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# Exploring the impact of teachers' past migration experience on inclusive education for refugee children

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## ABSTRACT

Teachers play a key role in shaping students' experiences in the learning environment. Studies on inclusive education in forced migration contexts, however, rarely examine what determines teachers' positive behaviour and attitudes toward refugee students. This study examines how teachers' past migration and occupational experiences impact their attitudes towards students who arrived through forced migration and whether they rely on teaching practices stemming from their past experiences to ensure a more inclusive school climate. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, we collected 228 surveys and conducted 9 focus groups with secondary education teachers in 11 public schools in 5 different cities in Turkey where students of Syrian origin who arrived through forced migration are registered. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' and 'social capital', this study argues that teachers' past migration experiences enable them to create a more inclusive classroom experience for Syrian refugee children.

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## Introduction

The educational experience of forcibly displaced children in the receiving countries is a contested policy and scholarly theme. The severity of the global policy challenge is more evident after the UNHCR reported that there is a high likelihood that most displaced children will have spent the whole period of their schooling in host countries, and in 2019 more than half of the 7.1 million refugee children do not access schools (As of August 30, 2019, UNHCR website). Despite a global policy consensus that 'School is where refugees are given a second chance' as noted by Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, refugee-hosting countries continue to have serious financial, professional and institutional deficiencies in their educational ecosystems to meet the needs of refugee and local community children effectively. As Nilholm (2021) argues, lack of knowledge on how to actually create truly inclusive classrooms, the persistence of segregated educational practices, and diverse opinions among teachers and parents about inclusive practices hinder educational opportunities to achieve more inclusive classrooms in the forced migration context.

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There is a vast literature on the role of teachers in inclusive education practices, how teachers' ideas and attitudes toward students are formed and how their attitudes impact school children's prospects concerning academic performance and social cohesion processes. Studies that focus on the factors that shape teachers' attitudes toward school children propose explanations such as the perception of parents' values (Sirin, Ryce, and Mir 2009), whether the teacher belongs to a minority group (Blanchard and Muller 2015), teachers' identities and values (Expósito and Favela 2003) and the teaching environment (Elbaz-Luwisch 2004). Among studies on education in forced migration context in Turkey, some focus on structural changes in education policy and access of Syrian refugee children to mainstream education (Alpaydın 2017; Taskın and Erdemli 2018; Aydın and Kaya 2019; Çelik and İçduygu 2018), others focus on the inclusiveness of the education ecosystem (Karsli-Calamak and Kilinc 2021; Erden 2020; Eren and Çavuşoğlu 2021). These studies mostly conclude that negative public attitudes towards refugees shape teachers' attitudes and their classroom practices without offering any comparison across cities, schools or different practices. By aiming to explain unexpected patterns of inclusive practices across different cities and schools, this study fills three major gaps in the literature. First, the findings are based on data analysed from 11 public schools in 5 different cities with teachers who experience challenges with managing classrooms with refugee children, however, are in very different school settings. Second, the analysis is based on understanding the root causes of positive attitudes of teachers toward refugee children in a context where negative attitudes toward refugees are increasing in Turkey. Third, the study focuses on the migration background of the teachers whereas most studies focus on the access to the education ecosystem, which is limited to structural factors.

This research seeks answers to the question: How do teachers' own past migration experiences impact their attitudes toward their students who have arrived through forced migration? As the most critical actor in creating an inclusive classroom and shaping Turkish parents' and students' attitudes towards Syrian refugees, it is crucial to understand the reasons behind the positive attitudes of teachers in Turkey. By employing Bordieuan analysis, this research examines the ways in which teachers' past migration experiences are reflected in their creation of inclusive classrooms.

### **Context: forced migration and education in Turkey**

Among the 3.6 million forcibly displaced Syrians in Turkey, 1.8 million are children, and Turkey has 1,148,341 estimated school-age children from Syria (World Bank and UNHCR 2021). In the 2011-2013 period, forcibly displaced Syrians stayed mostly in Temporary Accommodation Centres (TACs), which were in provinces close to the Syrian border. During this period, the governance of migration in Turkey mostly focused on humanitarian assistance and the provision of basic needs. By 2014 Turkey introduced the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), which laid down the legal and institutional framework for Syrian nationals who came to Turkey due to events in Syria after 28 April 2011 (UNHCR, 'Temporary protection in Turkey', accessed November 14, 2020). In line with TPR, the signing of the EU-Turkey Statement in March 2016 jump-started Turkey's institutional efforts for meeting the needs of millions of forcibly displaced Syrians to access services such as the public education system, healthcare and the labour market (Özçürümez and Ahmet 2020).

The merging of migration and national education policy agendas had three main consequences. First, Turkey devised and implemented policies in order to meet the educational needs of hundreds of thousands of school-age refugee children as of 2011, starting with programmes in TACs and enrolling them in Turkish public schools at all grade levels as of 2016. With international humanitarian support, a systematic effort was put in to create Temporary Education Centres (TECs) with Arabic and Turkish curriculums, Turkish and Syrian teachers and administrators. There were also some private initiatives that were run by civil society organisations without any supervision of the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), while some have signed a protocol with the Turkish government later on (Crul et al. 2019). Studies on the TECs suggested that Syrian parents preferred TECs so that their children could continue to sustain Arabic culture, language and Syrian curriculum (Çelik and İçduygu 2018). By attending the TECs, refugee children had access to education, however, remained segregated from the opportunities of their cohorts in the Turkish school system. This segregation hindered their prospects of social inclusion, academic success and Turkish language proficiency, and some studies note, rendered the transition to mainstream education difficult (Crul et al. 2019).

Second, with the decision to enrol refugee school children in public schools and close down the TECS, which happened suddenly and on a massive scale, the Turkish national education ecosystem had to incorporate a vision that accounted for long-term schooling and integration of refugee children in the public school system. The school system began to cope with the residual impact of the policies with schooling in TECs prior to enrolment in Turkish public schools alongside the persistent constraints in the forced migration contexts. The implementation process of this policy by local actors with different capacities has resulted in varying experiences among the forcibly displaced children and their parents (Sunata and Abdulla 2019), and ensuring school attendance has been difficult mainly due to the language barrier (Coşkun and Müberra Nur 2016). Refugee children report experiences of bullying and negative stereotyping in and outside of school by their peers and feelings of being rejected by their school community.

In these times of crisis in education ecosystem transformation, teachers are pivotal in creating a positive environment for facilitating inclusive education practices. Teachers shape students' academic performance by encouraging them to further their studies through positive reinforcement and by directing them to the right sources for furthering their educational objectives (Farkas et al. 1990). They may act as agents to foster peace, harmony, and cohesion among their students as well as their parents (Sayed and Novelli 2016). Alternatively, teachers' negative perceptions of the immigrant students' academic aptitude and cultural differences may result in discrimination toward immigrant children (Blanchard and Muller 2015). Teachers' negative attitudes and resulting mistreatment of refugee children may lead to behavioural problems and educational failure of their students (Sirin, Ryce, and Mir 2009). Since teachers may act as enablers or inhibitors of inclusive education in forced migration settings, it is critical to understand and explain what triggers inclusive behaviour among teachers in the classroom to advance the educational prospects of refugee children with comprehensive policies.

Despite their significance for promoting inclusive education practices, further research is needed to understand and explain the teachers' role in trauma-informed

education of refugee children (Berger 2019; Berger and Samuel 2020), increase their awareness on teaching students with trauma histories (Thomas, Crosby, and Vanderhaar 2019), and enhance their capacity through professional support for sustaining inclusion of students with diverse backgrounds and special needs (Rodríguez-Oramas et al. 2021; Brunzell, Stokes, and Waters 2019). Studies suggest that having access to prior and in-service training about teaching students with trauma histories equip teachers with skills for designing and implementing needs-based teaching practices and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for students (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner 2017), and develop adequate interventions for students with trauma experience and contribute to their psycho-social well-being (Berger, Bearsley, and Lever 2021). When professional support mechanisms are lacking, teachers develop bottom-up solutions for themselves and their students' daily educational needs (Johnson et al. 2019). In forced migration contexts, teachers have to operate with very little or no professional support, which makes it crucial to explain how they develop inclusive education practices according to their daily exigencies.

Inclusive education can be construed as facilitating free and publicly-funded, non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate safe schools that are accessible to all and adaptable to the ever-changing needs of society (Tomasevski 2003). Inclusive practices in education are expected to respond to the diverse needs of all learners within schools (Sunata and Beyazova 2022) and accommodate diverse voices and perspectives so that all children feel they belong and can contribute (Block et al. 2014). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, inclusive education in the context of refugee education in Turkey refers to equal opportunities to have access to education and an inclusive safe space in the classroom where the physical, social and mental well-being of the students and social cohesion among refugee and host community students are prioritised by their teachers and school administrators alongside academic aptitude. In this study, we examine teachers' and principals' discourses in the light of Taylor and Sidhu's (2012, 12) 'leadership' model for identifying inclusive education practices. In this model, strong advocacy for their refugee students, supporting them through academic and social challenges, organising and facilitating their extracurricular initiatives, and challenging other teachers' biases towards refugee children count as inclusive education practices. All these practices amount to the cultivation of 'rich and diverse learning interactions among heterogeneous students' (Molina Roldan et al. 2021). Inclusive leadership remains an important component of the successful practice of inclusive education, where all students with diverse abilities equally benefit (Agbenyega and Sharma 2014).

Teachers' attitudes towards their students depend on many factors such as age, gender, class and ideology (Gürşimşek and Göregenli 2005; Sayed and Novelli 2016). While there is considerable literature on how teachers interact with the structural changes concerning social cohesion policies in Turkey (Sağlam and Kanbur 2017; Taştekin et al. 2020; Oğuz Duran and Çalışkan 2020), there is a pressing need to explain the ways in which their values and beliefs affect the trajectory of social cohesion processes in schools in forced migration contexts. School administrators, teachers and counsellors had to cope with unprecedented institutional, professional and personal challenges while engaging in teaching and learning environments with children and parents from both refugee and local communities with the transition to enrolment of refugee school children in Turkish public schools instead of TECs. Studies report on how teachers

felt disoriented by the increasing number of Syrian students and often panicked about their presence in their classrooms due to mainly lack of institutional support (Çelik and İçduygu 2018).

As the efforts of the Ministry of National Education to include Syrian children in mainstream education was in full swing, local discourses toward Syrians refugees in Turkey began to shift from a positive tone of ‘guests’ (Sunata and Abdulla 2019) to be cared for toward a more negative tone. Research has reported that (Erden 2020; Eren and Çavuşoğlu 2021) negative local discourses have a negative impact on teachers’ attitudes and inclusive classroom experience. While reasons for negative attitudes of teachers are scrutinised in scholarly work, sources of positive attitudes of teachers to their refugee pupils are often neglected. Studying the case of Turkish teachers who have positive attitudes offers interesting insights for inclusive education practices as they are not only resisting existing negative discourses in their schools from fellow teachers, but they also have a positive impact on the discourses of Turkish parents. This study unravels how and why teachers who have past migration experiences have a positive attitude towards refugee children by employing a Bordieuan analysis.

## Theoretical framework

Bourdieu uses habitus, field and capital to explain the relationship between social structures including institutions, discourses, ideologies and everyday practices within the social structures. These conceptual tools offer valuable insights to understand ‘... the dynamic relationship between the structure and agency within a social practice pointing to the promise and possibility of social change’ (Nolan 2012, 203). Habitus is a series of binaries that shapes one’s way of acting, thinking, feeling and being in the social world, in which one’s actions and experiences are shaped by the dispositions (habitus) and the position in the field (capital) (Maton 2008). Habitus is more structured in a way that it is ‘(...) systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures (...)’ (Bourdieu 1990, 53). It is a total of habits and peculiarities embodied unconsciously by people from the environment that they live in. It is structured by one’s past experiences and circumstances, structuring social agents’ present and future practices (Maton 2008). It constitutes the unconscious part of ourselves that is deeply rooted within us (Bourdieu 1990, 56). It is not only reflecting a ‘sense of one’s place, but also “the place of others” in relation to oneself’ (Bourdieu 1990).

Field is defined as ‘a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, ... which produce and authorise certain discourses and activities’ (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002, 21). Education is regarded as a field since it sets its own rules that regulate behaviour within (O’Brien and Ó Fathaigh 2005). Within these structured social systems, individuals interact and struggle for the acquisition of certain assets. Bourdieu defines these assets as social capital. Social capital is divided into: *economic*, *cultural*, *social* and *symbolic*. Inclusive education of refugee children is influenced by economic, cultural, social and symbolic forms of social capital. The focus of this research is more on cultural, social and symbolic capital rather than economic capital. There are three subtypes of cultural capital categorised as embodied, objectified and institutionalised. Embodied cultural capital consists of both the deliberately and passively acquired properties of one’s

self from the family through the cultural socialisation and tradition over time, and impresses itself on one's habitus (Klibthong 2012, 73). Their embodied cultural capital becomes the character or ways of thinking of the teachers in the classroom. In inclusive education, social capital is constituted by social ties and symbolic capital, which is one's honour or prestige, and these two forms of capital govern the nature of the interaction in the classroom. 'They determine whether the classroom practices constitute oppressive practices or acts of social justice' (Gorder 1980; as quoted in Klibthong 2012, 73). For example, teachers' dispositions that are rooted in them from their families and upbringing, their educational background, the institutions they have negotiated with manifest themselves in different ways in their behaviour in the classroom. These influence each individual teacher toward particular ways of imagining and behaving with unique implications for their practices in the classroom.

The concept of habitus is used generously in social sciences in general and in several studies to understand the effects of teachers' beliefs and ideologies on their teaching practices. Oliver and Kettley (2010) suggest that teachers' guidance to students in the process of higher education applications, especially to elite universities, is shaped by teachers' past experiences, beliefs and connections. Their habitus also shapes their belief about whether their students' admittance to elite universities is desirable. Depending on their habitus, teachers acted as either 'gatekeepers' who did not encourage their students to apply to elite universities or as 'facilitators' who promoted those universities. Cui (2017) presents a case of how habitus is racialised through public discourse, media, hidden and formal curricula and how this racialised discourse continues through further knowledge construction and affects the education experiences of Chinese minority students at Canadian schools. Teachers' habitus includes their ideological beliefs as well. Their 'ideological baggage' shapes their bias and beliefs towards minority students and affect their teaching activities (Expósito and Favela 2003). Teachers' individual habitus is also having an impact on the school's institutional habitus. When schools' institutional habitus is inclusive and values students' language and culture, their academic skills and abilities, they become more entitled to the school. When the school habitus is exclusive, students' self-confidence is further damaged, and they feel devalued because of their cultural and linguistic background as well as feeling unskilled. The devaluation of students is also added to their already existing negative socialisation process (Çelik 2017).

This study argues that Turkish teachers' attitudes and assessments of their students are shaped by their habitus, which is based mostly on their social capital. Their professional practices and perceptions of what is right and wrong result from their habitus and their background milieu (Vester 2012). In this respect, habitus links teachers' individual and collective history with the present and future. In this framework, analysing Turkish teachers' past migration experiences offers valuable insights into their current inclusive practices. Teachers can use their habitus to describe their everyday practices of including refugee children or how they choose their strategies for inclusion, and how they challenge existing negative perceptions of other teachers and parents. In this respect, understanding the relationship between habitus and inclusion is critical while inclusion could be seen as a crisis for many of its participants as it challenges traditional notions of difference and discrimination and in a way to habitus (DiGiorgio 2009, 181), it can also be beneficial for constructing a more inclusive school climate as this research argues.



## Methodology, data collection and site selection

The quantitative data collection was carried out through surveys which took place between December 2019 and March 2020. A total of 261 teachers participated in the study, who submitted informed consent which went through ethics approvals by the Bilkent University Ethics Committee, from the secondary schools selected in Ankara, Gaziantep, Hatay, Bursa and Izmir provinces. The participants were asked to complete Bogardus Social Distance Scale (BSDS) and Attitude Scale Towards Syrians (ASTS). After all the normality, homoscedasticity, and linearity assumptions were met 228 participants were left for the main analyses.

Bogardus Social Distance Scale (BSDS) was developed by Bogardus (1959), and it is commonly used in research examining the relationship between local/majority and ethnic communities. The original scale comprises eight items measuring the extent to which the majority group members feel discomfort from a potential interaction with the target outgroup. Participants were asked to assess the discomfort impact of their interaction through questions such as ‘Please rate your level of comfort or discomfort about having a relationship with X (the target group) in the following situations (i.e. being married, being a friend, being a neighbour, being a citizen of the same country, having them as guest etc.)’ and they indicate their response one a 1 (extremely uncomfortable) to 7 (extremely comfortable) Likert type scale. The higher scores mean lower discomfort in the face of relating with the outgroup member, thus the lower the level of prejudice. Karşlı (2013) adapted the original scale to Turkish by taking some cultural and contextual nuances into account and thus ended up with 15 items that can be used for assessing the social distance among different (adult) ethnic groups in Turkey with reliable statistical indicators. In this research, the research team worked with the original BSDS and the one adapted by Karşlı (2013). Turkish teachers’ attitudes towards Syrian children were assessed through the Attitudes Towards Syrians Scale (ATSS). The original scale was developed by Yiğit Özüdoğru et al. (2018) in Turkish, and it aims at measuring local people’s general attitudes towards Syrian people. The original scale consists of 26 items and three sub-dimensions: Acceptance (11 items), threat (10 items), and rejection (5 items). The items are rated on a 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*) Likert type scale. The higher scores indicate more positive attitudes towards Syrian people. The total scale reliability score of the original scale is .96 showing that the scale is reliable for the adult sample. The demographic information about the teachers in the study is presented in Table 1.

For the qualitative data collection, this study used focus group interviews, known as a group interview, where a moderator guides the participants on a selected topic through group interaction (Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub 1996, 2; Morgan 1997, 1; Morgan 2002, 142). In the focus groups, participants were asked to introduce themselves along with their migration background if they had any. This question aimed to collect the diverse migration backgrounds of the teachers while reminding them what they had been through as former immigrants. Teachers also responded to questions on their feelings when they first had students from a different ethnicity/nation with a specific reference to the language barrier. The questions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of having students from different ethnic backgrounds aimed at revealing teachers’ experiences with different languages and communication practices, creating an accepting and coherent class environment, coping with the difficulties their students have and what they



**Table 1.** Demographic information related to teachers ( $N = 228$ ).

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Participant's gender</i>		
Men	70	30.7
Women	151	66.2
<i>City</i>		
Ankara	22	9.6
Gaziantep	50	21.9
Bursa	45	19.7
Hatay	90	39.5
İzmir	21	9.2
<i>School</i>		
Ankara Secondary School	22	9.6
Gaziantep 1 Secondary School	25	11.0
Gaziantep 2 Secondary School	4	1.8
Gaziantep 3 Secondary School	21	9.2
Bursa 1 Secondary School	10	4.4
Bursa 2 Secondary School	20	8.8
Bursa 3 Secondary School	15	6.6
Hatay 1 Secondary School	29	12.7
Hatay 2 Secondary School	11	4.8
Hatay 3 Secondary School	50	21.9
İzmir Secondary School	21	9.2
<i>Marital status</i>		
Married	139	61.0
Single	75	32.9
Divorced	8	3.5
<i>Children status</i>		
Yes	114	50.0
No	106	46.5
<i>Perceived social class</i>		
Lower	3	1.3
Middle	202	88.6
Upper	18	7.9
<i>Previous social contact with Syrian adults?</i>		
Yes	67	29.4
No	152	66.7
<i>Previous social contact with Syrian children?</i>		
Yes	61	26.8
No	160	70.2

do in the class to overcome adaptation problems. The teachers were also asked about the gendered differences between students' experiences. Most of the teachers answered this question by establishing references to their past experiences in the east and southeast regions of Turkey. They drew parallels on the patriarchal structure, which in turn affects their attitude towards Syrian students. Finally, teachers were asked about the factors that undermine social cohesion in the classroom environment. Since the participants of focus groups were from diverse backgrounds and different demographics, we aimed to understand the differences of attitudes between the teachers who previously migrated to Turkey or within Turkey with other teachers. This allowed us to clarify different patterns of attitudes in different contexts.

Focus groups were conducted with a total of 90 teachers (different background, experiences, demographics) by the research team at 11 schools in 5 cities which overall encompass 4 regions out of 7 in Turkey as well as the most densely populated cities by the Syrians in Turkey between December 2019 and March 2020. Some of the teachers have been added to the discussions since they were singled out in preliminary

focus group discussions with Syrian schoolgirls for their efforts to support them in the classroom while others voluntarily participated. Each focus group was transcribed from audio recordings and extensive notes for an inductive approach to qualitative data analysis using NVivo software.

The selection of 5 cities reflect the diversity of settlement patterns of Syrian refugees in Turkey. While most of the Syrians in Gaziantep are of Turkish descent and have adequate knowledge of the Turkish language, the Syrians in Hatay communicate in Arabic with the local people who are of Arabic descent. Bursa, located in the north-western part of Turkey, is one of the most populous and most developed cities with substantial employment opportunities. Bursa witnessed various migration flows before the Syrians in its history, which makes it a distinctive case for the project. Beginning from the late Ottoman Period until the end of World War II (İçduygu and Sert 2015), hundreds of thousands of people who were of Turkish origin migrated from the Balkans to Bursa for different reasons. This track record of migration inflow to Bursa offers a great opportunity to understand whether teachers' past migration experiences impact their teaching habitus. İzmir is a metropolitan city in the western part of Turkey and the third most populous city after İstanbul and Ankara. It has accommodated people of many different religions, ethnicities, and cultures throughout history as an international port city. The diversity of ethnicity is further increased with the addition of thousands of displaced Syrians as İzmir is the closest route for Syrian refugees to cross the border to Greece. The school selected for the fieldwork is in a district populated mostly by Syrians of Turkish ethnicity, and allows the researchers to understand the opportunities for social cohesion when the language barrier is not the main challenge. Finally, as the capital city, Ankara is the hinterland of all regions which allow the researchers to have different perspectives in the focus group, and the school selected for the research is in a neighbourhood where several incidents happened between the local community and the Syrian community. The high level of tension between the Syrian community and the local community gives the researchers an opportunity to understand how this tension was reflected in schools and how it is affecting teachers' attitudes towards Syrian students (Figure 1).

## Results

The quantitative analysis reveals the level of discomfort and teachers' motivations to put social distance between themselves and the forcibly displaced Syrians in Turkey, which is a strong indicator of prejudicial attitudes. The attitudes towards forcibly displaced Syrians indicate whether the teachers have positive or negative attitudes and the different sub-components of their attitudes such as perceiving Syrian people as 'threat', 'acceptance' of Syrian people, and 'denial' of Syrian people. Table 2 presents the correlations between the study variables. Results indicate that teachers' social distancing motivations increase when their acceptance of forcibly displaced Syrians in Turkey decrease, and they are more lenient to see Syrian people as threats and deny their social existence (Table 3).

Moreover, our quantitative analysis suggests that there is no meaningful change in the attitudes of teachers towards their Syrian students based on their age, year of service, and the density of Syrian students in their classroom. However, female teachers tend to have increased social distance than male teachers. While male teachers have increased acceptance



**Figure 1.** Cities in which action research is conducted.

of the existence of Syrians in Turkey, they have higher levels of threat perception than female teachers. This result confirms the often-referred discourse of Syrians as ‘guests’ that is previously underlined by several different studies. Supporting this argument, most of the teachers perceived the inclusion of Syrian children in mainstream Turkish public education as a sign of ending the ‘guest policy’, which became one of the hot topics of the field visits. This is also in line with Erdoğan’s (2020) research in which he states the rate of Turkish people who are supporting free education opportunities for Syrian refugee children in Turkey has reduced from 9.5 per cent in 2017 to 6 per cent in 2019. Another interesting result is that teachers who have previously met with Syrians tend to have negative acceptance and denial levels, while those who have not met a Syrian person before have higher levels of social distance desires. One of the reasons we identify during elite interviews and focus groups is teachers who recently started teaching are easily affected by experienced teachers’ negative ideas and perceptions. However, our qualitative analysis suggests that there is a different group of teachers that is not clearly represented in the quantitative data who have positive attitudes towards their Syrian students. Teachers who have previously experienced inward or outward migration have a positive attitude towards their Syrian students, which reflects itself in their inclusive school and classroom practices.

Some studies suggest that teachers are likely to be effected by the negative attitudes toward refugees in general along with all members of the local communities, since they also live and work in that society (Mittler 2003, 2), and that individuals’ group membership may determine their attitudes (Bešić et al. 2020), our study suggests that for teachers who previously migrated to Turkey or within Turkey there is a possibility of showing inclusive patterns of behaviour toward refugee children based on the individual

**Table 2.** Distribution of Syrian under temporary protection by province.

Cities	Syrians under temporary protection	Population
Ankara	96.850	5.503.985
İzmir	145.978	4.320.519
Bursa	176.202	2.994.521
Hatay	433.156	1.609.856
<b>Gaziantep</b>	<b>448.860</b>	<b>2.028.563</b>

Source: Directorate General of Migration Management.

**Table 3.** Pearson correlations, means, and Cronbach's alpha (reliability) scores for teachers.

	1	2	3	4
1. Social Distance	1			
2. Acceptance	-.80**	1		
3. Threat	-.61**	.69**	1	
4. Denial	-.75**	.66**	.63**	1
Mean	3.78	2.46	2.37	3.52
N	233	233	233	233
SD	1.67	1.04	1.13	1.00
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.92	.97	.96	.91

Notes. Acceptance, threat, and denial are the sub-dimensions of Attitudes towards Syrian People Scale, \*\*  $p < .001$ .

habitus of teachers or, in some cases, principals. Our qualitative analysis offers several different migration experiences of teachers that give new insights on how teachers' past migration experiences and their habitus affect their attitudes towards Syrian refugees positively.

One migration pattern that has an impact is the experience of Macedonian migration to Turkey, especially to İzmir during the 1950s and 1960s from the former Yugoslavia (Svetieva 2009). There were three teachers of Macedonian origin in the focus group in İzmir and like teachers who have migrated from Bulgaria, they noted that their immigration backgrounds allowed them to find ways to increase social interaction with Syrian children, which in turn allows Syrian children to be more confident and feel more included in the schools.

I was born in İzmir, but I am of Macedonian origin. I have been working as a physical education teacher in this school for the last five years. These children (Syrian) are very active. They need direction. I trained them for the half-marathon last year. Even we had to pay for their health report since they could not afford it. But look at them (shows a picture of the running team). Can you tell which one is Syrian? I will show you. The one with a silver medal is a Syrian student. (İ, F, 33, Physical Education teacher)

While the legal status of Syrian children in their class hinders their inclusion to participate in sporting events, teachers who have previously experienced exclusion took initiative and overcame structural barriers in their school environment. One of the key reasons for the success of this initiative is that the principal of the school comes from an immigrant family and is committed to a high level of inclusion based on her family's migration stories.

My family migrated from Greece in 1924. My grandmother told me stories about their first years in Turkey. Even though they are Turkish, people called them gavrur<sup>1</sup> and refused to accept them in their villages. Even some threw them some food and yelled them not to move further into the village. She told me they had to bury those who have died without proper religious ceremonies. I became teacher because of my grandmother. She told me to take care of children wherever they come from. You will see with your own eyes how happy Syrian children in my school are. (İ, F, 50, School Principal)

As mentioned earlier, our quantitative data suggests that teachers who have recently started teaching are mostly affected negatively by their administrators and more experienced teachers and want to put more social distance from their Syrian students. However, our qualitative analysis suggests that teachers feel more competent and prepared for Syrian children if they find an inclusive structure in the school climate.

As mentioned earlier north-west part of Turkey received hundreds of thousands Turkish immigrants from Bulgaria starting from the beginning of the twentieth century but accelerated during the 1980s, more than 340,000 ethnic Turks living in Bulgaria were subjected to forced migration to Turkey in 1989 (Kutlay 2017, 162).

I came to Turkey from Bulgaria in 1989, which is why I have sympathy for Syrian children. I did not know the (Turkish) language, just like them. They did not want to enrol me to school because of that. We also were happy when someone showed interest in our situation. (B2, F, 34, English teacher)

Those who have experienced language barrier personally tend to identify a variety of ways to strengthen their contact with Syrian students, and help them overcome the language barrier. However, those who were born and raised in Turkey as second or third-generation immigrants are less likely to be as resourceful about facilitating communication.

I teach technology design for 18 years and I have been in this school for 18 years. My family came from Bulgaria during the 1950s. I am neutral against Syrian boys because they are having troubles with communication. We are doing much better progress with girls. (B2, F, 41, Technology and Design teacher)

Teachers whose families migrated from the East/Southeast to the West have expressed experiences of hardships through social exclusion and communication difficulties similar to their Syrian students. Their embodied cultural capital is impressed in themselves to the extent that they quote their childhood socialisation as a source of their current positive behaviour clearly.

I lived in Bitlis (a town in Eastern Turkey) until I was six years old. After that, we migrated to Bursa. I can relate to their adjustment issues. I came here from a different culture. (...) I used to speak Kurdish until we migrated to Bursa. You are just a child; they do not understand you. They blame you, but you do not know what you are accused of. (B3, F, 25, Religious Culture teacher)

Our findings about the significance of habitus are resonated succinctly in the statement by one of the teachers with parents of both Syrian and Turkish origin, who lived in several different cities while struggling with language proficiency, cultural difference and feelings of social exclusion in the education ecosystem as a child in her sincere summary of the impact of her habitus on her efforts to promote inclusive practices and her shared imaginary with the condition of her current refugee students:

I was born in Syria. My mom is from Syria and my father is from Mardin (Turkey). I lived in different cities, and I have been living in Hatay for 5 years. I have been through the same struggles. I don't know maybe I take sides sometimes when I remember what I have been through. I did not know Turkish when I came to Turkey. I escaped from the school in my first year. I tried to hide under my desk when my teacher approached to me. I did not understand a single word of my teacher and tried to mimic what other children did. I knew what they will experience because of my experiences. (H2, F, 32, English teacher)

## Conclusion

This study sought answers to the question: How do teachers' own past migration experiences impact their attitudes toward their students who have arrived through forced

migration? While all teachers included in the study had no formal training for managing diverse classrooms and had been coping with similar challenges in the education ecosystem in the forced migration context in Turkey, based on the accounts of the students, our findings pointed out that some teachers pursued inclusive practices in the classroom while others did not. This study contributes to the body of literature by employing Bourdieuan analysis to offer a holistic understanding of inclusive education practices in forced migration contexts. It does so by employing habitus, capital and field concepts of Bourdieu.

The study proposes that the teachers' habitus effect teachers' attitudes in the classroom, and those who pursue inclusive practices are the ones who have had migration experiences. Even though teachers included in this study come from different historical and cultural contexts, age-groups and migration trajectories, they display similar inclusive attitudes towards their refugee students. Based on the analysis of the data, the study maintains that the experience of the teachers and the students converge due to their shared experience of adversity during their post-migration settlement and social exclusion on grounds of language and culture in the education field. Teachers with migration experience promote inclusive practices by relying on a combination of their embodied cultural capital and symbolic capital. Their early childhood socialisation in different cultural contexts, and in diverse settings prior to moving to/in Turkey enable these teachers to have a higher level of acceptance of student differences and diversity in the classroom compared to other teachers. Their narratives of how they appreciate welcoming gestures, disseminate their refugee students' success stories and show leadership in facilitating social cohesion in the classroom point out how their cultural capital is embedded in their symbolic capital. These teachers understand and attend to negative effects of trauma induced by migration on children. Some teachers' migration experience converged with the realities of their students because they reported on how they coped with discrimination, dealt with high stress situations in processes of adjustment in their new school environment and managed learning difficulties particularly exacerbated by limited language proficiency, which all contributed to the construction of their cultural capital. Drawing on their cultural capital, these teachers seek ways to relieve feelings of unjust treatment and to facilitate managing of difficult emotions that adjustment may trigger among refugee children. Among the teachers with migration experience, however, those with vivid memories of their migration process and/or are second generation migrants after settlement display stronger motivations of negotiation with the education field compared to third generation teachers' motivations.

This study offers a framework which calls for a re-examination of how education policies in forced migration contexts are shaped by teachers' practices and their own past experience in the education system. Such an assertion suggests that structural changes facilitating access to mainstream education needs to be examined with a lens that also focuses on the context of critical actors who implement those policies in forced migration settings. This study proposes that through an examination of the impact of teachers' experiences on how they operate within the challenges of a variety of forced migration contexts, it will be possible to advance knowledge on introducing feasible proposals for bringing about change toward inclusive education practices around the world. This research could also be expanded to include studies on the impact of the habitus of

policy-makers, principals, parents/guardians and students on interacting with and (re)structuring inclusive education field for refugee children.

## Note

1. Gavur is a Turkish word used for non-muslims in a derogatory and insulting way.

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