow the interview data to be analyzed in detail later and ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim after the interviews were completed. These transcripts were used in the thematic analysis to identify the main themes and patterns in the participants' statements. The interview data were anonymized to protect the participants' identities in compliance with the principles of confidentiality. These rigorous data collection and analyses ensure the reliability and validity of the data obtained during the research.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis (see Table 1). Thematic analysis is a systematic process of identifying the main themes and patterns in the data and is a frequently used approach in qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The main purpose of this method is to reveal specific themes based on the participants' experiences and to gain a broad understanding of the dataset through these themes.

Table 1

The Steps of Thematic Analysis (Creswell, 2017)

1.	Gaining Familiarity with Data
2.	Generating Startup Codes
3.	Identifying Themes
4.	Reviewing Themes
5.	Defining and Naming Themes
6.	Reporting

The package program MAXQDA 20 was used in the data analysis. MAXQDA is a powerful software program used in qualitative data analysis and provides significant convenience for organizing, coding, and thematically analyzing data. This software allowed the data to be processed and analyzed systematically, helping the researchers be able to easily code, identify themes, and visualize the data.

During the data analysis, the aimed was to reach the essence of the experiences the participants expressed and to reveal the meanings underlying these experiences. This process aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences with Syrian students and the effects of these experiences in social, cultural, and academic contexts. The themes derived from the analysis provide a comprehensive perspective on Syrian students' university life in Türkiye.

Ethical Principles

During the research, great importance was attached to informing the participants, ensuring their confidentiality, and gaining their consent. The participants were given detailed information about the purpose and process of the research and were assured that the data would be kept confidential and used only within the scope of this research. Written consent was obtained from the participants, and their voluntary participation was ensured. Interview recordings and transcripts were anonymized to protect the privacy of the participants (Orb et al., 2001).

Results

The data obtained from the interviews with the Turkish students have been addressed under certain categories, with each main theme being titled separately.

Theme 1: General Opinions on Syrian Students

In the interviews with Turkish students, questions were asked about the general situation of Syrian students in higher education, especially in terms of providing a general framework, and the following thoughts emerged.

Positive Opinions

Hospitality and Support. Many Turkish students expressed their willingness to be hospitable and helpful to Syrian students. Turkish students were found who are willing to guide and support Syrian students to facilitate their educational life.

Cultural Richness and Diversity. Some Turkish students positively evaluated the cultural richness and diversity that Syrian students bring to the university environment. Meeting students from different cultures broadens Turkish students' worldviews and reinforces a culture of tolerance.

Solidarity and Empathy. Syrian students' struggle with war and hardships strengthened the feelings of empathy

and solidarity among Turkish students. Turkish students try to understand the difficulties Syrian students face and want to support them.

Negative Opinions

Language Barriers. Turkish students reported having difficulty communicating with Syrian students due to the language barrier. This may limit social interactions and make Syrian students' ability to fully adapt to university life difficult.

Prejudices and Discrimination. Some Turkish students displayed prejudiced attitudes toward Syrian students. These prejudices may cause Syrian students to experience social exclusion and discrimination in the university environment. For example, the statement "I do not think that providing Syrians with facilities is right. I think that supporting Syrian students while the children of this country are not supported is wrong." reflects this situation.

Lack of Resources and Support. The Turkish students drew attention to the lack of resources and support that Syrian students face in their educational life. These deficiencies can negatively affect Syrian students' academic achievement and cause them to experience difficulties in their education. Some students even stated that Syrian students misuse the educational support that is provided to them.

Theme 2: Challenges

The general framework regarding the problems encountered in the context of Syrian students is presented below.

Language Barriers

One of the biggest challenges Syrian students face at universities in Türkiye is the language barrier. Syrian students who do not speak Turkish or do not speak it well enough struggle to understand the lectures, to use academic resources, and to succeed in exams. Furthermore, the language barrier also causes problems in social relations. Syrian students who struggle to communicate effectively with Turkish students and faculty members feel isolated and have difficulty participating in social activities. The inadequacy of language support programs exacerbates this problem. This is considered to be one of the most significant problems faced by Syrian students.

Cultural Adaptation Problems

According to Turkish students, Syrian students have difficulty adapting to the university environment in Türkiye due to cultural differences. For example, Syrian students have difficulty adapting to Turkish culture and the norms of university life. Different religious practices, traditions, and lifestyles make Syrian students' ability to integrate with Turkish students difficult. Misunderstandings and conflicts caused by cultural differences can negatively affect Syrian students' social integration. In addition, the lack of activities for increasing cultural diversity and inclusion in universities makes this integration process even more difficult.

Economic Difficulties

According to some Turkish students, Syrian students have great difficulty coping with the cost of living and education in Türkiye. Most Syrian students are economically disadvantaged due to the war and have limited financial resources. They struggle to meet such basic needs such as tuition, accommodation, food, and transportation costs and are therefore forced to work outside of school. Furthermore, students who have to work are unable to devote enough time to their studies, and their academic achievement suffers as a result. The lack of scholarships and financial support further exacerbates their economic hardship.

Discrimination and Social Exclusion

Some Turkish students also stated that Syrian students may face discrimination and social exclusion in Turkish universities. Some Turkish students display prejudiced attitudes toward Syrian students and exclude them from social activities. In confirmation of this, one student stated, "Arabs should not be pitied, especially by ultra-nationalist students." This situation is quite revealing and may cause Syrian students to feel isolated and not fully integrated into university life. According to some students, discrimination is additionally not only practiced among students but sometimes also

by faculty members and administrative staff. Such experiences can negatively affect Syrian students' psychological health and reduce their academic performance.

Theme 3: Social Adaptation

The findings of the study show that Syrian students have various positive and negative experiences in establishing social relationships and participating in university activities during their university life in Türkiye. Turkish students evaluated Syrian students' social adaptation as follows.

Friendship and Support Network

Positive Observations. Many Turkish students stated that Syrian students try to make friends and seek support in this process. Turkish students observed the Syrian students to be eager to establish warm and sincere relationships. Some Turkish students reported having developed strong friendships with Syrian students and these relationships to be enriching for both parties.

Challenges. Language barriers and cultural differences were cited as the main obstacles Syrian students face in building friendships. Turkish students observed that Syrian students have difficulty expressing themselves and as a result hesitated to participate in social activities.

Participation in University Activities

Importance of Participation. Turkish students reported that Syrian students' participation in university clubs, social events, and community activities played an important role in increasing their social cohesion. Participation in these activities helps Syrian students expand their social networks and become part of the university community.

Barriers and Suggestions for Solutions. Some Syrian students were observed to be hesitant to participate in social events or to not have the opportunity to participate. Turkish students suggested that language support and cultural integration programs could contribute to solving this problem.

Theme 4: Academic Performance

The research findings cover a variety of issues related to the academic performance of Syrian students in Turkish universities. The observations of Turkish students provide important insights into Syrian students' course success, the academic challenges they face, and the academic support they need.

Course Success

Overall Academic Achievement.

Successful Students. Turkish students reported that some Syrian students were very successful in their classes and performed well academically. These students were observed to attend their classes regularly, submit their homework and projects on time, and get high grades in exams.

Success Factors. Successful Syrian students are generally reported to have strong study discipline and high motivation. These students were also noted to make extra effort to overcome the language barrier and to have received help from Turkish students or faculty members.

Struggling Students.

Language Barrier and Difficulty Comprehending. Turkish students observed that some Syrian students had difficulty understanding and following the lessons. The language barrier is one of the main reasons for these difficulties. Some Syrian students might receive low grades because they can't fully understand the course content, thus negatively affecting their academic success.

Lack of Engagement and Motivation. In addition to the language barrier, some Syrian students were reported to have low attendance and to lack motivation. These negatively affect students' academic achievement.

Academic Challenges

Language Issues.

Language Proficiency. Syrian students reported having difficulty understanding academic texts and learning the concepts in the lessons. Turkish students observed that language proficiency problems seriously affect Syrian students' academic success.

Communication Problems. Syrian students have difficulty participating in class discussions and group work because they have difficulty communicating effectively with faculty members and other students.

Cultural Differences.

Learning and Teaching Methods. The Turkish education system and teaching methods are different from what Syrian students are used to. This situation causes Syrian students to struggle in lessons and to have difficulty adapting.

Different Academic Expectations. Syrian students may take time to adjust to the academic expectations and evaluation criteria in Türkiye. These differences may negatively affect students' academic performance.

Access to Resources and Materials.

Inadequate Resources. Syrian students may experience difficulties in accessing course materials and academic resources. Having problems accessing library resources, digital materials, and lecture notes can affect their academic studies.

Lack of Support Services. Turkish students stated that Syrian students cannot benefit sufficiently from academic counseling and guidance services. This makes coping with academic difficulties difficult for Syrian students.

Theme 5: Turkish Students' Suggestions

Increasing Social Cohesion

Cultural Integration Events.

Cultural Activities. Turkish students suggested increasing the number of cultural events universities organize to help Syrian students better adapt to Turkish culture. These events can increase social cohesion by promoting intercultural understanding and tolerance. For example, activities such as cultural nights, food events, and art festivals can allow Syrian and Turkish students to get to know each other better.

Workshops and Seminars. Turkish students suggested organizing workshops and seminars to increase cultural awareness. These activities can help Syrian students share their cultural differences and help Turkish students understand these differences.

Social Activities and Club Activities.

Student Clubs and Societies. Turkish students suggested that Syrian students should be encouraged to participate in student clubs and societies to better integrate into the university community. These clubs can help Syrian students expand their social circles and become an active part of university life.

Joint Projects and Activities. Syrian and Turkish students should be encouraged to work and interact together by organizing joint projects and activities. Such activities can contribute to building strong bonds and increasing mutual understanding between students.

Academic Support Programs

Academic Counseling and Guidance.

Individual Counseling Services. Turkish students recommend strengthening individual counseling services to improve Syrian students' academic performance. Academic advisors can guide students with course selection, homework, projects, exam preparations, and general academic planning.

Mentorship Programs. Turkish students recommend establishing mentorship programs for Syrian students at universities. These programs would allow experienced Turkish students to guide new Syrian students in academic matters and help them adapt to university life more quickly.

Providing Additional Support and Resources.

Tutoring and Study Groups. Turkish students suggested organizing supplementary classes and study groups to support Syrian students in academic subjects. These groups can help Syrian students get additional help in the subjects with which they struggle and increase their academic success.

Access to Academic Resources. Universities should facilitate Syrian students' access to course materials and academic resources. In this context, Turkish students suggested expanding library services and increasing access to digital resources.

Language Education and Psychosocial Support

Language Education Programs.

Turkish Language Courses. Turkish students suggest that universities should organize more Turkish language courses for Syrian students to overcome the language barrier. These courses can help students follow the lessons better and be more comfortable in social interactions.

Individual Language Training. Individual language training programs and language support services should be offered to improve language skills. These programs can help Syrian students progress faster by providing them with language training customized to their needs.

Psychosocial Support Services.

Psychological Counseling. Turkish students indicated that, given the traumas and adjustment issues Syrian students have experienced, they should have increased access to psychological counseling services. These services can support Syrian students' psychological health and positively affect their academic and social success.

Support Groups and Meetings. Turkish students recommended establishing support groups where Syrian students can come together and share their experiences. These groups can help students support each other and accelerate their social adaptation. In addition, psychosocial support meetings should be organized to find solutions to students' emotional and psychological needs.

Thematic Analysis Results

Table 2 presents the results from the thematic analyses obtained from the analysis.

Table 2

Thematic Analysis Results

Thematic Category	Sub-Themes
General Opinions on Syrian Students	<p>Positive Views: Hospitality and Support, Cultural Richness and Diversity, Solidarity and Empathy</p> <p>Negative Views: Language Barriers, Prejudice and Discrimination, Lack of Resources and Support</p>
Challenges Faced	Language Barriers, Cultural Adaptation Problems, Economic Difficulties, Discrimination, and Social Exclusion
Social Adaptation	Social Relations and Participation: Friendship and Support Network (Positive Observations, Challenges), Participation in University Activities (Importance of Participation, Barriers, and Solutions)
Academic Performance	<p>Course Success: Overall Academic Success (Successful Students, Success Factors), Struggling Students (Language Barrier and Difficulty Comprehending; Lack of Engagement and Motivation)</p> <p>Academic Challenges: Language Issues (Language Proficiency, Communication Problems), Cultural Differences (Learning and Teaching Methods, Different Academic Expectations), Access to Resources and Materials (Inadequate Resources, Lack of Support Services)</p>
Recommendations of Turkish Students	<p>Increasing Social Cohesion: Cultural Integration Activities (Cultural Events, Workshops, and Seminars), Social and Club Activities (Student Clubs and Societies; Joint Projects and Activities)</p> <p>Academic Support Programs: Academic Counseling and Guidance (Individual Counseling Services, Mentoring Programs), Providing Additional Support and Resources (Supplementary Course and Study Groups, Access to Academic Resources)</p> <p>Language Education and Psychosocial Support: Language Education Programs (Turkish Language Courses, Individual Language Education), Psychosocial Support Services (Psychological Counseling; Support Groups and Meetings)</p>

These findings have summarized the challenges Syrian students face in university life, their social adaptation processes, and Turkish students' observations regarding these processes.

Conclusion

This study has conducted a detailed examination of Turkish students' perspectives on Syrian students' experiences at Turkish universities. The findings clearly show the main challenges Syrian students face in university life to be: the language barrier, cultural adaptation problems, economic difficulties, and discrimination. The language barrier is one of the most important problems that severely affect Syrian students' academic as well as social life. Turkish students reported Syrian students to have difficulty following lessons and achieving academic success due to the language barrier. Furthermore, cultural adaptation issues make Syrian students' ability to fully integrate into the Turkish university environment difficult. Syrian students from different cultural backgrounds have difficulty adapting to the social norms and academic expectations in Türkiye. Economic difficulties are another

important obstacle in Syrian students' university life. Due to the economic disadvantages brought about by the war, Syrian students struggle to cover the costs of their education, which negatively affects their academic performance. These economic difficulties cause Syrian students to have to work and thus not be able to devote enough time to their studies. Discrimination and prejudices are some of the most serious social problems Syrian students face in university life. Some Turkish students exhibit prejudiced attitudes toward Syrian students, which leads to Syrian students being socially excluded and isolated. However, positive attitudes toward Syrian students were also observed among Turkish students. Hospitality and support reflect Turkish students' willingness and efforts to help guide Syrian students. Cultural richness and diversity are seen as values that Syrian students bring to the university environment. Interacting with students from different cultural backgrounds broadens Turkish students' worldview and reinforces a culture of tolerance. Moreover, Syrian students' experiences of war and struggling with hardships strengthen feelings of empathy and solidarity among Turkish students. This research has aimed to contribute to developing policies and strategies to support social cohesion and integration by gaining an in-depth understanding of Turkish students' perspectives toward Syrian students.

Discussion

The research findings are largely in line with the existing literature and reveal in detail the various dimensions of the challenges Syrian students face in university life. One of the most prominent problems Syrian students face is the language barrier, which has a serious negative impact on their comprehension, academic success, and social integration (Dryden-Peterson, 2011). Turkish students emphasized that Syrian students need more language support programs to overcome the language barrier (Çelik & Öztürk, 2017; Okan et al., 2023). This situation has also prevented Syrian students from participating effectively in classes and makes their ability to establish social relationships difficult (Bashir-Ali, 2006).

The study has also revealed that Syrian students struggle with cultural adaptation problems and economic difficulties. Cultural adaptation problems make Syrian students' ability to fully integrate into the university environment in Türkiye difficult and, being from different cultural backgrounds, this complicates their ability to adapt socially (Ager & Strang, 2008). Syrian students have difficulty adapting to the norms of Turkish culture and university life, and this negatively affects their academic performance (Berry, 1997). Meanwhile, economic difficulties have made Syrian students' ability to meet their educational expenses challenging and left them unable to devote enough time to their studies as a result (Güngör & Çelik, 2019).

This study has also shown Turkish students to positively welcome the cultural richness and diversity Syrian students bring to the university environment. Cultural richness and diversity broaden Turkish students' worldview and reinforce a culture of tolerance by interacting with students from different cultural backgrounds (Banks, 2008; Fidan, 2014). Syrian students' contributions to the university play an important role in increasing cultural integration and mutual understanding (Berry, 2005). This finding is in line with the literature that emphasizes how cultural diversity and tolerance support social cohesion (Vertovec, 2007). However, some Turkish students may exhibit prejudiced attitudes toward Syrian students, which may cause them to experience social exclusion (Berry, 1997). Prejudice and discrimination prevent Syrian students from fully integrating into university life and cause them to feel isolated (Esses et al., 2017). These negative attitudes can negatively affect Syrian students' psychological health and academic performance (Schweitzer et al., 2011; Okan, 2022).

As a result, this study has comprehensively examined Syrian students' experiences and challenges in Turkish universities and revealed Turkish students' attitudes toward these students. The findings clearly show how key issues such as the language barrier, cultural adaptation problems, economic hardships, and discrimination affect Syrian students' university life. In this context, the need exists to increase language support programs, cultural integration activities, and economic support for Syrian students in order for them to better integrate into the university environment.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, several recommendations are offered to help Syrian students overcome the challenges they face in Turkish universities:

1. Language Education and Support Programs: *More Turkish language courses and individual language training programs should be organized for Syrian students to help them overcome the language barrier.*

2. Cultural Integration Activities: *Universities should increase cultural integration activities in order to help Syrian and Turkish students get to know each other better. Cultural events, workshops, and seminars can play an important role in this process.*

3. Psychosocial Support Services: *When considering the trauma and adaptation problems Syrian students face, their access to psychological counseling services should be increased. Support groups and meetings should be organized in order to find solutions to students' emotional and psychological needs.*

4. Academic Support Programs: *Individual counseling services and mentoring programs should be strengthened in order to increase Syrian students' academic success. Additional courses and study groups should also be organized so that students can receive additional help in the courses with which they are struggling.*

5. Economic Support: *Scholarship and financial support programs should be increased to alleviate the economic hardship Syrian students experience. These types of support will allow students to cover their educational expenses and spend more time on their studies.*

These recommendations have been developed to better integrate Syrian students into university life and to increase their academic success. In addition, various strategies should be implemented to support Turkish students' positive attitudes toward Syrian students and to reduce prejudices.

Peer-review Externally peer-reviewed	Disclosure statement The authors report no conflict of interest.
Funding This research received no external funding.	Author's ORCID numbers Nihat Köse 0000-0002-9891-1421

References

- Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies, 21*(2), 166–191. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>
- Akçay, İ. M., & Serbest, F. (2022). The problems experienced in the integration of Syrian students into the Turkish education system. *Osmangazi Journal of Educational Research, 9*(1), 232–235.
- Banks, J. A. (2008). *An introduction to multicultural education*. Pearson.
- Bashir-Ali, K. (2006). Language learning and the definition of one's social, cultural, and racial identity. *TESOL Quarterly, 40*(3), 628–639. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40264547>
- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology, 46*(1), 5–34. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x>
- Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 29*(6), 697–712. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2005.07.013>
- Betancourt, T. S., & Khan, K. T. (2008). The mental health of children affected by armed conflict: Protective processes and pathways to resilience. *International Review of Psychiatry, 20*(3), 317–328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540260802090363>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Çelik, C., & Öztürk, M. (2017). Mülteci öğrencilerin eğitim süreçlerinde karşılaştıkları sorunlar. *Eğitim Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7(2), 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.15285/ebad.2017.28797>
- Dryden-Peterson, S. (2011). *Refugee education: A global review*. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/4fe317589.html>
- Erikson, E. H. (1994). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Esses, V. M., Hamilton, L. K., & Gaucher, D. (2017). The global refugee crisis: Empirical evidence and policy implications for improving public attitudes and facilitating refugee resettlement. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 11(1), 78–123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sipr.12028>
- Fidan, N. (2014). Deprem ve savaş psikolojisi: Kars'ta Suriyeli mültecilerle çalışan yerel bir iş birliği modeli. *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 3(4), 931–950. <https://doi.org/10.15869/itobiad.50682>
- Güngör, N. D., & Çelik, A. (2019). Suriyeli öğrencilerin Türkiye'de yükseköğretime erişim ve uyum sürecinde karşılaştıkları sorunlar. *Journal of Higher Education & Science*, 9(3), 425–435. <https://doi.org/10.5961/jhes.2019.339>
- Kılıç, B., & Koç, A. (2016). A systemic approach to the impact of disasters and war on cultural heritage in Türkiye. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 19, 10–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2016.07.006>
- Miller, K. E., & Rasmussen, A. (2010). War exposure, daily stressors, and mental health in conflict and post-conflict settings: Bridging the divide between trauma-focused and psychosocial frameworks. *Social Science & Medicine*, 70(1), 7–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.09.029>
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Okan, N. (2022). Adaptation of the Short Attitudes Toward Refugees Scale into Turkish and investigation of its psychometric properties. *TRC Journal of Humanitarian Action*, 1, 117–125. <https://doi.org/10.55280/trcjha.2022.1.3.0013>
- Okan, N., Kızılgöç, M., Akıncı, T., & Altuğ, G. (2023). Development of the Moral Disengagement from Refugees Scale: A psychometric analysis. *TRC Journal of Humanitarian Action*, 2, 53–63. <https://doi.org/10.55280/trcjha.2023.2.1.0001>
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), 93–96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>
- Schweitzer, R., Brough, M., Vromans, L., & Asic-Kobe, M. (2011). Mental health of newly arrived Syrian refugees in Australia: Contributions of pre-migration and post-migration experience. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 45(4), 299–307. <https://doi.org/10.3109/00048674.2010.543412>
- Sen, A. (1999). *Development as freedom*. Knopf.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 51–80). SAGE Publications.
- Unutulmaz, O. (2019). Türkiye's education policies towards Syrian refugees: A macro-level analysis. *International Migration*, 57(2), 235–252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12476>
- Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30(6), 1024–1054. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701599465>

