Current conditions and issues at Temporary Education Centres (TECs) for Syrian child refugees in Turkey

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Current conditions and issues at Temporary Education Centres (TECs) for Syrian child refugees in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Since the outbreak of Syrian conflict 2011, Turkey has received more than 3.5 million refugees, including a great number of school-aged children. Providing education to Syrian child refugees has therefore become important in Turkey. To effectively deal with this issue, Turkish government has developed educational policies and legal arrangements. Establishing Temporary Education Centres providing education in Arabic based on an adapted Syrian curriculum, was one of the main changes in Turkish educational system to accommodate Syrian child refugees. This paper aims to present the current conditions and issues at TECs based on views of Syrian teachers working in these centres. The findings show that TECs have faced several challenges, which can be categorized under three themes: infrastructral, student-related, and teacher-related challenges. The issues related to each of themes are disscussed based on the views of teachers working in TECs and suggestions relevant to both policymakers and researchers are presented in this paper.

More than ten million Syrians have been displaced since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011. According to the most recent statistics, around 5 million of these people have left Syria, especially moving to neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. As of mid-2018, 948,849 primarily Syrian refugees live in Lebanon, 671,551 live in Jordan, 252,526 live in Iraq, and 132,871 live in Egypt (UNHCR, 2018a). With 3,622,400 refugees at the end of 2018, Turkey has received the largest number of Syrians (UNHCR, 2018b). Of course, the Syrian refugee crisis is not limited to the neigbouring countries. In mid-2015, the flow of Syrian refugees to Europe began and, as Corabatir (2016) stated, 'the Syrian refugee crisis became a European humanitarian crisis'. According to UNHCR (2017), for example, Germany accepted 164,929, Austria 15,528, the Netherlands 12,312, and Norway 7,393 Syrian refugees in 2016. In these countries, the process of providing quality education for refugees is quite different to that in Syria's neighbouring countries due to the relatively small numbers of refugees and the settlement and citizenship issues (Dryden-Peterson, 2016a). The rapid increase in the flow of

refugees from Syria to European countries shifted European leaders' focus to the global refugee crisis and it became a concern of several other Western states who provide the international protection system with crucial funding (Newland, 2016). The substantial growth in the numbers of refugee children wanting to live and access education in different countries around the world also brought long-needed attention to the importance of identifying risk factors and factors associated with children's positive adaptation to the culture and education in host countries (Pieloch et al., 2016).

Given that approximately one-third of the refugees are school-aged children (5–18), providing them with education is one of the biggest challenges for host countries. As a result, host countries, and especially neigbouring countries, have been experiencing significant issues in ensuring high-quality education for refugee students. In an effort to overcome these problems in Lebanon, significant donor aid have been combined with Lebanon's commitments to protect the rights of children in order to create an inclusive education policy for Syrian refugee students (Buckner et al., 2017). In Jordan, besides the international aid received by the government and partnerships with donors funding education as part of the national *Education Reform for the Knowledge Economy* policy, an education task force led by the Ministry of Education developed the *Jordan Response Plan* for education with donors and partners (Jalbout, 2015).

As a country currently hosting by far the highest number of Syrian refugees, Turkey has also been experiencing significant challenges related to the education of refugee children. These challenges have forced the government to develop both short and long-term strategic plans, regulations, legal arrangements, and a set of educational policies. Since education is acknowledged as the most significant instrument for ensuring child refugees' social mobility and integration, the government has attempted to overcome the challenges in providing formal and informal education through more financial support and communication with stakeholders such as international organisations, NGOs, and local communities (Celik & Erdogan, 2017).

At the end of 2014, it was estimated that approximately 400,000 Syrian children, constituting more than half of the school-aged Syrian children registered in Turkey at the time, were not enrolled in any form of formal or informal education (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2015). With this substantial number of young refugees experiencing significant educational challenges in mind, the Turkish government has allocated significant resources and launched many new initiatives with the aim of increasing the number of Syrian child refugees receiving formal education. Consistent with these efforts, the *Law on Foreigners and International Protection* was passed in 2014, guaranteeing refugees' access to education, healthcare, and employment and a circular titled *Education for Foreigners* was published in the same year granting access to education (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2014/2015). It has been acknowledged that this circular has simplified the process of integrating refugee children in Turkish schools (Amnesty International, 2014). According to the circular, there are two opportunities for Syrian students to become integrated within the Turkish educational system: at Temporary Education Centres (TECs) or at Turkish public/private schools (Arar et al., 2018a; Karakuş, 2019; MoNE, 2014/2015). All of these efforts seem to have paid off. The UNHCR (2018a) has calculated that the number of Syrian refugee students in formal education in Turkey has passed 600,000, which is more than 60% of all school-aged refugee children.

The Turkish government has also taken several other important steps towards improving the quality of education provided to Syrian child refugees in Turkey. For example, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), in collaboration with the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), has trained more than 20,000 Syrian teachers working in TECs in terms of developing their pedagogical knowledge. Around 5,000 Turkish language teachers and school counsellors have also been employed to support Syrian students, whether enrolled at TECs or Turkish public schools, within the scope of a European Union (EU) supported project titled *Promoting Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System* (PICTES). In addition, with the collaboration between MoNE and UNICEF, thousands of teachers working in Turkish public schools have been provided with training in relation to inclusive education. Besides the projects initiated by MoNE, other bodies, including governmental agencies, national and international NGOs, and local municipalities, have supported the education of Syrian child refugees in different ways (Coşkun et al., 2017; Emin, 2016; Taştan & Çelik, 2017).

In general, it can be argued that the government of Turkey has made significant efforts with the aim of providing Syrian children with quality education opportunities and implemented important policy measures. However, Turkey still has some way to go to achieve the intended quality of education and school enrolment level for Syrian refugee children. Against this backdrop, the study presented in this article explains the current conditions and issues at TECs, which have been hosting a significant number of Syrian students, based on the views of Syrian teachers working at these centres. This is not only important in improving the centres and the quality of the education they provide, it is also crucial in developing a better understanding of the needs of Syrian refugee children and Syrian teachers and the challenges they face in the process of being integrated within the Turkish educational system. In addition, findings can support discussion of what the international community can do to help Turkey and other neighbouring countries provide Syrian child refugees with better educational opportunities and what can be learnt from Turkey's experiences. With these aims in mind, the following research question guided the study: What are the most common problems experienced at Temporary Education Centres (TECs) according to Syrian teachers working with refugee children in Turkey?

Temporary Education Centres

TECs are defined as education centres providing primary and/or secondary level education to Syrian child refugees in Turkey. The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has certified TECs to function both in and outside of refugee camps (Jalbout, 2015). Although the senior administration is Turkish, most of the teachers at TECs are Syrian. Accordingly, lessons are conducted in Arabic and the modified version of the Syrian curriculum that is developed by the Syrian Commission of Education is used (World Bank, 2015). This means that Syrian teachers teach Syrian child refugees according to a Syrian curriculum at these centres, making TECs a unique exception to Turkey's long-established centralised and monotype education system (Coskun et al., 2017). In TECs, Turkish Government aims to provide Syrian refugee students with compensatory education, which allows them to integrate into Turkish public education system. In these centres, the existing curriculum cannot be against the interests of Turkish nation and state and security. It is highlighted in the curricular that TECs should comply with the principle of education for national unity (Tezel-McCarthy, 2018).

By the end of the 2014–2015 academic year, there were 34 TECs in refugee camps and 232 TECs outside of the camps providing education to Syrian children (UNICEF, 2015). By 2016, this number had grown to 425 TECs spread across 21 cities in Turkey: 36 TECs serving 82,503 students located inside the camps and the remaining 389 TECs serving 166,399 students located outside. Among Syrian refugees, it was found that the children who had the opportunity to attend a public school preferred the TECs. Presumably, one key factor is that the language of instruction at TECs is Arabic and the Syrian curriculum is followed (Human Rights Watch, 2015). In 2016, it was reported that just under 60,000 Syrian students attended public schools in Turkey, whereas there were almost 250,000 Syrian students at TECs (Aras & Yasun, 2016; Coşkun & Emin, 2016). However, since education is accepted as an important mean of contributing the social inclusion efforts in school settings, not being able to speak the language of the host country can be a barrier of Syrian refugee children's both internalizing processes in Turkish education system and their social inclusion (Kaysılı et al., 2019). According to the research in the field, teaching refugee students in marginalized schools causes more isolation and becomes an obstacle of cohesion within the social structure (Taskin & Erdemli, 2018). As a result of accepting the risk of creating a marginalized society that the TECs would possibly create by adopting a Syrian curriculum, the Government of Turkey has decided to integrate the Syrian refugee children into the public school system and adopted a three year plan of closing out all of the TECs (Eryaman & Evran, 2019). With a remarkable change of policy in 2016, MoNE adapted a strategy that focused on registering all Syrian refugee children into public schools. In the light of this policy, Turkish public schools are formally open to all Syrian children for free under Circular 2014/2132 if they have a 'Foreigner ID' (İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016; Tezel-McCarthy, 2018). The Turkish Government, therefore, tend to support the process of accepting Syrians as longer-term residents (Unutulmaz, 2019). Consistent with this tendance, the enrolment of Syrian students at Turkish public schools (155,852 in 2017 and 328,399 in 2018) is planned to be increased to 834,833 by 2019 (Unutulmaz, 2019). With the government's aim of closing these centres and integrating child refugees within public education with a Turkish curriculum, recent years have seen higher levels of enrolment in Turkish public schools among Syrian children.

According to the official figures, Turkey was able to enrol 492,544 of 833,039 school-age refugee children (59%) at public schools by the end of 2017 and 604,183 of 976,200 (63%) by the end of the 2017–2018 academic year (Coşkun et al., 2017). In addition, MoNE has launched several projects in collaboration with international organisations such as UNICEF and the EU aimed at improving the quality of education provided to these children. While these efforts are very important, young refugee children still face multiple challenges that represent significant barriers to school enrolment, such as the indirect cost of attending school, a lack of safe learning environments, a lack of quality teachers and schools, poor housing conditions and access to school (Children of Syria, 2014). The temporary policies provide free health care, work permit, access to education for Syrian refugees, however, there remains still around 390,000 Syrian refugee children out of school. This low participation is thought to be a probable cause of a lost generation that would have some crucial problems such as child labour and different forms of marginalization (Eryaman & Evran, 2019; Taskin & Erdemli, 2018). The problem of refugee education does not

only depend on school settings or pedagogical processes (Kaysılı et al., 2019). Besides, the schools challenge with several humanitarian, economic, structural, organisational and pedagogic issues (Arar et al., 2018a). In order to overcome these challenges and strengthen refugee education, there is a necessity to determine the sources of these problems with the collaboration of authorities and stakeholders (Akgül et al., 2015). Therefore, more must be done with a holistic approach if all refugee children are to be integrated within the formal educational system and receive high-quality education.

Theoretical Framework

Social justice has emerged as an important concept, much discussed in educational literature during the last few decades (Bell, 1997; Bogotch, 2002; Cochran-Smith, 2009). From a social justice perspective, educational systems and organisations are expected to provide equal educational opportunities to all students regardless of their race, identity, culture, socio-economic background etc. (Berkovich, 2014; Chiu & Walker, 2007; Oplatka, 2013). The concept lof social justice is therefore highly relevant when discussing the education of refugee children, who often face hardships in accessing basic education (Keddie, 2012). In this context, we used Fraser's (2009, 2013) three-dimensional theory of social justice in this study to make sense of the current situation and the challenges TECs have been facing in Turkey. Fraser identifies social justice as comprising three dimensions: redistribution, recognition, and parity of participation. These dimensions are defined as crucial to ensuring economic, cultural, and political equality in contemporary societies. She proposes ' … a three dimensional categorisation of redistribution (economic), recognition (cultural) and a representation principle on the basis of parity of participation (political), which means that all members of society interact with each other as peers' (Koza-Çiftçi & Cin, 2018, p. 689).

Fraser highlights that *socio-economic injustice* exists when the society promote class inequality; *cultural injustic*e exists when status inequality is generated; and *political injustice* exists when particular groups are excluded from the decision-making process (Keddie, 2012). She asserts that 'justice today requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition' (Fraser, 1995, p. 69). Fraser also concedes that social justice cannot be ensured without the opportunities of participating the social life as equals (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012). Therefore, this model should be used as a whole and no dimension should considered in isolation from the others, as this might prevent such parity from being achieved.

When considering school settings, these three dimensions have been the focus of research as a crucial trivet of distributive justice that plays an important role in ensuring equality. Today, there is a broad consensus that it is time to eliminate the barriers for disadvantaged students in terms of race, culture, religion, socio-economic status, ethnicity etc. in terms of both equal access to and benefits from education. As discussed in the existing literature, inequitable distribution of educational resources and the prevention of marginalised students from accessing the same quality of education as their peers have been obstacles to democratic participation, along with not being a part of decision-making processes (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). Therefore, it is important that educators and policymakers develop a deeper understanding of the barriers and challenges that refugee children face through a social justice framework.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach focused on understanding 'the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions' (Maxwell, 2013, p. 30). More specifically, a phenomenological design was employed. Phenomenological studies focus on understanding existing given situation from the views of individuals who have experienced it (Christensen et al., 2010; Cresswell, 2013). It was therefore deemed an appropriate approach for revealing the problems faced by Syrian teachers working in TECs and their first-hand experiences in dealing with these problems. Since interviews are one of the most important data collection strategies in qualitative research (Hermanowicz, 2002), focus group interviews were conducted as a means of utilising a phenomenological approach.

Participants

The participants of this study were selected by using purposeful sampling, which is widely used in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). According to Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011), purposeful sampling focuses on identifying individuals or groups who have experience with a phenomenon of interest. The participants consisted of 22 Syrian teachers who were teaching at TECs. The demographic characteristics of the participants in the interviews are shown in Table 1.

As seen in Table 1, in terms of gender, six teachers were female and 16 were male. With regard to age, two were between 21 and 25, five were between 26 and 30, four were between 31 and 35, five were between 36 and 40, two were between 41 and 45, one was between 56 and 60, and one was older than 60. Concerning teaching specialisation, there were three theology/religious culture teachers, three primary school teachers, three Arabic language and literature teachers, two physics teachers, two computer and technology teachers, two mathematics teachers, one biology teacher, one English teacher, one science teacher, one chemistry teacher, and one geography teacher. Besides these teachers, one teacher held her college degree from law school and one from business school. When the cities where the teachers live were examined, it was found that five teachers come from Hatay, four from Istanbul, three from Adana, three from Şanlıurfa, two from Gaziantep, one from Ankara, one from Kahramanmaraş, one from Mersin, one from Antalya, and one from Osmaniye. This information represents the great variety among the participants.

Data Collection

In this study, data were collected through focus group interviews with participants. These interviews involve 'engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), 'focused' around a particular topic' (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 177). In focus groups, the environment is thought to be less threatening in terms of discussing different perceptions, ideas, and thoughts (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Opinions differ with regard to the optimal size of a focus group. According to

Table 1. Demographical characteristics of the Syrian teachers interviewed in focus groups.

	Code	Gender	Age	Branch of teachers	City
I. Focus Group	P1	M	37	Theology/Religious culture teacher	Adana
	P2	M	44	Geography	Adana
	P3	M	58	Chemistry	Hatay
	P4	F	42	Law	Ankara
	P5	M	39	Mathematics	Gaziantep
II. Focus Group	P1	F	40	Primary School Teacher	Hatay
	P2	F	35	English	İstanbul
	P3	M	26	Arabic Language and Literature	Şanlıurfa
	P4	M	35	Theology/Religious culture teacher	Kahramanmaraş
	P5	M	28	Science	Mersin
	P6	M	63	Mathematics	Gaziantep
	P7	M	40	Biology	Hatay
	P8	M	35	Computer and Technology Teacher	Hatay
III. Focus Group	P1	M	34	Computer and Technology Teacher	Şanlıurfa
	P2	M	28	Primary School Teacher	Şanlıurfa
	P3	M	29	Business	Antalya
	P4	F	28	Arabic Language and Literature	İstanbul
	P5	F	25	Physics	Osmaniye
	P6	M	32	Theology/Religious culture teacher	İstanbul
	P7	M	36	Arabic Language and Literature	Adana
	P8	F	31	Physics	İstanbul
	P9	M	25	Primary School Teacher	Hatay

Kitzinger (1995), focus group studies should include four to eight people, while Johnson and Christensen (2004) suggest that focus groups might consist of between six and twelve participants.

In the existing study, three groups of five, eight, and nine teachers were selected for focus group interviews. The interviews were conducted with teachers using an interview protocol that the researchers designed during the training provided to teachers working at TECs in partnership with MoNE and UNICEF. Before the interviews, gatekeeper permission was secured from the MoNE. At the beginning of each group interview, particpants were guaranteed that their real names and the personal information they provided would remain confidential. All interviews were conducted on a purely voluntary basis. Before the interviews, participants were asked for their permission to make an audio recording after which each group discussion was recorded by using a digital recorder. Each of the focus group interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and each participant read and signed an informed consent form. Each of the interviews was conducted by two researchers, who were accompanied by an Arabic-Turkish translator who also acted as the moderator of the group discussions.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the interviews was performed using MAXQDA, which is a commonly used piece of qualitative data analysis software. First, the recorded data was transcribed to a Microsoft World document. The focus group interviews were deciphered using the MAXQDA software. Then, the data were coded using as a framework the coding paradigm developed by Strauss and Corbin (Kuckartz, 2014) according to the open, select and selective coding steps.

In this study, data trilogy was performed to ensure the validity of the data analysis. These steps are as follows: (i) Interview transcripts have been reviewed repeatedly, (ii)

participant statements were discussed among the researchers, (iii) a coding table was created. In order to ensure the validity of the codes and not be limited to the researcher's own personal interpretation, the two researchers independently developed coding categories and the results compared. At this stage, a code table was prepared for the coding. Creswell's (2015) sample code table was taken into consideration as a reference when creating this table. Thus, only if the participants' statements were relevant to the definition in the code table was the coding was performed. Table 2 exemplfies the codes used in this study.

Findings

The teachers were asked about the difficulties and problems they experienced in providing education for Syrian child refugees at TECs. Based on the analyses, the findings of the study were categorised under three broad themes: infrastructural problems, student-related problems, and teacher-related problems.

Participants' views on infrastructural problems at TECs

The teachers were asked to explain their views about the problems they encountered at the TECs where they taught. According to their responses, as seen in Figure 1, several categories were identified under the broad theme of infrastructural problems. These categories are: a lack of necessary educational materials, poor social activities, schools being small and overcrowded, having lessons after Turkish school hours, heating issues, insufficient time for instruction, poor inclusion of students with disabilities, and issues related to school infrastructure. As shown in Figure 1, for a lack of necessary educational materials, poor social activities, and issues related to school infrastructure were the issues mentioned most frequently under this theme.

Table 3 illustrates the intensity of the discussions surrounding these categories in each focus group. As seen, this theme was mostly discussed in the first and second focus groups. In terms of the categories, there was a general consistency among the focus groups.

The categories of infrastructural problems experienced and discussed by the teachers and sample quotes from focus group discussions for each category are provided below.

A lack of necessary educational materials (books, notebooks, maps, etc.). Based on the teachers' responses, 13 teachers think that there is a lack of educational materials among Syrian refugee students. They state that the students lack even the bare essentials, such as books. The teachers report that there are complications with the provision of educational materials and books. Some of the opinions regarding this issue are expressed as follows:

'It is even difficult to compare Syrian schools and Turkish schools because Turkish schools have more opportunities. For example, there are no modern tools in Syrian schools and simple tools are used. In Turkish schools, there is a projector, electronic media, and they have advanced technology, but we do not.' (Focus Group 1)

'Books arrive late at [refugee] camps; there are things we lack. We don't have a laboratory; it would be good to have a lab.' (Focus Group 2)

Table 2. The code table.

| Main Code	Sub Code	Description	Example
Student Related Problems	Financial issues	Students' financial difficulties, being have to work, poverty and not having suitable living conditions	'The students have clothing problem and some of them are asking for support. They are so poor that they come with slippers in the winter because they can not get boots' (Focus Group 1)
Student Related Problems	Bullying and bias towards Syrian students	Bias and bullying against Syrian students	'In the 8th grade, there was a girl and other students made fun of her outfit. Since her family's financial situation is not good, she could not change her clothes every day. She could not stand for a month, then she had to leave school.' (Focus Group 2)
Student Related Problems	Transportation problem	Syrian students' problems with transportation on their way to school	'There are 3–4 students at one home. The schools are away from their home, they are mostly living outside the city. They need to go to school by bus or by minibus because the schools are far away. They need 400–500 TL for transportation every month, so they cannot come to school.' (Focus Group 1)
Student Related Problems	Adaptation problems	Student drop outs due to adaptation problems	'In Urfa, students do not come to school because they could not attend school before because of the war. One of my students is 12 years old but comes to 2nd grade. Many don't want to come because of that.' (Focus Group 2)
Student Related Problems	Low motivation and psychological problems of children	Students' low motivation and psychological problems that prevent them from coming to school	'Our students leave school when they are insulted by students or teachers in Turkish schools. Their psychology is already bad. Even a small word is causing them to leave school.' (Focus Group 2)
Student Related Problems	Unwillingness and low motivation of families	Families' being reluctant to send their children to school	'Sensitive families are sending their children. They are interested in education, but some families do not, they do not give importance to education.' (Focus Group 1)
Student Related Problems	Low attainment of female students	Barriers to schooling for female students	'From the first grade to sixth grade in primary school (because primary school is up to 6th grade in Syria) girls are more than boys. 70% girls and 30 % boys, but in 7th and 8th grades, it is just the opposite because parents don't allow the girls to go school' (Focus Group 1)
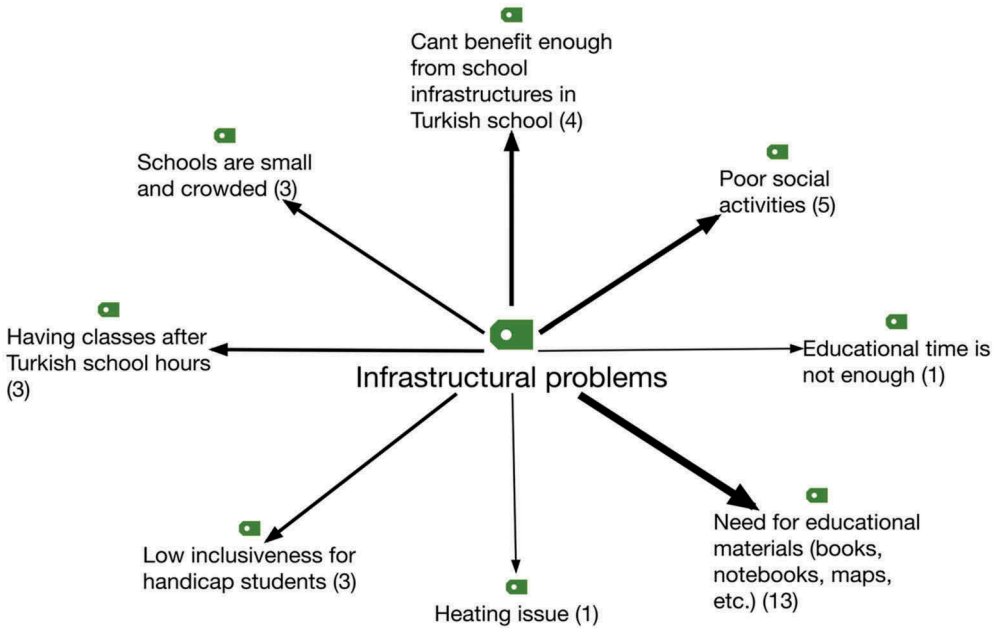
Figure 1. Infrastructural Problems.

Table 3. The intensity of the discussions for the categories of infrastructural problems in each focus group.

Infrastructural problems	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3
Need for educational materials (books, notebooks, maps, etc.)	⬛	⬛	⬛
Poor social activities	⬛	⬛	⬛
Cant benefit enough from school infrastructures in Turkish schools	⬛	⬛	
Schools are small and crowded		⬛	⬛
Having classes after Turkish school hours	⬛		
Low inclusiveness for handicap students	⬛	⬛	
Heating issue	⬛		
Educational time is not enough		⬛	

Poor social activities. There is almost complete consensus among the teachers regarding the need to provide far more social activities for the students at TECs. Furthermore, the teachers stress that the cramped physical environment at the centres should be addressed by providing outdoor spaces where students can walk, play games in groups, run, or

perform sporting activities in order to be more social and forget the traumas of war they have experienced. Below, we provide examples of the teachers' thoughts on the issue.

'Our school was [originally] built as a family home; there is no playground. Students are full of energy. We cannot take them outside. There are no physical education lessons; we do it in the classroom.' (Focus Group 1)

'Some students feel lonely. According to my observations, guns, tanks, and aeroplanes are the children's toys. They have violence in their minds, and we don't have social activities to support them'. (Focus Group 3)

The lack of opportunity to properly benefit from the infrastructure at Turkish schools.
One infrastructural issue highlighted in the teachers' statements is the lack of opportunity to properly benefit from the infrastructure at Turkish schools. The teachers mainly complain about the lack of facilities available to both teachers and students. They detail their experiences as follows:

'We use a Turkish school, but we cannot use certain things, like smartboards and the gym.' (Focus Group 2)

'There are some school principals who do not allow us to use the school because they are afraid.' (Focus Group 1)

Schools are small and overcrowded.
The participants also indicate that there are issues stemming from overcrowded classrooms. According to these participants, crowded classrooms and limited instructional time negatively affect the quality of education. The participants express their ideas as follows:

'Because the schools are small and crowded, children are packed in like sardines – and we also have a playground problem.' (Focus Group 2)

'The second problem is enrolment [levels] at the school, so there are a lot of students in classes at the schools, I found. There are 45–50 students in a class. The schools in the local area do not accept Syrians for this reason. Even schools that are far away from us have the same problem.' (Focus Group 3)

Having lessons after Turkish school hours.
Another infrastructural problem is mentioned by the teachers at TECs situated at Turkish public schools and concerns not being able to use the schools until after the Turkish students have left. The participants state that, as lessons at these TECs start late, student achievement cannot be obtained. According to these teachers:

'We teach at an Imam Hatip school from half past four to eight pm. Turkish students come out, then we go in. The girls work from eight in the morning to two pm and they have no time to study or educational activities. Therefore, they say that they can not do their homework. As soon as they are finished at work, they come to school.' (Focus Group 1)

'We're using Turkish schools. The [Turkish] students get out late and we go in after them. So it gets too late, and that is a problem.' (Focus Group 2)

Poor inclusion of students with disabilities. The participants state in interviews that, although there exists special classes provided for students with disbilities, there need to be more of them and these students should be provided with special education. The teachers emphasise that many Syrian refugee children with disabilities are not in school and they face many diasbility-specific barriers. The teachers express their feelings as follows:

> 'Yes, some students do not come to school. Because they have disabilities; some have lost their hands or legs in the war. We cannot bring these children to the schools – the environment is not appropriate. There is no curriculum tailored to their needs. There is no special education.' (Focus Group 1)'

> 'Some of them can come to school, but some cannot. A separate lesson or seminar should be provided children who are disabled as a result of the war.'(Focus Group 2)

> 'I'm the school principal. We have some students who are mentally retarded and they sit with me. We have students with physical disabilities; either older children or teachers carry them around. There is no special support.' (Focus Group 2)

Heating issues. One of the participants states that heating is an important problem at TECs. According to this participant, since it is a basic need, students' motivation and achievement decreases when the school is not properly heated.

> 'Students are very eager to learn, but there are some obstacles. The environment is not good; we do not have central heating, it is cold. Therefore, students do not want to come to school.' (Focus Group 1)

Insuficient time for instruction

> • 'The timetable is insufficient; the hours of this programme need to be increased.' (Focus Group 2)

Participants' views on student-related problems at TECs

According to participants' responses, as seen in Figure 2, there are also several categories under the theme of student-related problems. These categories are: financial issues, adaptation problems, low attainment of female students, low motivation and psychological problems of children, transportation problems, unwillingness and low motivation of families, and bullying and bias against Syrian students. Figure 2 divides these categories into a number of sub-categories. As illustrated in the figure, financial issues, adaptation problems, transport problems, and bullying and bias against Syrian students are the most frequently mentioned categories under this theme.

Table 4 illustrates the intensity of the discussions in relation to the various categories in each focus group. As seen, this theme was mostly discussed in the second focus group. In terms of the categories, there was general consistency among the focus groups.

Financial issues. Responses from the focus group interviews with teachers reveal that the Syrian refugee students struggle with financial problems, leading them to leave the school and attempt to find work.
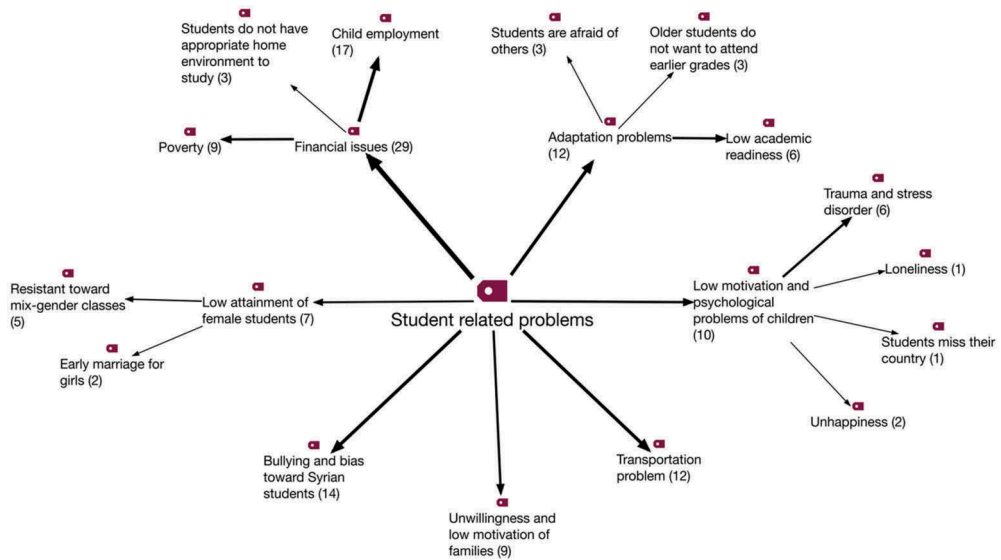
Figure 2. Student-related problems.

'The students have clothing problems and some of them ask for support. They are so poor that they turn up wearing slippers in the winter because they cannot afford boots.' (Focus Group 1)

'There is no obstacle when it comes to attending primary school; children are eager to learn and come to school regularly. In terms of middle and high school, students still want to continue their education; however, the children who have lost one of their family members or have disabled parents have to work.' (Focus Group 2)

'Having to live in a tent is a problem. A lot of people live in the same tent. There is no place to study.' (Focus Group 3)

Bullying and bias against Syrian students. Focus group discussions and interviews conducted by the researchers emphasise that the Syrian students experience bullying from both other students and teachers. The teachers believe that there is a lack of adequate psychosocial support in schools, and nocoordinated strategy to address bullying:

'In Year 8, there was this girl, and the other students made fun of her outfit. Since her family's financial situation is not good, she could not change her clothes every day. She stuck it out for a month, then she had to leave the school.' (Focus Group 2)

'Here at schooland on the street, there is discrimination. At my school, before the Turkish students leave the school, they leave their trash in the classroom, and when the Syrian students arrive, they have to clean it up. They [the Turkish students] do this persistently and deliberately. They know it's wrong, but they still do it.' (Focus Group 3)

Table 4. The Intensity of the discussions for the categories of student related problems in each focus group.

Student related problems	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3
Financial issues			
Child employment	■ (large)	■ (medium)	■ (large)
Poverty	■ (small)	▪	■ (small)
Students do not have appropriate home environment to study		■ (small)	▪
Bullying and bias toward Syrian students	■ (medium)	■ (medium)	■ (medium)
Transportation problem	■ (small)	■ (large)	■ (small)
Adaptation problems			
Low academic readiness	▪	■ (medium)	
Older students do not want to attend earlier grades	■ (small)	▪	
Students are afraid of others		■ (small)	▪
Low motivation and psychological problems of children			
Trauma and stress disorder	▪	■ (medium)	
Unhappiness		■ (small)	
Loneliness			▪
Students miss their country			▪
Unwillingness and low motivation of families	■ (small)	■ (medium)	■ (small)
Low attainment of female students			
Resistant toward mix-gender classes	■ (medium)	▪	
Early marriage for girls	▪	▪	

Transportation problems. According to the teachers, the students at TECs have transportation problems that directly affect their access to education. Especially the students who live far from a TEC have to use some form of transport (school bus or public transport). Participants made the following observations:

> 'There are 3–4 students living together. The schools are located far away from their home; they mostly live outside the city. They need to go to school by bus or minibus because the schools are far away. They need 400–500 Turkish Lira for transportation every month, so they cannot come to school.' (Focus Group 1)

'We use Turkish schools; we don't have any problems at the school. However, about 500 students are unable to travel to these centres. Our biggest problem is transportation.' (Focus Group 2)

'UNICEF or the United Nations began to pay transportation costs. If there were no vehicles, we wouldn't have enrolled the children. There is a transportation problem.' (Focus Group 3)

Adaptation problems. The teachers also mention that Syrian students have problems adapting to cultural and language differences. The teachers remark that younger children easily adapt to Turkish and the courses; however, this is more difficult for the older students, many of whom would rather not got to school.

'Older students do not come to school. For example, they come to us, we enrol them and try to integrate them with others. They are not at the same level as other students in their classes, so they flee the school. Since they can't adapt, they hate the school.' (Focus Group 1)

'There is a problem with the language. A proper plan has not been compiled by the government and the ministry. We were only told that "You are in Turkey, why didnt you learn the language?"' (Focus Group 2)

Low levels of motivation and psychological problems among students. Under the theme of student-related problems, one of the most important challenges the teachers mentioned was low levels of motivation and psychological problems among Syrian students. According to the teachers, psychological problems such as trauma, stress, anxiety, war-related fears, parental stress, and depression caused by the war, displacement or violence are common among the students. The teachers also stress that there is a lack of psychological support available to both Syrian students and their families. Some observations of students' low motivation and psychological problems are given below:

'Their psyche is very damaged by the war. There is no support, but there are many children suffering from depression. It would be good to have counsellors.' (Focus Group 2)

'My 8-year-old student can't talk. He does not speak of congenital nature, His lack of spoken language is not congenital, but his psyche has been damaged by the war. He needs special education or support.' (Focus Group 2)

'Our students leave school when they are insulted by students or teachers from Turkish schools. Their mental state is already bad. Just one little word can be enough for them to leave school.' (Focus Group 2)

Unwillingness and low levels of motivation among students' families. The teachers identified unwillingness to send their children to schools and low levels of motivation among students' families as another student-related problem they experienced at TECs. The teachers share their thought about this issue:

'The families that send their children to the centres are highly sensitive. They are interested in education, but some families do not place any importance on education.' (Focus Group 1)

'Last year, a study was done at the school. We found many families who have never enrolled their children in school because they have transportat problems, the children can work, and some families do not pay much attention to education.' (Focus Group 3)

Low attainment of female students. Responses from the teachers' focus group interviews reveal that Syrian girls over the age of 12 are at risk of early marriage. As a result, they generally do not continue their education after completing primary education. The teachers also mentioned that some families do not allow the girls to attend middle school because the schools are mixed. Furthermore, if families think that the schools are not a safe environment for their daughters, they do not allow them to go to school. According to the teachers:

'From Year 1 to Year 6 of primary school (there are six years of primary education in Syria), girls outnumber boys: 70% girls and 30 % boys. But in Year 7 and Year 8, it is just the opposite because parents don't allow the girls to go to school.' (Focus Group 1)

'It depends on the region. Because some families come from conservative places and they do not want mixed schools, but some of them are happy to send their children to mixed schools.' (Focus Group 1)

'Since we are in the camp, we don't have that problem, but after Year 10, the girls start getting married.' (Focus Group 2)

Participants' views on teacher-related problems at TECs

According to the teachers' responses, there are several categories of problems encountered at TECs that can be placed under the theme of teacher-related problems (as illustrated in Figure 3). These categories are: discrimination towards Syrian teachers, low job security of teachers, low teacher motivation, teachers from other professions, low teacher income, a need for more teachers, teachers with false diplomas, and language barriers. As indicated, discrimination towards Syrian teachers, low job security of teachers, low teacher motivation, and teachers from other professions were the most frequently mentioned topics under this theme.

Table 5 illustrates the intensity of the discussions surroungding these categories in each focus group. As seen, this theme was discussed to a more or less equal degree in each of the three focus groups. In terms of the categories, there was general consistency among the focus groups.

Discrimination towards Syrian teachers. According to the responses from focus groups, the teachers' most common complaint (12 teachers) concerns the coordinators at the schools where they work. The teachers remark that the coordinators frequently threaten to close down the centres and deliberately ignore the Syrian teachers' requests. The following are examples of such shared experiences:

'Our building is an old building; we did some renovations, but the Turkish coordinator constantly threatens us and tells us that "I'll close this school"; "Don't do that" or "Do this."' (Focus Group 1)

'There was a good coordinator last year; his first priority was the students, then the teachers. I am a Syrian vice principal. We were working with him. Then, he moved and another
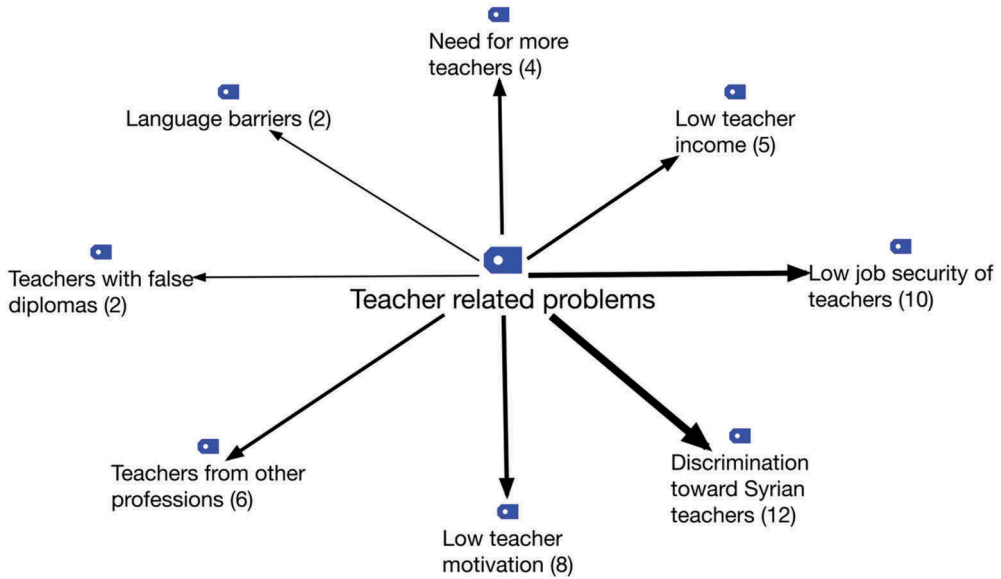
Figure 3. Teacher-related problems.

Table 5. The intensity of the discussions for the categories of teacher related problems in each focus group.

Teacher related problems	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3
Discrimination toward Syrian teachers	■	▪	■
Low job security of teachers	■	■	■
Low teacher motivation	▪	■	■
Teachers from other professions	▪	■	▪
Low teacher income	■		▪
Need for more teachers		▪	■
Teachers with false diplomas	▪	▪	
Language barriers		■	

coordinator arrived. He insults us in front of everyone. Sometimes he gathers all of us and says that we are under his responsibility; that we should not care about the principal and he is just a teacher like us. He says he is the one who runs everything at the school.' (Focus Group 1)

Low job security of teachers. The teachers in this study state that they have no job security and refer to themselves as 'volunteer teachers'. According to the teachers, it is

hard to retain Syrian teachers since they have no guaranteed social rights and most are unable to register for work permits. The teachers complain about their contracts.

'We can rent a four-floored building if we want, but any day, even tomorrow, MoNE can fire us since we don't have any job security.' (Focus Group 1)

'There is no job security for us. Recently, 50 teachers were fired at the same time. Students have 15 hours of lessons in Turkish and 15 hours in Arabic. Arabic teachers were fired; we always have the same problem. Our future is unknown.' (Focus Group 3)

Low teacher motivation

'There are inadequately qualified teachers to teach some subjects. Children's levels are too low because they could not go to school for a long time. As a result, teachers' motivation drops.' (Focus Group 2)

'Our salary does not have to be on the same level as Turkish teachers, but they should give us a good salary so that we could be accepted as real teachers by the students. Therefore, I sometimes do not want to continue in the center since my motivation decreases' (Focus Group 3)

'No matter how much knowledge has and how ideological the teacher is, if he does not feel comfortable and the students are not eager to learn, he cannot transfer this knowledge to the students.' (Focus Group 3)

Teachers from other professions.   The teachers state that there are some Syrian teachers who were trained as doctors, lawyers, or engineers working at the TECs. The teachers believe that these volunteers are not qualified to enrich the educational quality at TECs. They express their feelings as follows:

'We want Ministry of National Education to set up a commission and help us select teachers, because there are some teachers who cannot do multiplication, so how can he teach maths to a class?' (Focus Group 1)

'I think the training given to people who are physicians or engineers is not enough. No matter how useful it is, they cannot be as effectiveas someone who graduated from a teaching college.' (Focus Group 2)

'Some teachers do not have any qualifications and no expertise, but they might even be principal because they have the right connections.' (Focus Group 3)

Low teacher income.   According to the responses of the teachers, Syrian teachers receive monthly salaries starting at 900 Turkish lira ($240), rising to a maximum of 1,300 lira ($350), paid by UNICEF, NGOs, and donations. This amount is very low when compared to the teachers in Turkish public schools. The teachers verify that they experience financial difficulties and these difficulties discourage them from work at TECs.

'Salaries are paid monthly. For example, we are paid on the first day of each month. If the principal does not report [the hours we have worked that month], we are not paid. For instance, there are Turkish teachers who also teach Syrian children. There was an agreement

between the European Union and Turkey and their net salary is now 3,700 TL. Why can't we get salaries like theirs?' (Focus Group 1)

'We earn 600 TL in the camp, 900 outside. Principals and teachers get the same salary. But this month it will be 1,300 TL. This amount is very low.' (Focus Group 3)

A need for more teachers. The participants defined the need for more teachers as a teacher-related problem at TECs. They state that the number of Syrian students continues to grow and TECs are in need of teachers. Two different experiences are presented below:

'Although there was a need for teachers in Hatay, no teachers were assigned.' (Focus Group 2)

'We call the Ministry of National Education when we want a teacher and they provide [us with one]. They do interviews and provide training. Then, they send him or her to our centre.' (Focus Group 3)

Teachers with false diplomas. The teachers report that there are teachers working at TECs with false diplomas. They stress that it is now very easy to obtain false diplomas and documents. As a result, the teachers suggest that the authorities should rigorously control and standardise requirements in order to ensure the quality of teaching at TECs.

'There are a lot of fake diplomas. If you go to Gaziantep, you get all of them, such as professor, doctor … In just an hour, you become a doctor, a teacher.' (Focus Group 1)

'The most important problem is fake diplomas.' (Focus Group 2)

Language barrier. The language barrier was also mentioned as an important issue for teachers working at TECs. Not being able to speak Turkish was perceived as an obstacle to future employement. The following examples offer two differing opinions on this issue:

'Now, students have started having 15 hours of lessons in Turkish, but there is no specific language training programme for teachers who cannot speak Turkish. They can participate in the lesson and listen while the students are learning, but that is not enough.' (Focus Group 2)

'If Syrian teachers who do not know the language become unemployed, they might have a lot of problems. They should also learn Turkish.' (Focus Group 2)

Discussion and Conclusion

Education has emerged as one of the major problems with the arrival of millions of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Turkey has quickly implemented various measures to both integrate these new arrivals within the educational system and improve the quality of the education provided to them. Nevertheless, it still remains a serious problem. Against this backdrop, this study set out to identify the challenges facing TECs established in Turkey based on the views of the teachers working there. With this aim in mind, teachers were asked about the difficulties and problems they experienced in providing education to Syrian child refugees at TECs.

The challenges that the teachers experienced were identified under three broad themes: infrastructral, student-related, and teacher-related issues. In terms of infrastructural problems, a need for educational materials, poor social activities, and issues related to school infrastructure were highlighted as the primary difficulties. Under this theme, the teachers consider educational materials as crucial components for providing effective and high quality education and report that the students at TECs do not have the same opportunities as Turkish students in terms of such resources. According to the teachers, this lack of sufficient educational materials has emerged as an important issue, preventing Syrian students from receiving high quality education. The teachers also complain that adequate facilities are not provided to Syrian teachers and students; in some cases, the principals at the public schools where the TECs are located do not allow them to use of many of the school's facilities once the Syrian teachers and students gain access to the building after regular Turkish students have gone home. In line with this finding, Coskun & Emin (2016) define one of the major challenges in providing education to Syrian children as the inadequacy of the facilities at TECs. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2016), refugees identify insufficient infrastructure and poor quality of education as the greatest barriers to school enrolment. Similarly, Kilic and Toker- Gokce (2018) state that, as a result of the lack of school infrastructure and support mechanisms, Syrian students often experience problems in exercising their right to education. Other studies have likewise provided evidence consistent with this finding (Balkar et al., 2016; Dorman, 2014). It is therefore recommended that measures to improve the infrastructure of TECs should be priorised by international donors and the Turkish government. The government should also take the neccessary steps to ensure that Syrian students and teachers are given full access to existing facilities at Turkish public schools.

In terms of student-related problems, financial issues, adaptation problems, transportation problems, and bullying and bias against Syrian students were identified as key issues by the teachers. As the teachers observe, the majority of Syrian refugee families experience economic hardship and these financial problems are an impediment to Syrian children's participation in education. Transportation also comprises an important barrier preventing Syrian students from attending school. The majority of families struggle to pay transportation costs, usually resulting in the students leaving school (Aras & Yasun, 2016; Crul et al., 2019; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Taştan & &Çelik, 2017). Similar to our findings, Dorman (2014) found that the financial needs and economic challenges of Syrian families formed major barriers to school participation. At some schools, administrators and teachers sensitive to such challenges try to meet these needs personally by providing the students with clothes, shoes, money or food. However, these efforts do not seem sufficient. With the coordination of MoNE and both local and international partners, comprehensive support should be planned and provided to students experiencing financial difficulties. In these efforts, free and safe transportation options should be given priority.

According to the participants in this study, adaptation to a new school and an unfamiliar environment is also an important challenge, especially for older children who have been away from school for a long time. Refugee students whose education has been disrupted fall behind their peers academically and tend to drop out (Brown et al., 2006; Cochran, 2014; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). Our results also indicate that the language barrier make the adaptation process more difficult; a similar situation applies in many

European countries (Ackerman, 2015). Additionally, bullying has become a particular problem, reducing school attendance rates and causing school dropout. Dryden-Peterson (2016b) contends that, all over the world, refugee students experience discrimination and bullying by their peers and teachers. Students who are exposed to peer bullying are more likely to drop out and remain outside of formal education (Culbertson & Constant, 2015; HRW, 2015; Kargin, 2016; Unutulmaz, 2019). Along with this finding, Şeker and Sirkeci (2015) remark that, to reduce dropout among refugee children, bullying behaviours of local students and others towards Syrian students must be dealt with. As such, counselling services, social activities, and language support for Syrian children are very important components in overcoming the challenges of adaptation and bullying. In the last few years, thousands of school counsellors and Turkish language teachers have been employed at TECs, while thousands of counsellors at Turkish public schools have been trained in inclusive education. However, the counselling facilities in public schools are not convenient enough for Syrian refugee children with serious traumas (Crul et al., 2019). We advise the continuation of these important efforts and improving both their quantity and quality. In addition, in order to overcome problems associated with adaptation and bullying, a multicultural educational environment that can empower refugee students should be created at Turkish public schools. In order to achieve this aim, several areas of the Turkish educational system need to be changed, including teacher education, the curriculum, and sociocultural activities, so as to include more multicultural perspectives.

Finally, the participants in the study mentioned low job security, low motivation, and teachers from other professions as the most important teacher-related issues. In the existing literaure on the relationship between teacher motivation and student learning outcomes, it is commonly accepted that there is a positive relationship between motivated teachers and enhanced student learning and success. In this context, incentives – whether monetary or non-monetary – play an important role in retaining teacher motivation (World Bank, 2010). First and foremost, it is vital that the teachers working at TECs are paid enough and on time. There is also a need for legislation and facilitating approaches that will pave the way for certified Syrian teachers to work at Turkish public schools or other educational institutions under appropriate conditions. Employing some of these teachers in Turkish public schools, where the ratio of Syrian students is increasing may also help to overcome the communication-related problems with Syrian students and their families at those schools and ease the adaptation and integration of Syrian students. The participants in the study also complain about a lack of standardised qualifications for teachers who teach at TECs. Therefore, it is recommended that care should be taken in selecting and recruiting Syrian teachers. The diplomas of the Syrian teachers should undergo detailed audits. It is also recommended that the continuous professional development of Syrian teachers be prioritised in the form of in-service training to update their professional knowledge to required standards.

Based on the findings of this article, we make several additional suggestions. As a result of the integration of more Syrian students within public schools, the continuity of inclusive education trainings could be provided and these courses might also be offered to educational administrators as well as teachers since administrators' cultural responsiveness is critical for the education of refugee children (Arar et al., 2018b). The Turkish coordinators and staff at TECs should also be trained on a regular basis. Furthermore, in

order to prevent bullying, activities aimed at increasing Turkish students, parents and school staff's awareness of Syrian culture, history, food, art, etc., and vice versa, could be carried out and the commonalities should be emphasised more widely.

This study has crucial implications relating to the problems refugee children and teachers facing at TECs. It is evident that these issues can only be solved in collaboration with policy-makers, national and international organisations, school staff, students, and parents. In the international context, the results of this study may also help educational administrators, policy-makers, international organisations, etc. become aware of possible problems in the education of displaced people and to take appropriate measures when needed. The study has certain inherent limitations that must be taken into consideration. Firstly, the data that we used are based only on the perceptions of Syrian teachers. Future research could include the views of both Turkish and Syrian school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Secondly, a phenomenological model was employed in this study. Further employing different qualitative and quantitative research designs would offer new perspectives. And finally, it is beyond the scope of this research to fully explore possible solutions to the problems experienced at TECs. Therefore, research is needed to identify such solutions to the most common problems in providing education for refugee children as perceived by various stakeholders.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

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