A RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF SYRIAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN OSMANIYE PROVINCE ON INTEGRATION TO HIGHER EDUCATION PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Syrian civil war, which has caused more than five million Syrians being forced to migrate to other countries since 2011, was the beginning of an ongoing process of uncertainty and change for the Syrians migrated to neighboring countries such as Turkey. With the changing condition of Syrians in Turkey from temporary position to a permanent one, integration of Syrians became a significant issue of concern for both sides. Considering the fact that one in four of the Syrians in Turkey are young Syrians who have to create a life and a future here, Turkey changed the education policy in the way to integrate them to Turkish higher education system. Integration to higher education policy is a mutual exit door for both sides to diminish the risk of a lost Syrian generation in Turkey and to create a hope for the Syrian youth for a better future. Along with these desired positive outcomes, integration of Syrian students to higher education also brings changes and challenges for both sides. In this study, the relational changes and challenges experienced by Syrian students in integration process to Turkish higher education are explored using a relational sociological approach. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 13 Syrian students (six women, seven men) who aged between 18 and 23 and who have been studying in Osmaniye Korkut Ata University. The experiences of Syrian students in our study reveal that attending higher education is a turning point of their lives in terms of having a chance to control the uncertainities surrounding them and having more space to increase their areas of agency. While their families and the teachers in Turkish Language Learning, Research and Application Center have been the most significant support mechanisms for them, there is still relational challenges they face in their interactions with Turkish students. To achieve a successful integration process, relational dynamics and psychosocial support mechanisms should be taken into account in educational policies.

Keywords: Syrian students, integration, higher education, relational sociology

INTRODUCTION

Syrian civil war that has been continuing since 2011 has not only effected Syria, but also led to many regional and global results. In Syrian civil war, which has been lasting approximately for eight years, over 450,000 Syrians are died and thirteen out of 20 million Syrian citizens have become dependent on humanitarian assistance (AFAD, 2017). While the conflict displaced 7.6 million Syrians, approximately 5.1 million people migrated to neighbouring countries (AFAD, 2017). There are more than 3.640.000 Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey by the date of March 2019. According to the report of the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority on Syrians (AFAD) (2017), around 41% of Syrians in Turkey think that half of the Syrians will stay in Turkey permanently because most of them don't believe that the crisis in Syria will end soon. Although some of them have still hope of returning their homeland if the crisis ends, the uncertainty about their condition leaves them in liminality between their homeland and the new constrained "home" (Tekin Babuç, 2016). This uncertainty is a two sided concern for both Syrians and the Turkish people. Syrians in Turkey are sometimes experiencing racism, xenophobia, hate and negative attitudes, but the study also reveals that there is also a high social acceptance level (Erdogan, 2015). However, the social acceptance level was higher in the initial process when they are seen as temporary guests and it started to decline with their changing conditions from temporary quests to permanent residents (Orhan and Senyücel, 2015: 22).

While it becomes apparent that a significant number of Syrians will permanently stay in Turkey, this has brought a need for Syrians to establish a plan to create a stable life here. This reality also brought a lot of concern especially for the Syrian youth who were faced with Syrian crisis in the most important ages of their lives to shape their futures. According to the official figures, the population of young Syrians in Turkey between the ages 15-24 are around 825.000 and this number accounts for one in four of the Syrians in Turkey (İngilizce adı? , 2019). This young population should be taken seriously in terms of their roles in the integration process because they will be an important part of the Syrian labor force in Turkey in the recent future and the direction they go will lead way to the socio-economical and relational aspects of the integration process.

The crisis in Syria affected the futures of Syrian youth in many ways. While leaving their homeland with their families, they also have to quit their education and come to a new country with a different language and a new education system. Having a chance of continuing higher education in Turkey is important for Syrian youth in terms of improving their living conditions and giving a sense of hope for the future (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017). The Syrian youth, who deals with many uncertainties about their lives, see the higher education as an exit door for a job and a stable life. Higher education is also important to create an educated labor force to rebuild economic, political, educational, and health infrastructures in post-war Syria (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017). However, there are many challenges for them in accessing higher education in Turkey. Some of these challenges are the lack of documentation and restrictive host country policies; ignorance of university application procedures or lack of academic and career guidance to understand pathways to the labor market or further education, and financial shortcomings (Yavcan and El-Ghali, 2017).

The change in the status of Syrians in Turkey also effected the educational policy of Turkey. While their status transformed from being a temporary guest to a permanent household, the education policy became more focused on integrating Syrian students to Turkish system instead of providing separate teaching environments with a different language and curriculum (Kirişçi, 2014). Because of the growing risk of becoming a lost generation for Syrian children in Turkey (UNICEF, 2014: 26), the integration of Syrian youth to the Turkish system became an urgent issue that needs effective interventions. Understanding of the educational challenges and needs of these children may increase the likelihood of a positive contribution and integration of this generation to society and decrease the risk of being a threat to societal peace and stability (Kirişçi, 2014).

Turkey also made attempts on integration of Syrian students to higher education. In accordance with this policy, Council of Higher Education (YÖK) have allowed the transfer of university students from Syria and Egypt to the Higher Education Institutions in Turkey after a one year Turkish language course at Turkish Language Learning, Research and Application Center (Council of Higher Education, 2019). Also, there is a scholarship option carried out by Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) for high school graduate Syrian students who wants to continue higher education in Turkey (Yaralı Akkaya et al., 2018: 421). Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) choose the scholarship students with preliminary consideration to ensure that qualified students are selected for higher education institutions in Turkey. According to the statistics announced by Council of Higher Education, the number of Syrian students at Turkish higher education is 20,701 for the 2017-2018 academic year (Council of Higher Education, 2019). Considering the number of young Syrians in Turkey, the percentage of attending a university is around 3% and there are still a huge number of young Syrians willing to have a chance to attend a Turkish university (Hohberger, 2017). Turkey is also willing to increase the number of Syrians at universities in terms of diminishing the risk of a lost generation and increasing the quality of Syrian labor force. Most of the present Syrian labor force have been working at informal sectors due to the hardness of obtaining a work permit and financial difficulties (Hohberger, 2017). As a matter of fact, higher education is a mutual exit door to diminish these socio-economic challenges for both sides.

While inclusion of Syrian students to Turkish education system brings hope for the future, it also brings forward the issues of xenophobia, discrimination and marginalization with increasing contact and communication (Yaralı Akkaya et al., 2018). The studies on Syrian students in higher education focus on integration problems experienced by Turkish and Syrian parties. In a study examining the thoughts and attitudes of Turkish and Syrian students, it is revealed that both groups of students keep a distance from each other and Syrian students are sometimes subjected to different kinds of prejudice and negative behaviors (Ertong Attar and Küçükşen, 2019). This negative behaviors are especially related with the idea that process of attending higher education is easier for Syrian students (Ertong Attar and Küçükşen, 2019). Another research shows that Turkish students from Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia who have more frequent relations with immigrants due to physical proximity have more positive attitudes towards immigrants (Ankaralı, et al., 2017). Unlike this finding, increased

physical contact with Syrians can also result in more negative attitudes towards Syrians and this may be related to increased visibility of economic and social problems with direct contact (Aslan et al., 2018). Also older students and upper class students are found out to have a more constructive attitude towards Syrian refugees in helping them and advocating their rights (Kabaklı Çimen and Ersoy Quadır, 2018).

While participation on higher education decreases the effects of traumas they experienced, it also strengthens the ties with the host society (Yaralı Akkaya et al., 2018). Whereas Syrian students in higher education still needs psycho-social support mechanisms to ease the integration process and to contribute to social and economic life (Yaralı Akkaya et al., 2018). In addition to the lack of these support mechanisms, there are also challenges that hinders the education process for both sides. Taşkın and Erdemli (2018) stated that language barrier, cultural problems and discipline problems are main problems faced by teachers working with Syrian students and there isn't adequate material and human resource support to ease the teaching process. Language problem is one of the main challenges effecting social and academic life for Syrian students in Turkish higher education (Yaralı Akkaya Et al., 2018). Poor school conditions, insufficient number of skilled and trained teachers to study with foreign students, inadequate resources and inappropriate curriculum planning are also revealed as problems faced by teachers working with Syrian students (Aydın and Kaya, 2017). Another study focusing on pre-service teachers' training reveals that training system lacks a multicultural and bilingual viewpoint which also neglects the psychosocial condition of Syrian students in Turkey and a more comprehensive curriculum should be developed to decrease the problems associated with integrating Syrian students to Turkish education system (Aydın et al., 2019).

Although there are some studies to reveal the educational challenges faced by Syrian and Turkish students in this integration process, the number of studies focusing on the experiences of Syrian students are very limited. This study aims to explore the experiences of Syrian students in the integration process to Turkish higher education system from a relational point of view. Relational sociology approach brings a new perspective to the concept of agency and it has been effective in transnational migration and refugee studies. According to relational sociology perspective, social construction is relational as of its nature and relational approach tries to overcome the conflict between structure and agency focusing on the dynamic interaction between them in different social environments (Mische, 2011: 81) In this theoretical point of view this structural issues is inseparable from the agents and they are seen as complementary to each other (Köngeter and Smith, 2014). Agency is not a feature of the actor, but it is a result of actor's activities, his/her available resources, alliances and networks and it is a structural component of any social status (Köngeter and Smith, 2014). In this context, migration is not only a process that affects the migrants' lives and identities; their mobility create many new, changing and interacting social networks and social relations.

A relational sociological approach regards migration as a dynamic process in which actors implement maneuvers and strategies to adapt to the new situation and also to protect their past identities, habits and

interactions regarding their previous lives. Syrian youth who have to plan a future in Turkey away from their homeland have to set new social ties and roles and these relational interactions also lead to transformation of their identities. Syrian students are not passive actors of this integration process. They are active agents who are trying to establish a new identity between their past and new lives.

In this study, the relational changes and challenges experienced by Syrian students in integration process to Turkish higher education are explored using a relational sociological approach. The uncertainty and change process experienced by the Syrian students trying to create a new life and future in Turkey is defined as liminality and their experiences has been interpreted in the context of relational sociology literature. Considering the need for various and multidimensional sociological research on the area of Syrian migration crisis and its consequences, it is hoped that this study would make a contribution for further qualitative studies with larger sample sizes.

In the study, the answers to following questions are aimed to be explored:

a) What does it mean for Syrian students to attend higher education in Turkey and in what ways higher education have affected their lives?

b) b) What kind of concerns and expectations they have in the process of integration to higher education in Turkey? c) What kind of relational supports and challenges they have experienced in social relations in this process?

METHOD

In the study, semi-structured interviews were carried out with 13 Syrian students (six women, seven men) who aged between 18 and 23 and who have been studying in Osmaniye Korkut Ata University. The interviews were realized between November and December 2018 and snowball sampling method was used in the study. Three of the students attending in the study (1 female and 2 male) were at the first grade of school and the rest of the students were studying Turkish language at Turkish Language Learning, Research and Application Center which is a mandatory process to continue the higher education. Five of the students (1 female, 4 male) declared to stay with friends who are also Syrian students in Osmaniye Korkut Ata University. The rest of the students stay with their families in Osmaniye Temporary Shelter Center which is one of the 13 temporary shelter centers in Turkey. All of the interviews were carried out in Turkish in line with the students' preference. Students were mostly from a Turkmen ethnic origin (10 of the students) and they could express themselves successfully in Turkish. The three students who are not from a Turkmen background also have a command of Turkish due to the Turkish courses they have taken in order to attend higher education.

Osmaniye Korkut Ata University is chosen as the workfield of the study because it is a preferred university by Syrian students due to its proximity to the cities such as Adana, Mersin, Hatay and Gaziantep in which Syrian immigrant population are very high. This enables Syrian students to frequently visit their families who mostly

accommodate in the nearby cities. There are 196 (85 female and 111 male) Syrian students studying at Osmaniye Korkut Ata University for the 2017-2018 academic year (Council of Higher Education, 2019). Also Osmaniye hosts a significant number of Syrians as the other nearby cities. According to the official statistics of the Directorate General of Migration Management, the number of Syrians living in Osmaniye province is around 49.000 and this number is equal to 9,30% of the province population (Directorate General of Migration Management, 2019).

A phenomenological methodology is preferred as the best means for this study. The data in our studey express the perspectives of people that are involved in the study and the intention of this research was to gather data regarding their perspective about the phenomenon of integration to higher education and its reflection on their relational, social and academic lives. In phenomenological approach, "the intent is to understand the phenomena in their own terms; to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself" (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998, p.96). Phenomenology involves "deeper understanding of lived experiences by exposing taken-for granted assumptions about these ways of knowing" and through close examination of individual experiences, common features, events or meanings are seeked by the analysis (Starks and Trinidad, 2007, p.1373). The interviewees' names are coded with letters and numbers as K1, K2, K3.. for female participants and E1, E2, E3.. for male participants.

FINDINGS (RESULTS)

The data collected are discussed in the context of relational sociology under the themes; "Higher Education As a Turning Point", "Uncertainties About the Future" and "Relational Supports and Challenges"

Higher Education As a Turning Point

Attending higher education is a life-changing occasion for the Syrian students in our study. While the hope of returning to Syria nearly come to an end, university seems to be the best doorway for them to regain the control of their lives. Control, can be seen as a respond of the actor to unexpected changes in social environment and as actor's efforts to reduce uncertainty and contingency situations (White, 2008). Control is an integral part of every relationship and the control seeking is a response to unstable and unexpected character of social relations (Azarian, 2005: 75). Because this requires a change in actor's plans and resources, it involves different levels of agency. The students in our study are aware that integration to higher education process requires their increased agency to have control on their lives:

> **E5**: *If have been in Syria, I wouldn't have to think about these responsibilities at 16-17 years old. The maturation process was very short. We faced the reality of life very early. I think we can turn this situation to positive to a degree. It's hard to get out of this pit, but I can say that those who come out are doing very well. A friend of mine graduated from Sakarya University last year within the first place of his clas. When he started higher education, he knew nothing. He was both studying and dishwashing*

in a restaurant. Without these difficulties, I think he would not have accomplished this. If I had not experienced difficulty, I would not work so hard by myself without getting support from anyone.

A turning point occurs when identities have found more space to be able to change their thoughts, acts, strategies and maneuvers in social interactions (White, et al. 2014:138). For the students in our study, attending higher education is a turning point to change and take control of the uncertainities surrounding them due to the liminality situation they experience in Turkey. Furthermore, this control seeking process increases the areas of agency enabling them to transform a new identity that is different from the identity shaped for them as "Syrians" in Turkey. Attending higher education means a chance of getting back a new statue, position and meaning in social interactions.

Identity is revealed in a social relationship to maintain control in contingencies and unexpected situations seeking social footing in competition and interaction with other identities (Mützel, 2009: 875). Identities switch between netdoms in their control seeking process to find a safe area without contingencies and inconsistencies (White, 2008:9). Higher education also emerges as a safe area for Syrian students that they can at least put a distance from the burdens and labels they carry every day. It gives them an aim to work on and a promising environment to socialize:

> *K2: We have matured at the university. There were friends who had never been out of the camp before. Especially girls. University is good for them. They are used to getting out.*
>
> *E2: They think that we are very happy about this situation. We're never happy. Who wants to be away from home. Nobody wants it. But we had to. We need to create something different here by working harder.*

As it is mentioned, attending higher education means a chance of getting back a new identity and statue in social interactions. It gives the hope of being visible again as a unique and significant person rather than an ordinary and de-identified Syrian migrant figure. Higher education may give them a chance to redefine themselves in a more affirmative and powerful way. This identity change may lead both positive and negative responses from other social actors. The process of integrating Syrian students to Turkish higher education brings with relational changes and challenges for Turkish and Syrian students. Turkish and Syrian students experience a new situation which is different from the accustomed interaction styles between Syrians and Turkish people. This new area of agency requires an identity and strategy change for both sides in which they share a collective space with similar social roles and expectations. Sometimes this integration process results in a positive change in relations, but sometimes it leads to increased distance. The students in our study reveal that they experience both the change and challenges in their social interactions with Turkish people after attending higher education:

> *K5: When Turkish students understand that we are Syrians, they can respond negatively. They make us feel like we are redundant. We're afraid to communicate with them even if we want.*

K2: *They say that "these Syrians are everywhere, wish they return". No matter how much we live here, study in same schools with them, they are always treating us as a guest. We can't be comfortable in the social life because of this exclusion. We do not discriminate, we see everyone equal. We want them to see us equal, too.*

E2: *For example, some of our friends tell that some teachers bother with them. The teacher ones tell him that "I know your are Syrian, and I will not let you pass". Another friend's brother entered the class, the teacher said he is late and asked where he is from. When he say he is Syrian, the teacher told him to go out and he doesn't even need to study here.*

Uncertainties About the Future

Another role of attending higher education is to decrease the uncertainties about the future. With regard to search for control of identities over the uncertainties, White (2014) identifies the notions of ambiguity and ambage to explain this process. According to him, ambage refers to uncertainty in social relations and ambiguity refers to uncertainty in meanings (White et al., 2014: 138). In case of liminality, actors experience a high ambage but a low ambiguity which means that while statues, roles and rules are temporarily suspended and uncertain, identities are more free to form various new social ties (White et al., 2014: 148). The Syrian students in our study are in an uncertainty process in which they lost their hopes to return to their past lives and identities and have to create a new life and future in Turkey. Their situation can be defined as being in liminality. According to Turner (1967, p. 98), liminality is "a temporary state of being betwixt and between that ends when the initiate is reincorporated into the social structure" and "liminal individuals have nothing: no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, and kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows (Ozlatimoghaddam, 2012: 30). Syrian students declare that they have experienced this uncertainty and ambiguity in various occasions according to their liminal position in Turkey:

E2: *Even if there would be a school to go in Syria, all the teachers have left there. It's hard to start retraining again there.*

E1: *We cannot return to Syria. The war is not over. Even if it does, it takes a long time to rebuild there. Our future is not clear here either. I would like to stay in Turkey, but I do not know if I would have a chance of finding a job here.*

K1: *I would like to stay here and continue my education. I have no idea of returning to Syria. We have already started university here. If I go back to Syria, I have to start again.*

E3: *I want to stay in Turkey after university. It's hard to get back to Syria. I want to study in a health-related field so it's easier to find a job. But I don't know that's possible, or not.*

According to the statements of Syrian students, attending higher education is also increasing the chance of being a Turkish citizen. Legal and administrative arrangements in Turkey does not allow the Syrians arriving in Turkey to be accepted as "refugees" (Kutlu, 2015:3). With increasing number of Syrian immigrants in Turkey and because of their situations' turning to a permanent one, their legal situation in Turkey is defined as "temporary

protection" by regulations made in recent years (Kutlu, 2015:4). These arrangements mean that Syrians in Turkey are still seen as "guests" and these give the government the right of limiting their conditions or banning their access to basic rights in Turkey. As a result, the situation of being under temporary protection is another source of uncertainty for Syrian students effecting their present lives and future plans:

> *K1: Citizenship is easier for university students. We have many friends who are taken to citizenship because they are studying at university. When we start university, the Turkish state chooses us for citizenship. We want to take citizenship. It makes everything easier. For example, if I want to go to Hatay now, I need to get permission from the Province Directorate of Migration Management. It is also easier to travel to other countries with a Turkish passport. Employment is also easier in Turkey if you are a Turkish citizen.*

> *E2: The system here is slightly different. High school graduates can apply to the university. We have foreign student exams. Each university opens this exam separately. So we have to apply every university separately. I applied to 6 different universities. Each university has a quota for each nationality. But since our number as Syrians is too high, it is difficult for us to enter. Where you compete with 500 people, where you compete with 500 people. Although we have a high score, we can't enter the department we want easily. For medicine you need to do almost full. Students from the United States may enter easily even if they took a low point because there are few people applying from this nationality.*

Relational Supports and Challenges

The life of the Syrians in Turkey is a liminal situation between the homeland left behind and the hosting society. The fact that their guest situation will become permanent rather than a temporary one raised concerns for both sides and changed the way of interactions. Syrians in Turkey can neither feel at home, nor feel as guests being hosted gently. When they want to be a part of daily life as a simple human being shopping, laughing, going to school or traveling, the homeowners reveal implicitly or explicitly that they are not welcomed:

> *K3: You're regarded the same in or outside the campus. Their approach is the same because you are not in your own homeland. We have no other problems here. Only this. They don't accept us. They say that "Syrian students are more successful than us, we do not want them in your university. You don't have the right to be at the university. You are taking our bread. We can't get a scholarship like you".*

> *K2: Sometimes when we get on the bus, they tease us. They say "we cannot have a seat in our country, we have to stand because of you". We didn't come here willingly. We came from necessity. They're not very nice to us*

> *K5: At first, they were asking "you are Syrian, right?". Now they know that we are from the way we tie our headscarf. They gaze us. When they learn that we are Syrians in the hospital, they can treat negatively.*

> *E5: When we first arrived, we were not aware of the Turkish customs. It would be better if they were told to us. For example, in our homeland, men wear a long white outfit on Fridays days and we were*

wearing him up here, too. We realized that the neighbors were looking daggers at us. So we understood that we were not welcomed here with this outfit and we started not to wear. At first, we were experiencing these situations but now they are happening very rare.

K4: Our tent city is located in a village. In the early days, they were stoning tents saying that "we don't want you". And then they got used to us, I guess. Now these kind of things are not happening.

Although they sometimes face with discrimination and prejudice in daily life, increase social contact can reduce these negative attitudes. The effect of social contact and physical contact in the integration process may differ and cause opposite results. Attending higher education increase physical contact with the Turkish students in terms of sharing the same physical environment but without social contact and interaction, there wouldn't be a significant change in negative attitudes and prejudices for both sides. The experiences of the students in our study reflect the effect of social interaction to change relations for the better:

K6: When we first arrived here, they were not talking with us much when they learned that we were Syrians. When we go to the shops they are interested now, they welcome us.

E5: We moved to a new house 6 months ago. When we first arrived, our lower neighbor complained to the landlord and said "how you could rent it to the Syrians?. I have two little daughters, so how I'm going to send them to school". Then my mother visited this neighbor twice during the feast. One day she had a guest at the evening and asked us for coffee. Then She said, "Your coffee is so beautiful." Now they're so sincere. They're always together. Now she says "I've been prejudiced on you and thought wrong about you".

K2: After knowing that we are Syrian, their behaviors are changing. For example, if you get high marks, they say you are occupying our place. We had a trip to the youth camp, there were Turkish girls there. They didn't like us in the first place. But their prejudices disappeared while we were doing activities together.

K4: When we went on a trip, I had a very good friend. At first, we had also thought the Turks were always thinking badly. But it wasn't. There are a lot of good Turkish people, too. We have also been prejudiced before. For example, my friend I met on the trip, Zehra, asks me every week. She calls and asks if I need anything. When we met, we saw that they were good people

Syrian students stated that their families and the teachers in Turkish Language Learning, Research and Application Center have been the most significant support mechanisms for them in the integration to higher education process. Their families also regard education as an exit door for their children and believe that attending higher education will increase the opportunities for them. With regard to the teachers in Turkish Language Learning, Research and Application Center, they are different from the other teachers at the university in terms of being the first contact point for the Syrian students at the university and also they spent a significant amount of time with them for a year period. As a matter of fact, this close contact increases social interaction and empathy resulting in a significant relationship

between Syrian students and Turkish Language Learning, Research and Application Center teachers. Another relational support mechanism for the students were the other Syrian students who have already started higher education in the same university. Some students reveal that they were also supported by local Turkish people in the process of finding a house:

E1: We are four brothers. They're smaller than me. They're going to primary school. My family is conscious. They want us to be educated. They are very happy that I study at university.

K2: My family wants me to get the best education. Some families can be a bit against their daughter's studying, but my family is not one of them. We are three siblings and my brother is at university, too. My other brother didn't choose to continue education. So my parents are a little bit angry towards him.

E3: My parents have supported me to receive education. They always say, "If you read, you will be regarded as a man. If not, you will be like us.

E2: We have seen the most help from our instructors in Turkish Language Learning, Research and Application Center. Syrian friends, who have been here before us, also helped. We met a brother from the Turks while searching for a house. He was very helpful. He said, "Think of me as your brother."

E4: My friend rented our house. He took help from other Syrian friends. We did not have a problem with the people here in the settlement process.

K1: Our instructors in Turkish Language Learning, Research and Application Center were very helpful. They're still very helpful to us. We can go to our teachers in all kinds of problems. Even when we want to go to the bazaar, they can take us there. We love them very much.

The reciprocal expectations for relations are basic and necessary elements of forming social ties. The mutuality of these expectations is important in the sense that both sides take into account the others' perceptions and reactions and act accordingly (Azarian, 2005: 54). With increase contact and interaction, these mutual understanding may increase and ease the psychological integration. A very important component of integration process is psychological integration. Without psychological integration, migrants will have or have had problems in meeting their psychological needs and being employed, receiving education, housing or benefiting from health care are not enough for meeting these psychological needs of the migrants in a host society (Vrecer, 2010: 496). Syrian students' experiences show that there are still challenges in terms of mutual empathy and understanding, especially with the Turkish students. To achieve a successful psychological integration process, both parties need time and increased social contact, as well as effective psycho-social support mechanisms to ease this process:

K1: Some Turkish students don't want us to get close. We understand from their body language. Some say hello and smiles. Some of them turn their face, when they realize that we are Syrians.

E3: I don't think that it is possible to have an emotional relationship with Turkish students. Not really. They don't want this, I guess. I feel like that.

E6: I am the only Syrian in my class. That's why they have to talk with me. They're helping when I ask where I don't understand.

E7: I don't have a Turkish friend in class. I have Syrian friends that I am close. There are 60 students in the class. Four of us are Syrians. We talk to them too, but we're not close. We didn't get used to each other, yet. I would love to be close to the Turks. Especially to improve my Turkish.

K4: Syrian students who are in third of fourth grades are more closer to Turkish students. They spend time together, they can regard each other as friends. Their Turkish are good. By time, the relations are getting closer.

K6: I have never thought of what we could do to get closer to Turkish students. I think it needs time. I don't feel any exclusion by them, but we're not close.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

Forced migration process not only causes a departure from previous lives and identities, but also brings with it the challenges of adaptation to a new social environment and culture. Syrian civil war, which has caused more than five million Syrians being forced to migrate to other countries since 2011, was the beginning of an ongoing process of uncertainty and change for Syrians migrated to neighbouring countries such as Turkey.

With the changing condition of Syrians in Turkey from temporary position to a permanent one, integration of Syrians became a significant issue of concern for both sides. Considering the fact that one in four of the Syrians in Turkey are young Syrians who have to create a life and a future here, Turkey changed the education policy in the way to integrate them to Turkish higher education system. Integration to higher education policy is a mutual exit door for both sides to diminish the risk of a lost Syrian generation in Turkey and to create a hope for the Syrian youth for a better future.

Along with these desired positive outcomes, integration of Syrian students to higher education also brings changes and challenges for both sides. In this study, relational uncertainties, changes and challenges related with this integration process are tried to be revealed on the basis of experiences of Syrian students in Turkish higher education system. The experiences of Syrian students in our study reveal that attending higher education is a turning point of their lives in terms of having a chance to control the uncertainities surrounding them and having more space to increase their areas of agency. Higher education provide them a new environment to reshape their identities, to create new social ties, and to take an active position to change their future. From the point of view of relational sociology, social relations and identities do not remain constant and invariant as they are. Identities emerge from control efforts in the midst of uncertainties and controversies (White, 2008: 1). Social ties are dynamic structures that arise from the interaction processes of real social actors, and in this sense they require being active and continuous rather than mechanical and stable (Azarian, 2005: 60). In the study, higher education is a safe area enabling them to transform a new identity that is more powerful and desirable from the identity shaped for them as "de-identified" Syrians in Turkey.

This identity change lead to positive and negative responses of other social actors. Syrian students' attending higher education is a new experience for both parties which is different from the accustomed interaction styles of Syrians and Turkish people outside in the daily life. This new position involves to share similar social roles as university students and this relational change reguires to adopt new strategies for both sides. The students in our study reveal that, in this integration to higher education process, they experience both change and challenges in their social interactions with Turkish people. The findings also points out the fact that increased physical contact without social interaction is not adequate and sometimes has a triggering role on discrimination and prejudice, but increased social contact can reduce these negative attitudes. This finding can also explain the opposite findings of the studies according to the effects of physical proximity on negative attitudes towards Syrians (Ankaralı, et al., 2017; Aslan et al., 2018).

Higher education is also an exit door for the Syrian students to decrease the uncertainties about the future. The Syrian students in our study have to create a new life and future in Turkey because they don't have a hope to return their homeland anymore. But although this fact requires them to plan a future in Turkey, their official "under temporary protection" statue put them into a liminal position causing a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity in their lives. The uncertainty about their situation is a two sided concern for both Turkish people and them. Syrian students in the study reveal that they don't feel to be fully accepted by Turkish community members and they are still seen as undesirable guests in Turkey. With all of these two-sided uncertainties and concerns, the integration process seems to be fluid and open to change in time and with increased social interaction.

Regarding the relational changes and challenges, Syrian students' statements show that they experience both of them in the integration to higher education process. While their families and the teachers in Turkish Language Learning, Research and Application Center have been the most significant support mechanisms, the older Syrian students studying in the same university and some local Turkish people also have helped them in this process. Although with increased social interaction, the relations between Syrian students and Turkish people are becoming more tolerant and empathic, it seems that there is still a need of time and increased social contact, as well as effective psycho-social support mechanisms to ease this process. The policy of integration of Syrian students to higher education should take into account and focus on psychological integration, too. Without psychological integration, Syrian students will have problems in meeting their psychological needs and their hopes and expectations from higher education will be partially fulfilled. To achieve a successful integration process, these relational dynamics mentioned in the study should be evaluated seriously and psychosocial support mechanisms should be strengthened in educational policies regarding the integration of Syrian students in Turkish higher education system. An effective collaboration of relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations and also academic institutions on this matter will contribute to stronger social ties between both sides to ease the social integration process.

SUGGESTIONS

Considering the fact that migration is a multi-sided and multi-dimensional process including social perceptions and acculturation strategies of host country and migrant groups, the research on this area should include the viewpoints, values and sensitives of both sides and the research methodology should be comprehensive and multi-dimensional to have a better understanding of the acculturation process (Çağlayandereli and Arslan, 2016). As a matter of fact, lack of different sample groups from host community is a limitation of the study restricting the reflection of a broader viewpoint. Another limitation of the study is that this study is carried out with a limited sample size and the results driven from the study are reflecting the views and experiences of Syrian students at Osmaniye Korkut Ata University. As a matter of fact, there is need for further qualitative research with larger sample sizes and similar sample groups at different locations to explore the inferences of the study and to enable the generalization of the results.

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