



## An overview of music education of refugees in Türkiye: focus group study

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### Abstract

This study examines the integration process of refugee students into music education in Türkiye through the views of music teachers working in different samples. Based on a qualitative research paradigm, a holistic multiple case design was used, and a focus group interview was preferred as the data collection method. The participants consisted of 16 music teachers selected from provinces where refugees live intensively and at different educational levels. Prior to the research, a pilot interview was conducted with 32 music teachers, and focus group questions were prepared in line with the findings obtained. The findings show that teachers in the UNICEF Al Farah Project reported high attendance and class participation of students thanks to support such as transport and provision of instruments, while teachers in Istanbul and Anatolia reported negative themes due to factors such as language barrier, economic reasons and family indifference. Absenteeism rates are higher in secondary schools than in high schools, with male students being more likely to be absent for economic reasons. Regarding the orientation process, all participants except the UNICEF Al Farah group emphasised the need for language and cultural adaptation training. It was stated that the language barrier is more pronounced in theoretical courses and less problematic in practical courses, and that music lessons contribute to language development. With respect to national awareness, students in the UNICEF group showed interest in anthems and national days, while family pressure, lack of emotional bonding and indifference were at the forefront in other groups. The mutual attitudes of Turkish and refugee students are generally negative, and peer bullying is the most common problem. Although music lessons generally have a neutral effect on this issue, they can play a unifying role in some cases. The research suggests that for the effective participation of refugee students in the education process, comprehensive orientation programmes,

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language support, inclusive education skills for teachers, and the use of applied courses such as music as a tool for integration should be implemented. It is concluded that holistic policies to be developed in this direction will strengthen both the academic success of refugee students and social cohesion.

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## Introduction

Within the phenomenon of migration, the concepts of migrant, refugee and asylum seeker, which differ in terms of definition and status, are often confused with each other. Refugees are usually people who have to leave their countries for compelling reasons, such as fear and pressure, while migrants migrate voluntarily in search of better living conditions (Ziya, 2012). There is a subtle difference between a refugee and an asylum seeker. A refugee is a foreigner who is in danger of being persecuted on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion and therefore cannot or will not seek protection from his/her own country. When they leave their own country and request protection from another country, they are accepted as an asylum seeker until these requests are verified and approved, and after approval, they gain refugee status (Esenlikci & Engin, 2019). Due to its strategic geographical location and deep historical-cultural ties with the region, Türkiye has been a transit and destination country for various migration waves and refugee movements throughout history.

Today, the biggest migration wave for Türkiye has occurred as a result of the civil unrest that started in Syria in 2011 (Karakaya, 2020). What started on 15 March 2011 as peaceful protests turned into a deep war with the formation of local opposition groups in different parts of the country against the Assad regime's violent repression attempts against civilians (Eker, 2015). People fleeing the conflict have preferred to seek refuge in Türkiye, which has the longest land border with Syria. Another reason for Türkiye's preference is that its geographical location makes it a transit country for asylum movements from east to west (Erten, 2015). However, Türkiye's unpreparedness for such a large-scale migration movement and the uncontrolled influx of asylum-seekers from Syria have had negative economic, social and cultural impacts (Akkoyunlu Ertan & Ertan, 2017). According to United Nations data, 3.6 million Syrians are registered under temporary protection in Türkiye (International Organization for Migration, n.d.). According to the April 2025 data of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the total number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide has reached 122.1 million (UNHCR, 2025). Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that permanent migration movements increased by 26% in 38 countries after 2021 (OECD, 2025).

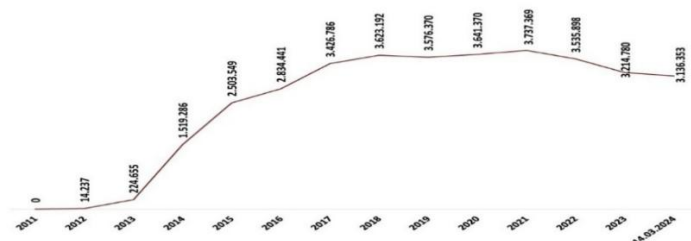
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) states that approximately 36 million school-age children who are asylum-seekers worldwide are integrated into the education policies of the countries where they stay for ten years or more (UNESCO, 2023). Following the 2011 Syrian civil war, efforts to develop policies based on the assumption that Syrians who came to Türkiye would return to their country when the war ended began (Culbertson & Constant, 2015). In this period, short-term policies and plans were prepared mostly for Syrian children living in camps (Gencer, 2017). In 2013, the number of Syrians seeking refuge in Türkiye increased due to the civil war and violence in Syria, which brought their educational problems to the forefront of the agenda. With the possibility of a military solution in Syria weakening, new ways were developed to ensure Syrians' access to education (Seydi, 2014). One of the most important initiatives in this field has been the Temporary Education Centres (TECs) opened, especially in areas where Syrians live in large numbers (Usta et al., 2018). Temporary Education Centres (TECs) were established to enable school-age foreign students who migrated to Türkiye en masse to continue their education that was left unfinished in their home countries (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2014). During the transition period in which these centres operated, the language of education was Arabic (UNICEF, 2022) and the curriculum used was revised by the Syrian Interim Government and based on the Syrian Ministry of Education curriculum (BEKAM, 2015, cited in Emin, 2016).

In the first two years of the civil war, approximately 224,655 migrants arrived in Türkiye and the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) came into force in 2013 (Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu, 2013). This law stipulates that Syrians with certain identity documents will be provided with basic rights such as health services, education, employment and social assistance (Şimşek, 2018). Following the entry into force of the LFIP in 2013, the Temporary Protection Regulation was issued in 2014, and it was decided that “those coming from non-European countries will be defined as conditional refugees, subsidiary protection or temporary protection” (Erdoğan & Kaya, 2015).

The participation of migrants in social life in the countries of destination directly affects both these individuals and the people of the host country. One of the groups most affected by migration is children (Dustmann & Glitz, 2011). Among the main problems faced by refugee children is education. Due to the unfavourable conditions they live in, they have serious difficulties in continuing their education (Duran Yılmaz, 2023).

In 2016, it was decided to integrate Syrian students into the Turkish education system and to close Temporary Education Centres (MoNE, 2016). In this context, it was stated that efforts would be made to ensure the integration of Syrian students into the education system in order to provide them with education (MoNE, 2015). The fact that the language of instruction in Temporary Education Centres is Arabic instead of Turkish has created a significant obstacle for Syrian students to adapt to the Turkish education system (Beyhan & Epçaçan, 2018). For this reason, the PIKTES Project was initiated in 2016 with an agreement between the Ministry of National Education and the Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye (Karaman, 2018). The aim of the project is to support the successful integration of foreign children into the education system and their social cohesion in Türkiye (PICTES, 2024).

By 2024, the number of Syrians under temporary protection is estimated to be 3,136,353 (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024). The number of refugees under temporary protection in Türkiye, between the ages of 0-18 is 1,534,447, of which 791,324 are male, and 743,123 are female (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024). Between 2011 and 2024, the change in the number of Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Change in the Number of Syrians under Temporary Protection in Türkiye between 2011-2024

National consciousness, integration and orientation processes have a very important place in refugee education. According to Güzel (2006, p. 12), national consciousness is defined as informing individuals within the framework of the triad of homeland-nation-flag, giving them a sense of belonging and creating a sense of common destiny and common values. As reported by the European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), refugee integration is a multidimensional and bidirectional process involving (forced) migrants and the resident population and other communities in the host society (European Council on Refugees and Exiles [ECRE], 1999, pp. 2-3). According to Temiz (2020), orientation is defined as the process of adapting to the society by learning the language, traditions, values and rules of the host country. This process is briefly referred to as the orientation process.

In light of this information, it is important to analyse the music education situation of refugee students in Türkiye. The main problem of the research was determined as ‘examining the views of refugee students towards music education in the axis of different educational foci and age groups’. This study aims to investigate the relationship between refugee students’ school attendance and class participation, general education activities and orientation processes, the effect of music lessons and language barrier, the level of national consciousness and the attitudes of Turkish and refugee students towards each other.

## Method

### *Research Model*

In this study, a case study model was employed within the framework of the qualitative research paradigm. Since the research aims to reveal the problems encountered by music teachers in the process of integration of refugee students into the Turkish education system, a holistic multiple case design, one of the case study models, was preferred. In a holistic multiple case design, “there is more than one situation, each of which can be perceived as a whole in itself. Each situation is handled holistically within itself and then compared with each other” (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018, p. 301).

### *Participants*

The music teachers who will participate in the study were determined by taking into consideration the findings obtained in the pilot study conducted before the study and the provinces in Türkiye where refugees live intensively (Refugees Association, 2023). In this context, one music teacher each from Adana, Ankara, Istanbul and Hatay was included in the study for the pilot interview. After the pilot interview, participants were selected for the focus group interviews and divided into 4 groups according to school levels and geographical regions of Türkiye. The first focus group interview was conducted with four music teachers working within the scope of the UNICEF Al Farah Project in different provinces. This group was formed to compare the experiences of teachers working with refugee students in different provinces. The second group was selected from Istanbul, the largest and most cosmopolitan city in Türkiye. The teachers in this group work in four different schools in Istanbul, where refugee students are the majority. The third group consisted of secondary school music teachers from various regions of Türkiye. This group consisted of one teacher each from Aksaray, Adana, Hatay and Şanlıurfa. The last group consisted of teachers teaching music at high school level in provinces other than Istanbul. The teachers in this group were selected from Ankara, Kahramanmaraş, Mardin and Mersin. During the research, four focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 16 music teachers. The participants were coded as follows: UNICEF Al Farah Project focus group (Pu1, Pu2, Pu3, Pu4), Istanbul focus group (Pi1, Pi2, Pi3, Pi4), high school focus group (Ph1, Ph2, Ph3, Ph4) and secondary school focus group (Ps1, Ps2, Ps3, Ps4). In this direction, demographic information for the participants in the study group of the research is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographic Information of Participants

| Participants            |             | Gender | Age    | Graduation Status | Professional Experience Duration | City of Duty |               |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------|--------|-------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| UNICEF Al Farah Project | Pu1         | Male   | 41     | PhD               | 18                               | Kırıkkale    |               |
|                         | Pu2         | Female | 37     | Master's          | 15                               | İzmir        |               |
| İstanbul                | Pu3         | Female | 39     | Master's          | 16                               | Kayseri      |               |
|                         | Pu4         | Male   | 40     | PhD               | 16                               | Bursa        |               |
|                         | Pi1         | Female | 28     | Undergraduate     | 4                                | İstanbul     |               |
|                         | Pi2         | Female | 34     | Master's          | 5                                | İstanbul     |               |
|                         | Pi3         | Male   | 29     | Undergraduate     | 3                                | İstanbul     |               |
|                         | Pi4         | Female | 33     | Undergraduate     | 7                                | İstanbul     |               |
|                         | High School | Ph1    | Female | 41                | Master's                         | 17           | Ankara        |
|                         |             | Ph2    | Male   | 39                | Master's                         | 14           | Kahramanmaraş |
| Ph3                     |             | Male   | 44     | Master's          | 29                               | Mersin       |               |
| Ph4                     |             | Female | 27     | Undergraduate     | 3                                | Mardin       |               |
| Secondary School        | Ps1         | Male   | 38     | Undergraduate     | 13                               | Aksaray      |               |
|                         | Ps2         | Male   | 42     | Undergraduate     | 16                               | Hatay        |               |
|                         | Ps3         | Female | 54     | Undergraduate     | 30                               | Adana        |               |
|                         | Ps4         | Male   | 32     | Master's          | 5                                | Urfa         |               |

### ***Data Collection Process***

This research was designed in line with the qualitative research paradigm, and the focus group interview technique was used as the data collection method. Before the research data were collected, a pilot study was conducted; in this context, 32 music teachers who had worked with refugee students between 20 June 2024 and 2 August 2024 were asked to verbally share their experiences. After these interviews, the themes for the focus group interviews were determined. Before preparing the interview questions, a comprehensive literature review on the research topic was conducted. Then, questions were developed in line with the data obtained from the experiences of 32 teachers. The first interview protocol created by the researchers was analysed and evaluated by two field experts and one measurement and evaluation expert. Necessary arrangements were made in the questions in line with the feedback received. A suitable environment was prepared before the interviews so that teachers could answer the questions comfortably and without feeling pressured. On 30 October 2024, pilot interviews were conducted with five music teachers working in different provinces and at different educational levels, and the questions were finalised after this stage. On 11 January 2025, the first focus group, UNICEF Al Farah Project teachers, were interviewed, and on 18 January 2025, the second focus group, music teachers in Istanbul, were interviewed. On 20 January 2025, the third focus group consisted of music teachers working in secondary schools in Anatolia and the interview was conducted on this date. On 25 January 2025, the last focus group consisted of music teachers working in Anatolian high schools.

### ***Ethics Committee***

This research was conducted with the approval of Kafkas University Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee dated 30.12.2024 and numbered 65.

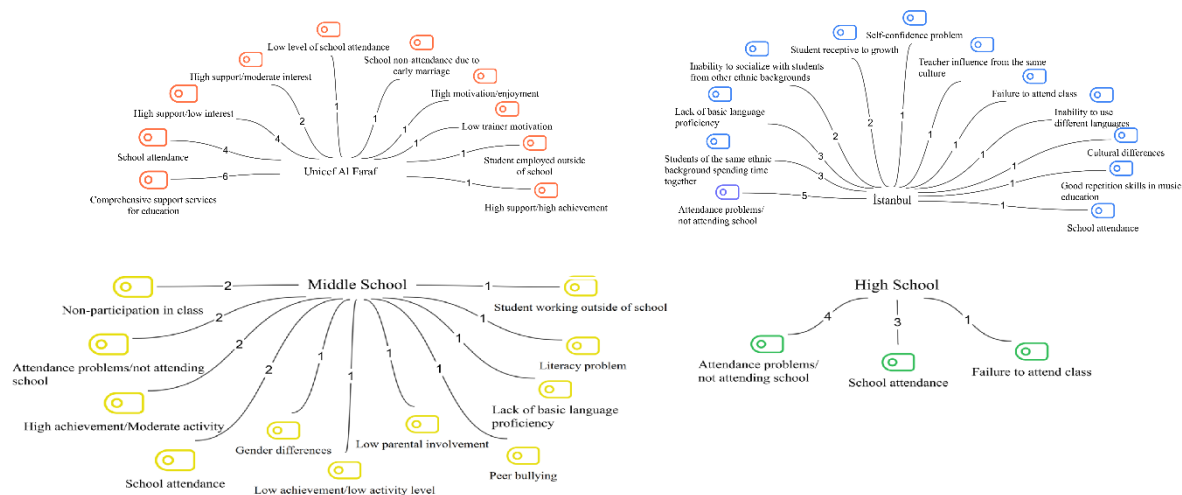
### ***Data Analysis***

In analysing the data obtained in the study, the content analysis technique was used within the qualitative research paradigm. In the analysis of the data, firstly, the interview videos were carefully listened to by two researchers, meticulously transcribed, and coded. Then, the data were transferred to MAXQDA 24 software in order to carry out the data analysis more safely. The interview videos were then listened to and transcribed again by two different researchers, and coding was done again. The codes were finalised by adding and removing codes by all researchers, and the data were presented with graphs and comments. In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the study, Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula [ $\text{consensus} = \text{consensus} / (\text{consensus} + \text{disagreement})$ ] was used, and the agreement rate between the researchers was found to be 91%. This rate shows that the results obtained are reliable.

## **Findings**

### ***School Attendance and Class Participation***

The findings regarding the school attendance and class participation of refugee students are analysed and presented. When the focus group interviews are analysed, it is seen that UNICEF Al Farah Project teachers reported 22 codes under the theme of school attendance and class participation, teachers working in Istanbul reported 22 codes, teachers working at the secondary school level reported 15 codes, and teachers working at the high school level reported eight codes.



**Figure 2.** Opinions of music teachers working in different sample groups on the theme of refugee students' school attendance and class participation

When Figure 2 on the theme of refugee students' school attendance and class participation is analysed, while all of the participants working at the high school level reported negative codes, nine out of 11 codes reported by the participants working at the secondary school level, and nine out of 12 codes reported by the participants working in Istanbul were negative. Participants in the UNICEF Al Farah Project group reported four negative codes. Nevertheless, teachers in this group stated that students' school attendance rates were high. Some views on the related sample are as follows;

(Pu1): "In general, I did not have a serious problem with absenteeism in choir lessons; students come with enthusiasm and pleasure. Because they enjoy the lesson."

(Pu2): "Since students living in certain parts of the city are picked up and dropped off from their homes by shuttle bus, I generally did not have any problems with attendance. The teachers working in the project are competent in their fields, but although we give individual lessons to the students, sometimes they come without practising..."

(Pu3): "There are students from Alsancak, Eyüp and the east end of Izmir. A route is determined for each student, and students are picked up by shuttle bus. Students enrolled in a certain instrument course are provided with that instrument. All kinds of opportunities are provided for students to continue their studies."

When the opinions of the teachers working in Istanbul are analysed, it is seen that the situation is more negative compared to the project schools, but presents a more positive picture than the other focus groups. Some of the opinions of the relevant sample are as follows;

(Pi1): "I think the participation of refugee students in my class is weak. Students who do not speak Turkish do not participate much anyway. When we practise songs and anthems, they do not participate much, but they try as much as they can."

(Pi2): "They are absent too much. Because they do not like school. So the rate of absenteeism is very high. For example, I can say that the most absent students in my school are usually refugee students. Let me put it this way, that's why I categorise class attendance into three categories: good, medium and bad. As I said, students who don't speak Turkish automatically choose not to come because they don't understand anything."

(Pi3): "When we look at the school in general, we see that refugee students are the most absent. I think one of the reasons for this is that they have poor reading and writing skills in Turkish. For this reason, we put them in one class to increase their attendance and participation. This had both positive and negative aspects. As a result, we plan to continue with the same system this year."

(Pi4): *"We have the same situation, that is, there are many absent students. But in terms of attendance, yes, there are some who don't speak Turkish at all, and even some who don't understand the notes at all."*

When the opinions of the teachers working at the high school level are analysed, it is found that absenteeism rates are lower compared to the other interview groups. The participant's views of this sample are as follows;

(Ph1): *"I mean, in the high school where I work, students generally attend the class. There are one or two absentees, but the others are regular."*

(Ph2): *"In my classes, there are five refugee students on average. I go to ten different classes, and three or four of these students are constantly absent."*

(Ph3): *"Let me give the school statistics in general. We have a total of 350 registered students. 150 of them attend school. Of the 200 students who do not attend school, 150 are refugees. None of them comes to class."*

(Ph4): *"Actually, the situation is the same. There are those who attend, but there are also those who do not attend. Those who attend are like ghosts in terms of participation; they exist only on paper."*

The views of the participants working at the secondary school level indicate the lowest attendance and participation rates among all focus groups. The views of this sample are as follows;

(Ps1): *"The family factor is very important here. When the family is not interested, we have problems with both success and attendance, whereas in the opposite case, students are both successful and attend classes regularly."*

(Ps2): *"The rate of absenteeism is high in my school, but male students are absent more than female students. The reason for this is that male students work."*

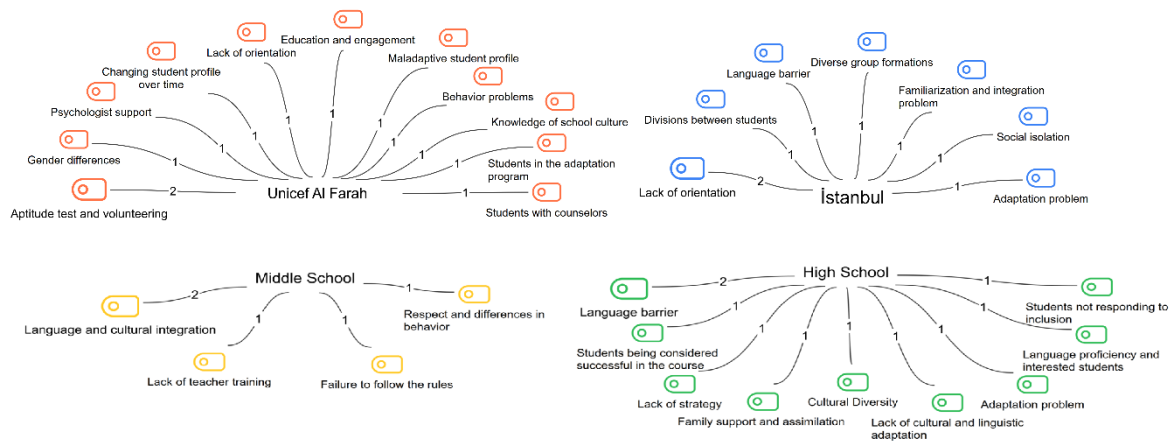
(Ps3): *"There are some students who we never see at school and are always recorded as absent, but there are also some who are always in class. However, these students are usually passive in class. Normally, it takes 6-7 weeks to get to know the students and get them to participate more actively, but when refugee students are passive, it takes longer."*

(Ps4): *"We do not have many absent students. As other teachers said, those who are absent are usually the ones who go to work somewhere. In terms of class participation, especially in the 5th grade, there are students who cannot read and write."*

Teachers working in the UNICEF Al Farah Project expressed positive views on the attendance and class participation of refugee students. It was stated that one of the most important reasons for this was the facilities provided, especially transport support. Teachers in other groups stated that students in the Istanbul group did not attend school regularly due to language barriers. Although it is seen that the attendance rate in the secondary school group is higher than in the high school group, it is emphasised that the attendance rate of both groups is not at the desired level.

#### **General Education Activities and Orientation**

Findings regarding teachers' opinions on whether refugee students should receive orientation training before starting general education activities are presented below. When the focus group interviews are analysed, it is seen that UNICEF Al Farah Project teachers reported 12 codes under the theme of general education activities and orientation, teachers working in Istanbul reported eight codes, teachers working at the secondary school level reported five codes, and teachers working at the high school level reported 11 codes.



**Figure 3.** Opinions of music teachers working in different sample groups on the theme of refugee students' general education activities and orientation

When Figure 3 is examined, it is evident that the opinions of music teachers working in different sample groups on whether refugee students should receive orientation training before starting general education differ. Below are some examples of opinions of each sample group. The views of the UNICEF Al Farah project group on the theme of general education activities and orientation are as follows;

(Pu3): "This is not a situation specific to our course. The children brought to our class are always like this; for example, let's say they bring 20 children to the choir one week. Let's say we started in September. We chose five of the twenty children who can take part in the choir. But these are the children of families who already receive counselling from the association in some way."

(Pu1): "Children have a school culture, and they already come to school with it. In other words, they actually know the basic things, such as entering and leaving the class and the rules to be followed in the class."

(Pu4): "Pu3 already mentioned the orientation process. I think the more accurate way of putting it is that we actually assess the students in advance to guarantee their adaptation. We have already done a simple aptitude test, but in recent years we have started to apply it on a purely voluntary basis. Of course, after a certain point, we did not exclude a student who did not have talent from the course."

Contrary to the views of the teachers working in the UNICEF Al Farah project that refugee students are included in the school culture and that most of the basic integration processes take place naturally, the views of the teachers working at the high school level are as follows;

(Ph1): "At the moment, even the Turkish language of the students is weak, so they do not understand what they hear in the lesson. This situation is not good for us either. I mean, they cannot follow even the simplest instructions. These problems could have been solved with an orientation process."

(Ph3): "On the other hand, there are students whose families are well-off and who have adapted to their own culture in terms of education."

Teachers at the high school level drew attention to more specific integration problems that directly affect refugee students' participation in class. The views of teachers working in Istanbul are as follows;

(Pi1): "I mean, there should already be an orientation. First of all, students should understand the language used in the lesson so that the lesson will be useful for them."

(Pi2): "Guidance services can actually be in the sense of the orientation you first mentioned. They can do a study about them in this regard. You know, rather than them going to the counselling service, the counselling service can do a study on this. But I have not seen such a study done separately."

(Pi3): "Actually, it is very logical in terms of the integration of refugee students, but this is never done."

The opinions of the teachers working at the secondary school level are align with those of the teachers working in Istanbul. Some of the statements of the related sample are as follows;

(Ps2): "Definitely, I think they should be trained especially in language teaching and social and cultural structure."

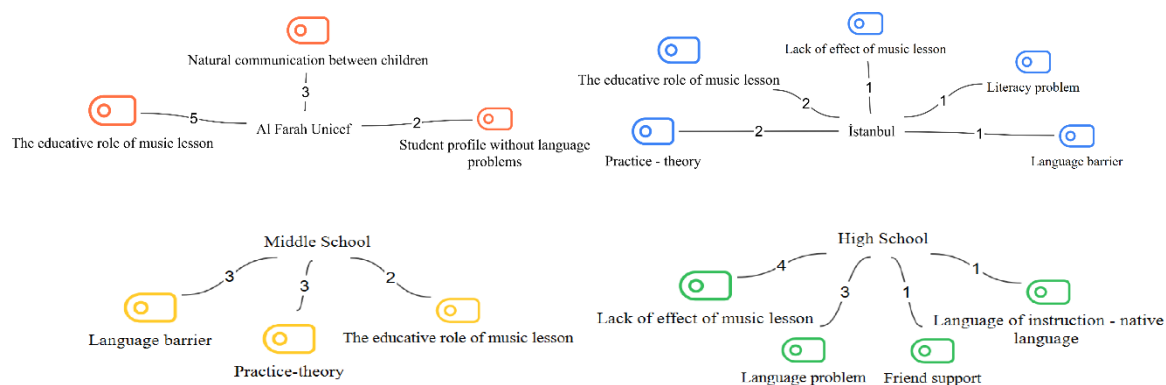
(Ps1): "Absolutely, we agree on language. I think they should also receive cultural education."

(Ps3): "We did not receive any training on IEP (Individualised Education Programme) when we were students, so I had difficulties in this regard when I started my profession. After all, refugee students are also included in the scope of mainstreaming students. We could have received training on this subject in order to include them in education."

All teachers in the group stated that refugee students should go through an orientation process and that it is important to provide language and cultural education in this process. However, Ps2 has a different perspective from other teachers. While the other teachers saw the orientation process as an application that could take place outside their field of duty, Ps2 stated that this process also included his own role, and argued that he did not receive orientation training for refugee students and that he should receive it.

### Impact of Music Lessons and Language Barrier

The findings in this section reveal teachers' views on the language barrier faced by refugee students and the possible effects of this barrier on music education. When the focus group interviews are analysed, it is seen that teachers working in Istanbul province reported seven codes under the theme of the impact of language barrier on music lessons, teachers working at the high school level reported nine codes, teachers working at the secondary school level reported eight codes and teachers working within the scope of UNICEF Al Farah Project reported 10 codes.



**Figure 4.** Opinions of music teachers from different sample groups on the theme of the effect of the language barrier of refugee students on music lessons

When Figure 4 is analysed, sample opinions of music teachers from different sample groups on the theme of the effect of the language barrier of refugee students on music lessons are presented below for each group;

(Pi3): *"I don't think that students get stuck in a language barrier in music lessons. Especially in practical subjects, we solve our problems with auditory memory. Even if we do two repetitions, they can remember the song and anthem and participate in the lesson."*

(Pi2): *"I have problems while explaining the theoretical subjects... However, I think that the anthems and songs sung in the lesson will be useful in solving this problem over time."*

(Pi4): *"Compared to other lessons, children are a little more comfortable in music lessons. I mean, of course, we have difficulties not only in musical meaning, but also in music culture and musical knowledge. Students also have difficulty in taking notes. But in other areas, such as vocalisations, marches, folk songs, etc., they try to sing as much as they can, even through imitation."*

The number of codes that emerged from the opinions of teachers working at the high school level is quite close to the opinions of teachers working in Istanbul. The opinions of the related sample are as follows;

(Ph2): *"Honestly, I do not have any students who do not understand or cannot speak Turkish. When I worked in secondary schools, I had students who did not speak Turkish at all, and we could not communicate, but by the time they reached high school age, everyone had learnt Turkish."*

(Ph4) *"Since I work in high schools, refugee students have solved the language barrier to some extent by high school age. I think that music generally improves their Turkish at some points, because they listen to Turkish music both in class and outside."*

Similar to the views of the teachers in the Istanbul sample that the language barrier decreases over time, teachers at the high school level also state that students have learnt the language to a great extent by high school age. In contrast to this situation, the views of teachers working at the secondary school level are as follows;

(Ps1): *"There is definitely a language barrier, dictation of songs is a problem, but we do not have a language barrier in the singing part."*

(Ps3): *"I have problems with theoretical issues, but I have no problems with practical issues such as singing."*

(Ps2): *"I agree with the other teachers that they can learn word pronunciation better with music, especially when they sing. While they can learn it only by reading books, they can learn it more easily by repeating it several times because music is more fun. Apart from that, when we sing anthems or folk songs with them, we may seem meaningless to them as they have difficulty in understanding figurative or synonymous sound similarities because they do not have a full command of the language. Sometimes I have problems at this point."*

Teachers working in the secondary school group reported that students experienced language barriers in theoretical aspects of teaching, but not so much in the practical aspects. Teachers working in the UNICEF Al Farah Project were the group with the fewest language barriers;

(Pu1): *"We had the opportunity to have an interpreter in our classrooms, but this is no longer necessary. The children started to translate for each other."*

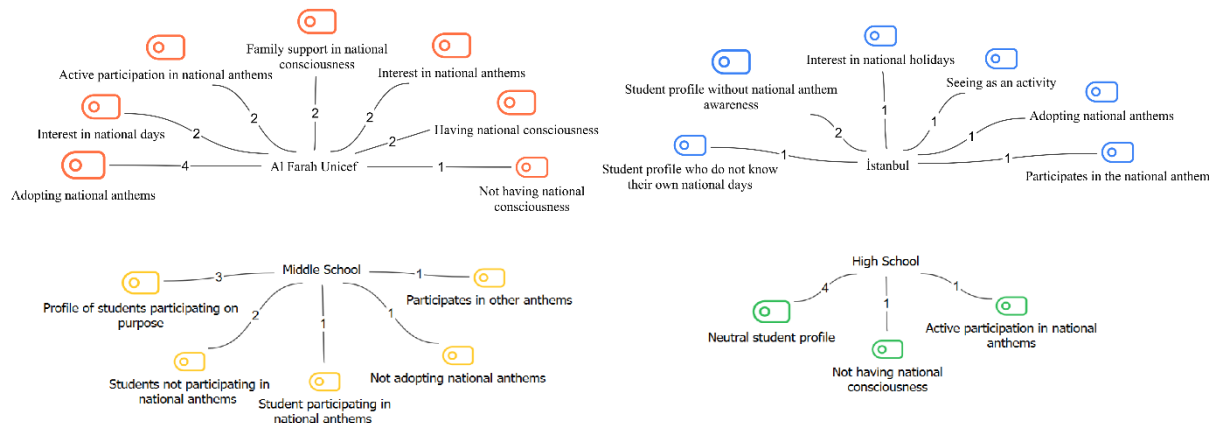
(Pu3): *"Yes, the students who have been with us for a long time translate for the younger ones."*

(Pu1): *"I also think that the Turkish of the students who know little or no Turkish has improved in the lessons. For example, if they don't know the word in a song, they ask and find out what it is."*

Teachers in Istanbul and in the high school group reported that refugee students do not have a significant language barrier, whereas secondary school students have a serious language and language-related communication problem. In the UNICEF Al Farah group, it was concluded that students did not face language barriers and that an interpreter was available in cases where language barriers were possible. The language barrier experienced at different levels is reduced to some extent by the songs and anthems sung in music lessons at all levels of education.

### National Consciousness

The findings of this section reveal teachers' views on the national consciousness of refugee students. When the focus group views are analysed, it is seen that teachers working in the UNICEF Al Farah Project reported 15 different codes, teachers working in Istanbul province reported seven different codes, teachers working in secondary schools reported eight codes and teachers working in high schools reported six different codes.



**Figure 5.** Opinions of music teachers working in different sample groups about the national consciousness of refugee students

When Figure 5 is analysed, it is evident that the opinions of music teachers across the different sample groups regarding the theme of national consciousness among refugee students show diversity. The opinions of the teachers working in the UNICEF Al Farah Project are as follows;

(Pu1): "Our children had a special enthusiasm for anthems and national holidays. They learnt anthems quickly and wanted to give concerts on national holidays."

(Pu3): "The children I worked with had a special love and sympathy for anthems. We were even surprised, we were saying among ourselves, why does this child want it so much? When it came to certain days, when the Republic Day was approaching, the children would sing it themselves, we started to learn how to sing anthems at school, will we sing it here too? Or on 23 April, are we going to have a concert, are we going to sing 23 April songs? I mean, I think my parents integrated very quickly in Izmir."

(Pu4): "The children sang the anthems very beautifully and diligently. I never saw that they were prejudiced in this regard."

The most positive views on the theme of national consciousness were obtained within the scope of the UNICEF Al Farah project, and one of the sample groups with the most negative views on the theme of national consciousness belongs to the teachers working in Istanbul. Half of the codes belonging to this group are negative. The views of the teachers in this group are as follows;

(Pi2): "In general, there is a lack of national consciousness in students, whether they are Turkish or from other nationalities. This situation is naturally reflected in refugee students."

(Pi4): "They take whatever I give to the students; I have not seen them show a special reaction in this regard."

(Pi3): "At the 19 May ceremony, a choir including refugee students gave a concert with anthems they had completely memorised. The parents of these students were also in the audience and everyone accompanied them enthusiastically with flags in their hands."

The views of the teachers in the Istanbul group contradict the views of the teachers in the secondary school group. The opinions of the teachers in the secondary school group are as follows;

(Ps1): "I have many students who do not participate in the National Anthem. One of them said that he should not sing because of the pressure from his family. I do not have such a problem with other anthems, because these students sing these anthems diligently in order to get into the choir."

(Ps2): "I did not have a problem with singing the National Anthem. I think I solved this situation by expressing that it is a duty and responsibility. Of course, since refugee students see it as a duty, I don't think they sing it with the feelings we feel."

One of the codes belonging to high school teachers is positive, one is negative, and the other is neutral. However, most of these codes belong to neutral views. These opinions are as follows;

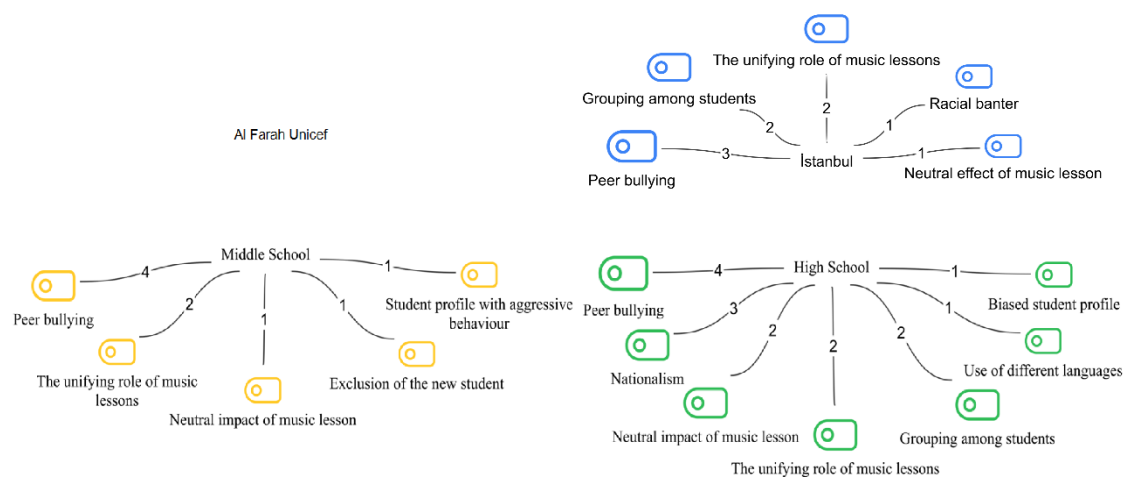
(Ph2): "I did not see any extra effort from refugee students saying "I want to learn and sing the anthems"; on the contrary, I did not encounter an attitude like "I don't want to sing this anthem."

(Ph4): "In general, students are not very keen to learn this subject. For them, it is okay if it happens or not..."

While some teachers in Istanbul stated that students lacked national consciousness (Pi2) and were indifferent towards anthems (Pi4), secondary school teachers did not completely agree with this point of view. Some of the secondary school teachers reported that a small number of students avoid singing the National Anthem due to family pressure (Ps1), while others perform it only as a duty, without feeling an emotional attachment (Ps2). Therefore, their views contradict the statements of the teachers in Istanbul, who emphasised a general lack of interest.

#### *Attitudes of Turkish and Refugee Students towards Each Other*

In this section, the attitudes of Turkish and refugee students towards each other in music lessons are analysed. Since the UNICEF Al Farah Project includes only refugee students, there is no data for this interview group. In the analysis of the focus group interviews, teachers working at the high school level reported 15 different codes within the theme of Turkish and refugee students' attitudes towards each other, teachers working at the secondary school level reported nine codes and teachers working in Istanbul province reported nine different codes.



**Figure 6.** Opinions of music teachers working in different samples on the attitudes of Turkish and refugee students towards each other, and the effect of these attitudes on music lessons

When Figure 6 is analysed, it is seen that the opinions of music teachers working in different samples on the theme of attitudes of Turkish and refugee students towards each other and the effect of

these attitudes on music lessons are generally common with negative codes. The opinions of high school teachers regarding these codes are as follows;

(Ph1): *"Our music lessons are more enjoyable. At least you can make them sing or play something together. In the meantime, they can mingle a little. In this sense, I think music lessons have a positive effect."*

(Ph2): *"Yes, they experience peer bullying in this regard. I think that the nationalist trend has been getting stronger recently, and they bully their friends, their foreign friends."*

(Ph4): *"Other than that, the only problem is that they speak their own language among themselves, so our students are constantly disciplined because they ask if you said something to my mother or my father, what are you saying about us? That's why this group and that group are constantly interfering with each other because they speak Arabic among themselves."*

At the high school and secondary school levels, there were views that there was peer bullying between Turkish and refugee students. In parallel, secondary school teachers also expressed similar views. The views of secondary school teachers are as follows;

(Ps2): *"I agree with Ps3. Turkish students can bully newly arrived refugee students more easily, but they get along better with students who have been here for a long time. Level is also very important. The rate of bullying can be higher in high school. The effect of music lessons on this issue is neutral."*

(Ps4): *"While there are no problems in the lesson, these problems are more common outside the lesson."*

The opinions of teachers working in Istanbul are similar;

(Pi1): *"There are problems between students. I mean, they joke a lot. When other students joke with each other, saying, 'You are from Syria, are you Afghan, etc., we hear it during breaks. But of course, we cannot intervene directly; they make these jokes among themselves. Maybe the counselling service takes precautions in this regard. There is no problem directly related to the music lesson."*

(Pi2): *"Actually, as Pi1 said, there is a lot of joking between them. But maybe here I think that music can create a unity in situations like singing together or doing something together."*

(Pi3): *"I mean, I always see them grouping together, and they don't want to mingle too much... That's why I think that if a little more work on mingling is done from the beginning, maybe it will work as a preventive measure. But there is always grouping."*

In general, teachers stated that music lessons either had no effect or were neutral in this regard. However, some teachers stated that singing together kept refugee and Turkish students together and that singing together played a unifying role between them.

## Discussion

Analysis of the views of the relevant focus groups shows that school attendance and class participation rates in UNICEF Al Farah projects are quite high. According to the teachers, the main reason is the facilities offered to the students and the organisation of the course content in a way that attracts their interest. In particular, focus group participants emphasised that the transportation facilities provided to students enabled them to continue this project. A Syrian family interviewed by Şimşek (2018) stated that education is free in Türkiye, but they have difficulty sending their children to school due to high additional costs such as school buses. In contrast, participants in the middle and high school groups in Istanbul and Anatolia reported more negative themes than participants in the UNICEF Al Farah project. In Istanbul, the language barrier was cited as the biggest barrier in terms of both absenteeism and class attendance. Although it was concluded that absenteeism rates at the secondary school level in Anatolia were higher than at the high school level, attendance was not consistent in both

groups. Participants working at the secondary school level emphasised that students were absent because they had to work for economic reasons. As stated by the participants, the gender difference in attendance rates also reveals this situation. It was stated that male students were absent more frequently due to their work obligations. In addition, it was stated that some students did not come to school at all, while others attended the class passively, although they were present in the classroom. Overall, the results show that structural support mechanisms such as transportation and targeted interventions can significantly improve the absenteeism and attendance rates of refugee students. However, economic conditions, language barriers and challenges related to family engagement appear to have a negative impact on students' attendance and participation. Similar to the UNICEF Al Farah project in Türkiye, the Swedish Law model has also yielded positive results. According to the Swedish Law, it is mandatory to record the reading, writing and arithmetic skills of the student within two months from the date the student starts school. According to this law, the school decides in which class the student will be educated, what support will be provided, how much teaching time will be allocated to the lessons, and which mapping materials will be used to assess the student's prior knowledge (Koehler, 2017). However, there is no concrete data on artistic fields in the Swedish law. Research shows that the educational continuity of refugees in Germany and Northern Europe is low (Pantazopoulos & Roussakis, 2024).

The best integration process for refugee students can only be achieved through educational inclusion. Morrice (2021) argues that the full potential of lifelong learning for refugees can only be achieved by recognising the fragmented educational background of refugee students from the outset and embedding opportunity and support structures within the system. This can be achieved by recognising what skills and knowledge refugee youth and adults need to build a sustainable future for themselves and their families (Braye, 2018). In Braye's (2018) study on the obstacles faced by refugee students, it was revealed that most refugee students who settled in the United States could not continue their education and gain status due to economic difficulties. Similarly, in this study, it was concluded that refugees in Anatolia have difficulty in attending school due to economic reasons. During the research process, only the teachers in the UNICEF Al Farah project stated that they applied an aptitude test to the students and that this test could actually be considered as orientation training.

Secondary school, high school and all teachers working in Istanbul drew attention to the language barrier in education and especially stated that orientation should be provided on this issue. Teachers believe that the language barrier can be solved with orientation training. In contrast to Türkiye, countries such as Sweden, Germany, the Netherlands and the state of Texas in the 1990s included refugees in orientation programmes in the first 30 days on topics such as employment, health services, community organisations, workplace, transportation, housing, crime prevention, consumer rights, education, citizenship, student welfare services, government agencies and finance (Koehler & Schneider, 2019). The language barrier is an important problem in countries where the local language is different. Perhaps the biggest challenge in the lives of refugees is being labelled as 'the other' due to the social, emotional and academic difficulties that come with the language barrier. Researchers emphasise that traumatic experiences can hinder the ability of resettled refugees to learn a new language (Beiser & Hou, 2006). As a result, some refugee children are placed in special education classes, while others remain at low academic levels despite their high abilities (Allen & Franklin, 2002; Cheng, 1998; McBrien, 2005). During the research process, all teachers stated that they observed that music lessons contributed to language development and that students experienced positive emotional and cognitive effects. Empirical studies conducted with refugees in many countries (Abdulkali & Berger, 2020; Ahonen & Desideri, 2014; Alanne, 2010; Scripture, 2014) have revealed that musical expressions symbolise the past, present and future experiences of refugees and offer a form of expression that helps traumatised individuals to repair their ties with others and their own culture. The results of this study also support the views of the participants.

Music teachers stated that refugee students showed a more negative and unresponsive attitude towards national consciousness. Eastmond (1998) stated that Bosnian refugees in Sweden resist assimilation, which prevents the formation of national identity and makes it difficult for the citizens of the two countries to get closer. Shabaneh (2010) stated that Palestinian refugees living under the same roof experience integration problems. As in this study, family support and family integration were found to be very important in all studies. Dressler and Gereluk (2017) emphasise that families who participate in training programmes gain social capital, learn how to act to strengthen their families, learn how to navigate the host society and culture, and thus make better decisions to guide their families. The most common problem that all teachers agree on is peer bullying. The fact that students are in a psychologically challenging period, such as adolescence, and are provoked by media channels and racist attitudes, leads to gangs and bullying among both local and refugee students. Many studies, such as Eruyar et al. (2018), Fandrem et al. (2009), Samara et al. (2020) and Hek (2005) have been examined refugee students and peer bullying, and similar results have been reached in all of them, although the rates vary. The first research on peer bullying towards Syrian refugees in Türkiye was conducted by Yılmaz and Çıkılı-Uytun (2020). In interviews with 119 refugee students, it was determined that students were exposed to peer bullying and that male students were bullied more than female students. Younger children experience bullying more than older children. Various reasons for bullying include lack of family support, acute stress disorder and adjustment problems. All teachers participating in this study also stated that students bully each other regardless of their educational level. Unlike the study of Yılmaz and Çıkılı-Uytun (2020), it was stated that not only local students but also refugee students grouped against each other and bullied each other, as in the case of Istanbul province.

### Conclusion

While teachers working in the UNICEF Al Farah Project reported relatively positive views regarding refugee students' school attendance and participation in class, teachers in Istanbul and Anatolia generally expressed negative themes. It was observed that students within the project were motivated by various supports ranging from transportation to instrument provision and individual lessons. In contrast, in other groups, absenteeism and passive participation were prominent due to factors such as language barriers, economic reasons, and family neglect. A similar picture emerges in opinions on whether refugee students receive orientation training before starting general education. While UNICEF Al Farah teachers stated that they conducted a more structured process, other teachers emphasized that students could not even understand basic instructions, especially due to language barriers, and that the lack of orientation negatively affected student participation. Participant coded Ps2, in particular, stated that teachers did not receive sufficient in-service training on this issue. In the context of the language barrier and its impact on music lessons, it was noted that this barrier was less felt in practical lessons, but the teaching process became more difficult in theoretical content. In the UNICEF Al Farah sample, it was stated that the language barrier was overcome over time through collaboration among students, and that music played a positive role in language development. It was also noted that conducting lessons with interpreter support reduced the language barrier. Regarding the level of national consciousness among refugee students, teachers in the UNICEF Al Farah Project emphasized that students showed a high level of interest in national anthems and national holidays, while in other groups, negative opinions prevailed, particularly regarding participation in the Turkish National Anthem, due to reasons such as family pressure, difficulty in interpretation, and inability to form an emotional connection. Finally, opinions regarding the mutual attitudes of Turkish and refugee students were generally negative. Peer bullying was frequently mentioned in all groups, and it was stated that music lessons did not directly solve these problems but could play a unifying role, albeit a limited one. In this context, it was concluded that structural orientation programs, language development support, and improvements in teachers' inclusive teaching skills are needed to ensure the effective participation of refugee students in the educational process.

## Recommendation

Music education in schools emerges as a strategic universal force for refugee students in their social integration processes. However, the sustainable success of this education through a cultural phenomenon like music depends on the presence of the family, the primary source of cultural values, within the education system. Therefore, music education should not be confined to the classroom, but should be seen as a bridge that brings the family closer to the school environment, especially during ceremonies such as national holidays. In this regard, state policies should be implemented regarding community-centered music activities that include the family in general music education.

A comprehensive and structured orientation program should be implemented in all schools to facilitate the integration of refugee students into the Turkish education system. These programs should include in-service training not only for students but also for teachers, covering topics such as multicultural classroom management, language support strategies, and inclusive education approaches. In addition, activities that will increase student interaction and cultural adaptation should be planned by evaluating the potential of applied subjects such as music. To support the social and academic development of refugee students, language support programs should be strengthened, and simplified content should be prepared, especially for music lessons, with language levels taken into account. Guidance and psychological counseling services in schools should be diversified to meet the needs of refugee students, and practices that enhance a sense of belonging should be encouraged. Holistic policies developed in this direction will both increase refugee students' educational success and contribute to their social integration. Furthermore, the orientation process, just like in the UNICEF Al Farah project, should begin with a welcome interview upon the family or student's arrival at the center, identifying needs, language level, and psychosocial status. Following this, Turkish language support, school registration guidance, and adaptation to the education system should be provided, along with psychosocial support and protection services, and counseling for issues such as trauma, adaptation difficulties, and social isolation. Since art, culture, and music workshops strengthen students' emotional bonds, sense of belonging, and expression skills, social integration should be supported by bringing together refugee and host community members through community activities. Throughout the orientation process, the student's educational, health, and social needs should be regularly monitored, and necessary referrals should be made. Additionally, it is considered that educating refugee students in state schools offers a healthier, more sustainable structure. Accordingly, it is recommended that monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, programs that strengthen family participation, and holistic practices supporting the integration of refugee students into the Turkish education system be encouraged, and that these processes be systematically planned, implemented, and monitored within the framework of state policies.

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