

Review of scientific studies on foreign national students attending primary and middle schools

Pelin Coşkun¹, Volkan Canatan², Vedat Karaoğlu³

Abstract

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This study examines scientific studies on foreign national students attending primary and middle schools regarding their topics, methodologies, and data analysis techniques. It is envisaged that scrutinising scientific studies conducted on foreign national students at the primary and middle school levels may shed light on new research directions and enhance the quality of educational services provided to foreign national students in our country by evaluating the current situation. The study employed a qualitative research methodology, with data

collected through document analysis. The gathered data were then analysed using descriptive analysis methods. The study population comprises foreign national students receiving education in Turkey, while the sample consists of scientific studies conducted on foreign national students attending primary and middle schools in Turkey. A search was born on the National Thesis Center for studies related to foreign national students, resulting in access to the first six master's theses. The contents of these theses were examined, and research was expanded based on the keywords of the studies. Keywords related to primary and middle school were added, resulting in access to 49 master's theses and one doctoral thesis. Seven master's theses written in English were excluded from the study. The research findings indicated that most of the studies were conducted in 2019. The qualitative research approach was predominantly favoured in the studies, with the case study method being the most commonly used research model. Purposive sampling was most frequently employed, focusing on classroom teachers or foreign national students in the sample groups. Advanced statistical data analysis techniques were preferred. The examined studies were mainly aimed at identifying problems and providing solutions. Recommendations were made to researchers based on the findings of the reviewed studies.

Key Words: Foreign national students, primary school, middle school, document analysis.

¹ Teacher, Ministry of National Education, pelincskn_1707@hotmail.com

² Teacher, Ministry of National Education, volkancanatan33@gmail.com

³ Teacher, Ministry of National Education, vedatkarao@gmail.com

Introduction

Syrian refugee crisis worldwide

The growing anti-government uprisings, toppled regimes, and bloody internal conflicts since 2010 have created high instability in the Middle East. Ongoing disputes between civilians and states have threatened regional and global security, prompting significant international attention to the region. The Syrian crisis, which began in 2011, has become one of the most pressing issues for both the international community and neighbouring states. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines this humanitarian catastrophe as one of the most significant waves of migration witnessed in recent human history (Çavuşoğlu, 2016). When the protests against the Assad regime began, Syria's population was 21,018,834 (Worldometers, 2019). According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), more than 511,000 people have died since the start of the war (HRW, 2018). Over eight years, more than 13 million Syrian citizens have been displaced, including 6,654,000 refugees, 6,184,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 140,000 asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2018). Displaced individuals fled Syria to Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and beyond for security (UNHCR, 2018).

The number of refugees continues to increase every month. Syria's neighbouring countries have been pushed to their limits to accept refugees, and now most of the neighbours are unable to accommodate new refugee flows. Additionally, Europe has recently started taking a limited number of refugees. Still, these limited quotas were quickly filled by mostly skilled refugees, and the vast majority of Syrian refugees continue to stay in Turkey, which is considered the ultimate destination for Syrians. Recently, refugees' mandatory refugee status in Turkey has led to seeking irregular ways to enter European countries. Many Syrians have attempted to escape to Europe, primarily by sea, through illegal routes, resulting in horrific humanitarian disasters. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi stated 2019, "This year's worst Mediterranean tragedy has occurred" (ALJAZEERA, 2019). According to data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), from January to April 2019, 12,530 migrants and refugees risked their lives to enter Europe by sea, and the number of deaths reached 356. Among the arrivals were also 3,089 Syrian citizens seeking a better life in Europe (IOM, 2019).

When Aylan Kurdi, a two-year-old child, tragically died while trying to escape war and violence by sea to Europe in September 2015, then-UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres remarked:

"These people are being put on boats, paying 4,000 or 5,000 euros, and dying in desperate conditions. This is not rational. We need to provide a consistent response to this situation, and in my view, a united Europe based on solidarity can provide this response" (CNN, 2015).

The increasing death toll at sea has finally managed to draw more attention to the Syrian refugee crisis in different parts of the world. Yet, there is still no permanent solution for Syrian refugees. Most importantly, no one has any idea when the conflict in Syria will end and when Syrian refugees will be able to return to their country. Due to this situation, today's refugees are likely to become tomorrow's migrants or citizens in their host countries. States should reconsider their

migration and integration policies based on this reality because the number of Syrian refugees is relatively high, and various studies indicate that these refugees do not want to return to their countries (Erdoğan, 2015).

Turkey's response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis

Turkey is increasingly recognised in global politics as a transit country for refugees and migrants. Throughout its history, Turkey has been a destination for both irregular migrants and refugees from the Middle East, Asia, and former Soviet Bloc countries (Kirişçi, 2000). According to Kirişçi, Turkey has been known as a country of migration due to the large number of people who migrated to Europe for workforce participation in the 1960s and 1970s. However, in the last twenty years, Turkey has transformed from a country of emigration to a country of immigration (Kirişçi, 2000). As estimated by the UNHCR (2019) 2019, Turkey hosts 3.99 million refugees and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2019). According to the World Population Review (2019), as of July 2019, with a population of 83.3 million, 5% of those living in Turkey are refugees and asylum seekers, while 95% are Turkish nationals (World Population Review, 2019). With approximately four million refugees and asylum seekers, the Turkish government continues to host the most significant number of refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2018).

Beyond Turkey's complex migration history, its ongoing concern has always been to create a homogeneous national identity since its establishment. Turkey has historically attempted to assimilate migrants from various countries, regardless of their religions and cultures.

Turkey's chronic ailment of xenophobia reproduces different ethnic groups in society and produces the Turkish identity (Kirişçi, 2000). While Turkish and Muslim identities dominate in Turkey, there is a significant proportion of Kurds, other minorities, and non-Muslims, constituting around 28-30% of the population (World Population Review, 2019). It is challenging to claim that Turkey is a homogeneous country in this context, but Turkey appears more homogeneous in terms of national identity. However, Turkey's open-door policy towards Syrians until 2017 has further diversified Turkey's already heterogeneous social fabric (Erdoğan, 2015).

Admission to Turkey

On April 29, 2011, the first group of refugees, consisting of 252 Syrians, entered Turkey through the Yayladağı border gate. At that time, the Turkish government declared that the Syrian people fleeing war and oppression would always have a place in Turkey. Turkey welcomed them not as refugees but as guests and committed to meeting their humanitarian needs to the best of its ability (Erdoğan, 2015). By 2015, when the number of refugees reached nearly 2,000,000, the former High Commissioner of the UNHCR, Antonio Guterres, announced that Turkey had become the country hosting the most significant number of refugees globally. Studies indicate that since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Turkey has hosted a substantial number of Syrian refugees and has almost reached its capacity to absorb this immense number of Syrian refugees (İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016).

One of the most critical aspects of this issue is the acceptance of Syrian nationals as guests rather than refugees because individuals fleeing their countries due to war, conflict, or governmental oppression and seeking asylum are internationally referred to as refugees. However, according to

the Geneva Convention (1951), Turkey could not legally classify Syrians as refugees due to geographical limitations. Among the challenges brought about by compulsory migration, the education of migrant children should be considered among essential needs (Çağmlar & Altunkaynak, 2019). Despite Turkey signing the Additional Protocol in 1967, which lifted the temporal and geographical restrictions of the Geneva Convention (1951), Turkey chose to maintain geographical limitations, citing concerns about potentially unmanageable situations due to its extensive borders with many Middle Eastern countries. Although there is no definition of the term "guest" in international law, Turkish government officials preferred to label Syrian refugees as "guests" to demonstrate the hospitality of the Turkish people and the fraternal relations with Syrian citizens, aiming to mitigate tensions in the region. Economic and political reasons are cited behind this preference (İçduygu, Üstübcü, Aral, & Ayar, 2017).

Analysing scientific studies on the education of foreign national students in primary and middle schools in terms of content and methodology can provide a general overview and shed light on future research. Moreover, it can be beneficial in developing pedagogical approaches and policy-making to enhance the quality of education.

This study examines scientific research on foreign national students attending primary and middle schools regarding topics, methodology, and data analysis techniques. It is anticipated that examining scientific studies conducted on foreign national students at the primary and middle school levels will shed light on new research and enhance the quality of educational services provided to foreign national students in our country by evaluating the existing situation.

The research questions sought to be answered in this study are as follows:

1. What research methods are used in the theses published on foreign national students attending primary and middle schools?
2. What are the research models of the theses related to foreign national students attending primary and middle schools?
3. What are the sampling methods of the theses related to foreign national students attending primary and middle schools?
4. How is the distribution of the samples according to the sample group in the theses related to foreign national students attending primary and middle schools?
5. How is the distribution of the data analysis techniques in the theses related to foreign national students attending primary and middle schools?

Method

Research Design

This study was designed as a descriptive content analysis (Çalık & Sözbilir, 2014). In general, the aim of analysis studies is, as stated by Çalık and Sözbilir (2014), to "rescue education research from repetition and dispersion" and to ensure that teachers and researchers who want to follow developments in education research despite workload and difficulties in accessing research are knowledgeable. In line with this purpose, descriptive content analysis constituted the method of

this study, and data were collected within the framework of the parameters specified below. As individuals who have worked in this field for many years and have developed projects and publications, especially on the education of refugees, an interpretive approach was adopted, and the research was conducted accordingly.

Data Collection Tool

Various techniques can be used in qualitative research during the data collection stage. One of these is document analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Documents are written, visual, and digital sources containing information related to the research topic. In this study, document analysis was used as the data collection technique, and accordingly, academic studies published between 2012 and 2023 formed the data for this study.

Data Collection Process

The data for this study, which employs a fundamental qualitative research design, are derived from published research in the field. These were retrieved using search engines such as tez.yok.gov.tr, Ulakbim, Google Scholar, and Sobiad by entering keywords such as "Syrian," "Education," "Primary School," "Middle School," and "Refugee." Since Syrian refugees are referred to by various names, during the search, keywords such as "Refugee," "Temporary Protection," "Foreign student," "Foreign national," "Guest," and "Migrant" were also used instead of the keyword "Refugee."

Addition and Subtraction Metrics

The studies included in the research were also examined regarding the common quality principles of qualitative and quantitative research identified by Elliot, Fischer, and Rennie (1999). These principles are as follows:

1. Open scientific content and purpose,
2. Appropriate methods,
3. Respect for participant confidentiality,
4. Use of a method specific to the research,
5. Discussion relevant to the research topic,
6. Clarity of research presentation, and
7. Scientific contribution (p. 220).

The Analysis of The Data

This step involves a detailed examination of the studies included in the research and their reevaluation using a descriptive analysis method. The purposes, research questions, research methods employed, analysis techniques, sample situations, findings, and recommendations of the studies were carefully reviewed, and the essence and significance of each study were determined. The necessary corrections were made in this evaluation process, and the conclusions were reached.

Result*The general characteristic features of graduate theses on foreign national students in primary and secondary schools*

The general characteristic features of graduate theses on foreign national students in primary and secondary schools are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. General characteristic features of graduate theses on foreign national students in primary and secondary schools

Characteristics of the Thesis	f	%
Graduate Thesis Type		
PhD	1	3
Master of Science	42	97
Total	43	100
Year		
2023	1	2
2022	5	12
2021	7	16
2020	8	19
2019	18	42
2018	2	5
2017	1	2
2016	0	0
2015	1	2
Total	43	100
University		
State	37	85
Private	6	15
Total	43	100
Main Discipline		
Basic Education	5	12
Classroom Education	4	9
Educational Sciences	16	37
Social Sciences	3	7
Classroom Teaching	4	9
Secondary Science and Mathematics Education	3	7
Turkish and Social Sciences Education	3	7
Social Work	1	2
Educational Institution Management	1	2
Educational Management	3	7
Total	43	100

According to Table 1, one of the postgraduate theses is a doctoral thesis, while 42 of them are master's theses. Most of the research was conducted in 2019 (42%), with no research conducted in 2016. Most of the research studies are in the field of education sciences (37%), with one research study each in social work and educational institution management.

The distribution of studies according to research methods

Table 2 presents the distribution of studies according to research methods.

Table 2. Distribution of studies according to research methods

Research Method	f	%
Qualitative		
YU1, YU3, YU5, YU8, YU10, YU12, YU13, YU14, YU15, YU18, YU19, YU22, YU23, YU26, YU27, YU29, YU30, YU32, YU36, YU38, YU41, YU42	22	51.3
Quantitative		
YU2, YU4, YU7, YU11, YU17, YU20, YU21, YU24, YU25, YU28, YU33, YU34, YU37, YU39, YU40, YU43	17	38.5
Mixed		
YU6, YU9, YU16, YU31	4	10.2
Total	43	100

According to Table 2, 22 studies were conducted using qualitative methods (51.3%), 17 studies used quantitative methods (38.5%), and four studies (10.2%) used a mixed-method approach.

Distribution of Studies by Research Model

Table 3 displays the distribution of studies according to the research model.

Table 3. Distribution of Studies According to the Research Model

Research Model		f	%
True Experimental Model	(YU40)	1	2
Content Analysis	(YU1)	1	2
Survey Model	(YU2, YU17, YU24, YU21, YU33, YU43)	6	14
Case Study	(YU3, YU8, YU10, YU14, YU22, YU30, YU38, YU41)	8	19
Holistic Multiple Case	(YU5)	1	2
Descriptive Survey	(YU23, YU29, YU34)	3	7
Relational Survey	(YU7, YU4, YU11, YU28, YU37, YU39)	6	14
Sequential Explanatory	(YU9, YU6)	2	5
Phenomenology	(YU12, YU13, YU15, YU26, YU32, YU42)	6	14
Interview	(YU18, YU19)	2	5
General Survey	(YU20)	1	2
Cross-sectional Descriptive Survey	(YU25)	1	2
Action Research	(YU27, YU36)	2	5
Not Specified	(YU16, YU31, YU35)	3	7
Total		43	100,0

According to Table 3, the highest proportion of research activities (19%) has been devoted to situation analysis. Findings indicate that content analysis, comprehensive multi-case study, general survey, cross-sectional descriptive survey models, and accurate experimental models were conducted to a minor extent (2%).

The distribution of studies according to the sampling method

The distribution of studies according to the sampling method is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Studies According to the Sampling Method

Sampling Method		f	%
Purposeful Sampling	(YU1, YU2, YU5, YU8, YU10, YU11, YU12, YU13, YU17, YU18, YU19, YU22, YU23, YU26, YU28, YU34, YU38, YU41, YU43)	19	44
Sampling Method	(YU3, YU16)	2	5
Snowball	(YU6, YU32)	2	5
Random Sampling	(YU7, YU9, YU20, YU21, YU25, YU33, YU35, YU37, YU39, YU40)	10	23
Criterion-Based	(YU15, YU30)	2	5
Stratified	(YU24)	1	2
Selective	(YU27, YU29, YU31, YU36, YU42)	5	12
Not Specified	(YU4, YU14)	2	5
Total		43	100,0

According to Table 4, purposeful sampling was preferred in 19 studies (44%), with only one study (2%) opting for stratified sampling.

Distribution of Studies According to the Sample Group

Table 5 displays the distribution of studies according to the sample group.

Table 5. Distribution of studies according to the sample group

Sample Distribution		f	%
Literature Review	YU1	1	2
Single Sample			
Class Teacher	YU3, YU7, YU15, YU16, YU17, YU34	6	14
Foreign National Student	YU9, YU13, YU19, YU29, YU31, YU36, YU42, YU43	8	19
Turkish Student	YU11, YU12, YU35	3	7
Subject Teacher	YU25, YU39	2	5
Guidance Counselor	YU30	1	2
Pair Sample			
Class Teacher + PiKTES Teacher	YU2, YU6, YU41	3	7
Class Teacher + Foreign National Student	YU18	1	2
Class Teacher + Subject Teacher	YU24, YU28, YU37	3	7
Class Teacher + Administrator	YU5, YU8	2	5
Turkish Student + Foreign National Student	YU21, YU38, YU40	3	7
Math Teacher + Foreign National Student	YU22	1	2
Teacher + Students	YU33	1	2
Subject Teacher + Students	YU20	1	2
Triple Sample			
Teacher + Foreign National Student + Administrator	YU10, YU23	2	5
Principal + Vice Principal + Teacher	YU32	1	2
Foreign National Student + Foreign National Parent + Teacher	YU4, YU27	2	5
Foreign National Parent + Teacher + NGO	YU14	1	2
Fivefold Sample			
Foreign National Student + Foreign National Parent + Teacher + Administrator + Guidance Counselor	YU26	1	2
Total		43	100

According to Table 5, there is only one review article. There are a total of 8 studies (%19) conducted with foreign national students using single sampling. Five-fold sampling was employed in only one thesis.

The distribution of studies according to the data analysis technique.

The distribution of studies according to the data analysis technique is shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of studies according to data analysis technique.

Analysis Technique		f	%
Content Analysis	(YU1, YU5, YU8, YU12, YU18, YU19, YU30, YU32)	8	19
Descriptive Analysis	(YU2, YU3, YU14, YU15, YU22, YU23, YU26, YU29, YU41, YU42)	10	23
Descriptive and Content Analysis	(YU13, YU10, YU36, YU38)	4	9
Inductive Approach Analysis	(YU27)	1	2
Advanced Statistical Data Analysis	(YU4, YU6, YU7, YU9, YU11, YU16, YU17, YU20, YU21, YU24, YU25, YU28, YU31, YU33, YU34, YU35, YU37, YU39, YU40, YU43)	20	47
Total		43	100

According to Table 6, it is observed that advanced statistical data analysis was preferred in 20 studies (47%), while only one study (2%) utilised an inductive approach analysis.

Discussion and Conclusion

Studies On Document Analysis

In the master's thesis coded as YU1, document analysis was conducted. Seventy-three scientific articles were accessed, and methodological and descriptive analyses were performed. All studies are directed towards foreign national students attending primary schools. It was concluded that the articles examined ranged from at least 2015 to mostly 2020, between 2012 and 2020. It was observed that the studies predominantly involved collaboration with teachers, and in the recommendations section, it was suggested that the samples should be expanded. The standard issue identified among the examined articles focused on "the language and communication problems of foreign national students.

The master's thesis, coded as YU36 and written in 2021, is focused on adapting the 6th-grade Turkish language textbook for refugee students. It emphasises the necessity for textbooks to have a multicultural structure and to be supported with concrete examples. A conclusion has been drawn regarding foreign national students' difficulty with Turkish proverbs and idioms, suggesting they should be excluded from the curriculum.

Attitude assessment studies in subject areas

In the master's thesis coded as YU35, foreign national and Turkish students' attitudes towards the Science course were examined. It was emphasised that students are highly interested in the Science course, so efforts should be concentrated in this direction.

In the doctoral thesis coded as YU27, 'culturally sensitive education' practices were implemented in the Social Studies course, and it was observed that Turkish and foreign national students were more tolerant towards understanding each other. The conclusion was drawn that the low academic achievements of foreign national students stem from their inability to convey and

express their cultural backgrounds. It was recommended that in-service training on culturally sensitive education should be provided to teachers and teacher candidates.

The master's thesis coded as YU31 aimed to examine the impact of STEM (Science-Technology-Engineering-Mathematics) activities on foreign national students' school belonging and attitudes in the 7th grade. Pre-tests and post-tests were administered to control and experimental groups. Experienced STEM teachers provided education over ten weeks following the pre-test, and effectiveness was measured through post-tests. Feedback from students indicated that refugee students found STEM education exciting and enjoyable, fostering positive feelings towards school and developing a sense of belonging. It was emphasised that STEM education should continue and that programs should be organised to attract students' interest.

In the master's thesis with code YU22, a study was conducted to identify the challenges faced by foreign national students attending middle school in their mathematics education. This study focused on mathematics education in multicultural classrooms. When the comments of foreign national students regarding the mathematics course were investigated, it was concluded that they needed help understanding the teacher. However, they enjoyed the mathematics class and needed help with some topics. In the same study, interviews were conducted with mathematics teachers, and supportive results emerged indicating that foreign national students worked with problem-solving and that their inability to understand the problem stemmed from language issues. As a result, it was deemed necessary to address the language barrier. In the master's thesis coded as YU21, a study on comprehension in social studies was conducted, paralleling the previous dissertation. The results were consistent, highlighting the significant impact of language problems. It was suggested that foreign national students should be integrated into the education system based on their Turkish language proficiency levels.

General Overview Of The Studies

Between 2015 and 2023, a total of 1 doctoral and 42 master's theses were examined regarding foreign national students enrolled in primary and secondary education levels in Turkey. Scientific studies conducted since 2015 reached their peak in 2019 and then gradually declined. Only one doctoral study was found in this field, which led to a pilot implementation of culturally-based education. The study showed positive implementation results in multicultural classrooms, where students felt more comfortable and said they could learn more efficiently. It was also observed that students integrated more easily. Students underwent pre-tests before and after the implementation, and post-tests and interviews were conducted and analysed. As a result, it was determined that culturally-based learning is suitable for schools in multicultural environments.

Most of the other master's theses focused on language inadequacy. Only two scientific studies were conducted in the guidance counselling dimension, coded YU30 and YU40. It was found that foreign national students needed more information on how to benefit from school counselling. This study observed that foreign national students experienced discrimination and exclusion, had difficulties in assertiveness, and faced adaptation issues. Studies have identified that the root cause of these issues is their inability to express themselves. The low motivation of foreign

national students has been suggested as a factor contributing to their academic failure, and it is recommended that efforts be made to help them feel a sense of belonging in this regard.

In the study conducted by a researcher from the Faculty of Fine Arts (YU29), children of foreign nationalities aged between 7 and 15 were asked to draw and interpret paintings on "war and migration." The focus was on emotions expressed without language barriers. It was concluded that foreign national students are still affected by the adverse effects of war, which has impacted their lives as unresolved trauma. It was suggested that efforts should primarily be made to eliminate this trauma as children who express negative emotions in their drawings struggle to adapt to their new experiences.

In a master's thesis conducted in 2023 by the Department of Elementary Education at Kocaeli University (YU43), it was recommended that more comprehensive studies on foreign nationals be conducted. The study examined the attitudes of 4th-grade student groups towards children's rights. The results showed no significant difference based on gender, but there was a considerable difference based on the family's education level. In line with this finding, a recommendation was made to provide education to families.

Conclusions and Recommendations

When examining the studies related to foreign national students in primary and secondary schools in Turkey, it was observed that the samples were limited to specific regions, and there was a prevalence of studies focusing on individual groups, leading to a predominance of findings related to language issues. It is recommended that more studies be conducted to guide the education system for existing foreign national students. Considering the different ethnic backgrounds among foreign national students and the diversity in cultural differences based on family structures and upbringing methods, a study in this direction could be beneficial.

A study could be conducted to examine the language learning abilities of foreign national students born in Turkey and to determine if there are differences regarding language and behaviour between students who have experienced war trauma or received education in their home countries.

Seminars and counselling sessions on multiculturalism for foreign national parents could be intensified, and an education program could be designed based on the outcomes of these sessions. Intriguingly, the results remained consistent between the first and last studies when chronologically ordered. Conducting studies with PiKTES (Primary Schools Project) teachers, believed to be more effective in the field, could provide more precise insights into the existing issues.

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