CHILDREN OF SYRIAN REFUGEES AND FORMAL EDUCATION: CHALLENGES OF THEIR LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN TURKEY

DĚTI SYRSKÝCH UPRCHLÍKŮ A FORMÁLNÍ VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ: VÝZVY JEJICH JAZYKOVÉHO VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ V TURECKU

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Abstrakt

Turecko se díky své geografické poloze stalo s více než 3.6 milionu syrských uprchlíků jejich největší hostitelskou zemí na světě. Jedním z důležitých cílů turecké vlády je integrace dětí syrských uprchlíků do formálního vzdělávání. Navzdory mnoha úspěchům není vzdělávání syrských nezletilých bezproblémové, zejména pokud jde o výuku tureckého jazyka. Tento článek se proto zabývá podporou zvládnutí jazyka u syrských nezletilých a diskutuje výzvy v jazykovém vzdělávání.

Klíčová slova: *Syrští nezletilí, vzdělávání uprchlíků, integrace, jazyková podpora*

Abstract

Due to its geographic location, Turkey has become the largest host country of Syrian refugees in the world, accommodating more than 3.6 million Syrian refugees. One of the important aims of the Turkish government is the integration of Syrian minors into formal education. Despite notable success, education of Syrian minors has not been free of challenges, particular, in terms of Turkish language instruction. Hence, this paper focuses on language support for Syrian minors and discusses the language-related challenges in education.

Keywords: *Syrian minors, refugee education, integration, language support*

1 INTRODUCTION

At first, the main schooling options for Syrian refugee children were temporary education centers (TECs), and a medium of instruction was Arabic with the use of Syrian curriculum. However, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) required TECs to teach Turkish language and recruited teachers who had diplomas in Turkish language and literature. Later, MoNE initiated new reform to directly integrate refugee minors into mainstream education. The sudden transition from TECs to Turkish public schools (TPSs) created language-related challenges affecting both the mental well-being and social integration of the refugee minors.

2 THEORY

In his comprehensive analysis, Alpaydin (2017) highlights that although other refugee-hosting countries have introductory language courses for refugee minors, Turkey provides a limited amount of language support before schooling and directs school-age refugees to formal education whilst they have basic-level of Turkish. For the additional Turkish language support, the children are required to stay in out-of-school hours, extending the school time.

3 METHODOLOGY

This conference contribution is a document analysis of, firstly, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 2019 report for the recent educational situation of Syrian minors in Turkey. The objectives and the activity reports of the collaborative project of the MoNE and the European Union, "Promoting Integration of Syrian Children to the Turkish Education System" (PICTES), were also examined. Then, a Workshop Report which was published by MoNE (2018) with respect to the evaluation of Turkish language proficiency of Syrians was analyzed. Lastly, we selected an article by Sarmini et al. (2020) that discusses the Turkish language skills of Syrian minors. The selection criteria is to choose the recently published documents which mainly focus on educational needs and statistics of Syrian minors.

After the selection, we specially focused on the parts where the authors discuss Turkish language-related problems of Syrian minors.

4 RESULTS

Despite the rise in school enrollment rates, UNICEF (2019) report shows there are over 400 thousand Syrian minors who are out of formal education. One major reason for that is the language barrier. Due to the lack of fluency in the Turkish language of Syrian minors, teachers utilize different strategies such as having interpreters in the classroom. This causes challenges not only for academic achievements of refugees but also their social interaction with teachers and peers, thus also affecting their mental

well-being (Sarmini et al., 2020). Although providing language courses is among the main goals of PICTES, those courses usually take place after-hours at overcrowded classes with a limited number of proficient Turkish language teachers. Moreover, the Workshop Report (MoNE, 2018) on Turkish proficiency of Syrian minors focused on three age groups (i.e., 6-10, 11-15, and 16-over), but for only reading and writing skills, whilst speaking and listening skills were not included. Considering the importance of productive language skills in foreign language fluency, inclusion of those skills would have provided a better picture on the Syrian minors' language attainment.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Refugee-related educational challenges have become highly relevant for the Czech Republic as well due to the latest Ukrainian refugee crises. Schools in the Czech Republic have also faced similar challenges such as lack of language teaching proficiency of Czech teachers for non-Czech speakers. Some EU countries such as Germany and Sweden provide preparatory courses to enhance language skills of refugees before their entrance of formal education. We recommend designing different levels of language preparatory courses for Syrian refugee minors in Turkey as well to ease the full integration to TPSs and prevent anticipated problems in communication, grade repetition, and segregation at schools.

6 REFERENCES

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