

# The Life of Syrian Asylum-Seeking Children in a Temporary Shelter Centre in Turkey: An Ethnographic Study on Primary School Education\*

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## Abstract

This research aims to describe primary school children's life and education experiences who escaped from the war environment in Syria and took refuge in Turkey. The study was conducted with an ethnographic research design. The study participants comprised fourth-grade students, teachers, parents, and the close social circle of Syrian nationals who stayed in the temporary shelter in Turkey. Observation, interview, field notes, researcher's diary, and ethnographic photograph were used to collect the research data. Content analysis was used in the analysis of the research data. As a result of data analysis, the lives of Syrian children and families in the temporary accommodation centre, before and after the asylum, the socio-economic life of the container city, and the daily life routines of the children in the camp are described. The research proposes to conduct more ethnographic research with children under temporary protection, describe their life stories and indigenous perspectives, organise events that will bring together local children and children in the shelter, and increase studies on teaching Turkish to foreigners.

## Keywords:

Ethnography, Temporary Protection, Temporary Accommodation Centre, Temporary Education Centre, Syrian Refugee Students

## Introduction

Turkey is the country that houses the most Syrian refugees. According to official data from the General Directorate of Migration Management [GDMM] of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, the number of Syrians receiving temporary protection in Turkey reached 3,579,318 in 2020. On the Syrian border, Hatay is the 3rd province of Turkey that hosts the most people under temporary protection, with 436,708 people (GDMM, 2020).

This situation has caused Turkey to change rapidly in terms of health, education, and other public policies regarding migration. In the face of rapid and massive migration, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection were enacted for foreigners on 4 April 2013. With this law, Turkey has issued temporary protection identity cards to Syrians who have immigrated to the country and sought asylum,



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enabling them to carry out public transactions such as residence, health, and education (T.C. Resmi Gazete, 2013). Turkey did not have an education policy with a legal basis for the Syrian population, which was included in temporary protection in 2011. In this process, Syrian nationals under temporary protection, who were teachers by profession, rented buildings with the support of non-governmental organisations where Syrian students were concentrated and started education in Arabic in these buildings. However, the Ministry of National Education [MoNE] opened temporary education centres [TEC] in 2014 and provided Syrian children with temporary protection access to education under state control in these centres. The cities with the highest density of TECs are respectively; Hatay (77), Istanbul (53), Gaziantep (50), and Şanlıurfa (42). These cities have the highest concentration of Syrian students (MoNE, 2018). According to the data of the Ministry of National Education, General Directorate of Lifelong Learning, for the year 2018-2019, the population of educational age in Syria is 1,047,536. According to the years, the number of Syrian students who have access to education in Turkey has reached 643,058. According to their education levels, schooling rates of students in public schools and TECs were 33.86% in kindergarten, 96.50% in primary school, 57.66% in secondary school, and 26.77% in high school. It is known that 365,535 of the 382,748 Syrian students in the primary school-age population in Turkey are enrolled in school (MoNE, 2019). This rate shows that most children under temporary protection in the primary school age can access primary school education in Turkey. This research examines the life and education experiences of the 4th-grade primary school children studying at the TEC in the temporary accommodation centre.

### *Being in a temporary shelter*

The migration from Syria to Turkey began in the middle of 2011. As the study's first author, I witnessed children seeking shelter in a mosque courtyard in Altnozü's Hacpaşa neighborhood in February 2013. The children were sleeping in the coffin in the mosque in order not to get cold. Witnessing this moment deeply affected me. Living on the border of a war-torn country and witnessing the people affected by it made it inevitable to be involved in the process. From 2011-2012, I worked as a deputy principal at a public school, but I was also volunteering for the establishment of temporary accommodation centres. With the circular decision of MoNE numbered 2014/21, TECs were established, and I started to work day and night in the field as the training coordinator. As a civil servant, my shift ended at 17.00, but due to the intensity of the work in the field, I left at 00.00 or after. I worked nonstop in the field, and my beginner level of Arabic was progressing with these experiences. Although my parents were of Arab origin, I first understood very little Arabic but could

not speak it at all. However, with my intensive work in the field since 2011, I learned to speak Arabic at a very good level in 2016, and I started to be officially assigned to the field due to my knowledge of Arabic and English. Since 2014, I have been participating in the visits and educational meetings of the United Nations, associations affiliated with the European Union, or representatives of other non-governmental organisations of Arab origin, and I was conducting the establishment of TECs. On the other hand, I organised social events to ensure the harmony of Turkish and Syrian teachers and humanitarian aid activities in the field.

As first author of the study, I have spent most of my life among Syrian refugees in Turkey since 2011. I shared their many pains and joys. While I was working as a coordinator in the field, I was also continuing my doctoral education. The researcher's ethnographic description of the primary school education of refugee students during the doctoral process was effective because he was a classroom teacher and a doctoral student with field experience. Ethnographers are sometimes described as interpreters of culture. Glesne (2013) states that researchers who know people's stories can better understand and interpret people. Thus, as the study's first author, I wanted to translate the living culture in the temporary accommodation centre and make sense of the Syrian children's perceptions of their education.

### *Purpose of the research*

The research aims to describe the life and education experiences of the primary school children who took refuge in Turkey due to the war from Syria in the temporary accommodation centre from an ethnographic point of view. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1. What are the daily life experiences of Syrian refugee children before and after migration?
2. What are the educational experiences of Syrian refugee children in the temporary education centre?

### *Method*

Ethnography has become a new accepted practice in childhood research. It has been accepted as a qualitative research method that provides an opportunity to describe children's development and learning experiences in detail within their cultural context (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The qualitative and ethnographic methods of the research helped us understand and interpret the children's stories in the temporary shelter. In studies conducted in the social field of childhood, children are seen as competent interpreters of the social world (James, 2007). This

ethnographic research aims to reach the meanings of the lives and education of the competent translator children in the temporary accommodation centre. The research participants were 42 students, 20 girls, and 22 boys, studying at the TEC in the temporary accommodation centre in Hatay, a province bordering Syria in the south of Turkey, in the 2018-2019 academic year. The other participants are the Turkish teacher providing education, Syrian volunteer trainer, parents of students, and people in their immediate social circle. The length of the students' stay in the temporary accommodation centre is between 3-5 years. However, four participating students have been living there since the establishment of the shelter. The temporary accommodation centre where the research was carried out was determined as the study area since it is the largest existing centre of Hatay province. The participants, students housed in the shelter, their families, and volunteer instructors are Syrian nationals, and the Turkish teacher is a Turkish national. As part of the study, interviews were conducted with teachers, the students' families and social environment, and the students. Research environment

Boynuyoğun Temporary Accommodation Centre is a residential area built on 140,000 m<sup>2</sup> of land. The temporary accommodation centre is 31 km from the

city centre. It was established on a village near the Turkey-Syria border, surrounded by wired fences. The temporary accommodation centre where the research was conducted was established as a tent city in Altınözü district of Hatay province on 09/05/2011.

The temporary accommodation centre was converted into a container structure in 2016. Security controls have been established at the entrance of the shelter centre. In this order, a sensitive door, X-ray device, and body search detectors are available to control the entrances and exits to the centre. Security officers conduct body searches at the entrance and exit of the temporary accommodation centre, and then visitors are taken inside. There are 2056 containers in the temporary shelter centre. Containers are set up at the height of about 30 cm from the ground in case of flooding. In addition to the health centre, TEC, and mosque, there is a market, barbershop, telephone shop, cafe, butcher, local food and telephone shop where the participants meet their vital needs in the temporary accommodation centre. In addition, there is the Red Crescent Child-Friendly Area, where the Red Crescent volunteers organise social activities for children. The library building, the orphan centre, and the sports facilities are where the children do their physical education lessons.

**Image 1.**

*Hatay Provincial Borders Map, Road Route and Temporary Accommodation Centre (<http-1>)*



### Data Collection Process

Since the research site is a temporary accommodation centre, I received special permission and official permission to implement the research as the first author of the study and a doctoral student. I informed the 4th-grade students in the temporary accommodation centre, their parents, teachers, and relatives (who were the research participants) before the research and I obtained their consent with a consent form. I gathered the main data of my study through participant observations and unstructured interviews with the participants. Life experiences, field notes, diaries, photographs, video and audio recordings of daily life in the temporary accommodation centre and TEC constitute the study data. The data collection process took ten months, between February and November 2019. By participating in every area where children live their daily routines such as school, home, garden, park, I observed them, their teachers, and their immediate social. There, I was called by the camp-dwelling Syrian adults as “akh” [brother], and “ammo” [uncle], or “ustaz” [teacher] by the children. During the research process, I drank helli [cardamom] coffee served between the neighbourhoods where the containers in the temporary shelter were lined up, ate meals with them, participated in class activities, played games, and had conversations in which they shared their pain and joy, accompanied by plenty of sugary tea. In short, I was with them most of my time during the day and tried to understand their experience through their perspectives.

In ethnographic research, data collection, analysis, and interpretation are carried out in a cycle, and researchers with sufficient experience and knowledge are needed to collect data (Altheide, 1987). The content analysis technique was used in the analysis of the research data. In the study, the data collection process and the data analysis were carried out simultaneously. During the data analysis process, I reviewed 140 pages of field notes, 100 pages of the researcher’s diary, 750 photographs, 17.2 GB of video recordings, and 500 MB of audio recordings. I wanted to organise the data after each site visit. Organising the data was difficult. Because the data was scattered, the job was to start working with the data. I watched the video recordings in chronological order, noting the relevance of each situation related to the subjects of the study. I listened to the audio recordings. I read observation data, diaries, and field notes and correlated them with photographic frames. I then noted all the video recordings with their recording dates and times, created a description of the recorded events and added the relevant analytical notes. In the research, I used long-term participation, continuous observation, data diversification, and member auditing to increase the likelihood of reliable results. After completing the data analysis, I visited the students and parents, talked to the participants individually, and presented the findings for their approval.

Considering that the research group describes one of the three accommodation centres in a province, it is important to consider this situation while generalising the study subject. Students may be reluctant to talk about the process or their feelings and thoughts or may not want to remember their past experiences. For this reason, I accepted that the data collection and analysis process depends on the researcher’s interpretation, that it may be difficult to reproduce, and that the findings obtained in other ethnographic studies may strengthen the validity.

### Results

With the analysis of the data collected in the research, ethnographic findings reflecting the nature of the life and education experiences of the children in the temporary accommodation centre were reached.

#### *Life Experiences of Children in the Temporary Shelter Centre*

In this section, to capture the locals’ perspective, the pre-asylum life of the students and their families living in the temporary accommodation centre, their escape from the war, and their acquaintance with the temporary accommodation centre are explained. On the other hand, the container city’s socio-economic life, the children’s daily life routines, the place of the games in the children’s daily lives, the description of the interpreter student, and the belief discourses of the children were included.

#### *Pre-asylum life and escape from war*

The temporary shelter was reminiscent of a city lined with white container houses. During recess time in the TEC garden, I mingled with the children, sat on the garden bench, and observed the students. It was February, and the weather was cold. Some children played the “hop hop” game on circular shapes drawn on the garden floor, while others walked in the garden with their friends. While sitting on the bench, Rim and his classmates, one of the students of the class I was observing, came to me. We were chatting with Rim and his friends about their lives before taking shelter in the temporary shelter. “When we were in Syria, I was not going to school,” Rim said, “Then my mom and dad said we were going to Turkey. I said this was good because most of our relatives in Turkey wanted us to come to Turkey. Turkey is beautiful. There was no school in Syria, no job, no food.” He expressed his life before asylum in Arabic in his own words (Interview, March 2019). Rim described his pre-asylum life as fear, poverty, and lack of schooling.

The students asked me to walk with them to their house after school. While walking with them, we also talked about how they got to the shelter. One of the students, Yaser, said, “When there was a missile attack, they hid us in the school’s basement. I was very

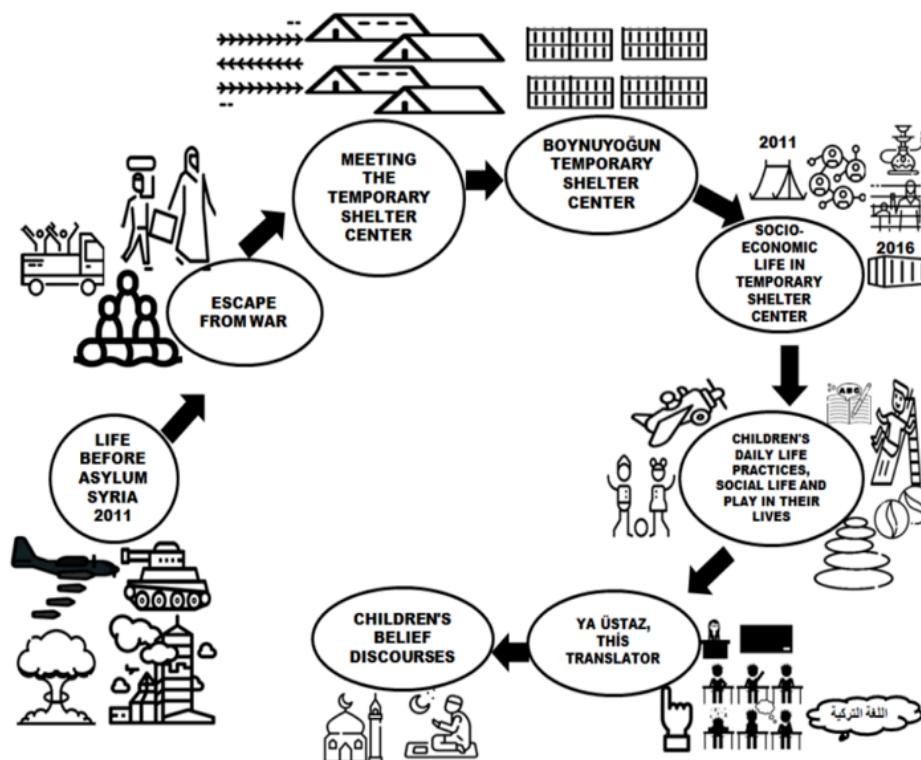
scared, and then I fled to Turkey with my family. The village is already on the border, close to the shelter centre" (Field note, March 2019). Some of the students stated that they witnessed the war, fled their country, and took refuge in Turkey. In the scheme of the students in the temporary accommodation centre, the temporary accommodation centre was almost like a village where they lived. When the question "Where are you from?" is asked, students respond with answers as "I am from Hatay, I am from Boynuyoğun Kamp" or "Syrian, Turkish". However, although the students say that they are Syrian, they do not know which city of Syria they are from. Students describe the places where they live as their countries.

**Socio-economic life in the temporary accommodation centre**

The living space in the temporary accommodation centre was formed from the neighbourhoods, and the streets were paved with cobblestones. The containers in the neighbourhood are listed with numbers on them. It is very difficult to find houses in the temporary shelter without numbers. The majority of students describe their homes with numbers. The container homes in the shelter did not have a standard appearance. A number of centre residents had altered the exteriors of their homes.

**Figure 1.**

*Children's Experiences of Life in Temporary Shelter Centre*



**Image 2.**

*Covered Container Houses in the Temporary Shelter Centre*



It is essential to accommodate a single family in containers. A container house is defined for five people. When the number of family members exceeds five, a second container house is given to the family. There are also sections such as a bathroom, toilet, and kitchen in the containers. The electrical infrastructure provides the container houses' heating and hot water needs. A certain quota consumption amount has been defined for each house for electricity, increasing with heating in winter.

In my conversations, while playing with the children at the playground, they happily talked about the moment they got out of the temporary shelter. One of the students, Halime, said, *"Master [Hodja] week madi [last] we go to Antakya halti [aunt] shock [very] beautiful, blessed [happy] but bes [only] three days"*, stating that she left the centre and went to her aunt residing in Antakya, but she could only stay for three days (Interview, April 2019). The children interpreted the temporary shelter centre as being surrounded by wire fences and the security control for entry and exit in two different ways. Zeynep, one of the students, said, *"Master [Hodja], a gunman came to the house during the war, there is no one here, no one here comes here"*, and Seyfettin said, *"Ammo [Uncle] it is all wire and wall here. It's nice outside, but it is memnu [forbidden] to go outside"*.

Individuals housed at the Temporary Housing Centre receive a monthly allowance of 30 euros per person on their AFAD card [Presidency of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Turkey for Disaster and Emergency Management] to meet their market needs. They can shop at the market with this cash assistance. In addition to the education given to children at the TEC, the Public Education Centre also organises mosaic, hairdresser, wedding dress sewing, rug-carpet courses, baby knitting, crochet knitting, painting, and Turkish level courses for adults. Mainly female participants can sell the products and materials they have designed during and after the course through the course centres and can use the income they get from the products for their home or children's education expenses.

### Children's daily and social life practices

The daily life practices of the children in the temporary accommodation centre were similar to each other. Since the research group students were the midday group students of the TEC, their lessons started at 11.50 and ended at 16.50. Students often woke up around noon. Since the students woke up late, they were fed two meals, breakfast and dinner. There was an artificial waterfall in the corner of a house visited in the shelter. Container residents had built a small wetland called "nahura" in front of the container. When the researcher asked them why it was so popular, the student's mother, Esma [pseudonymous], explained:

*Almost every house in our town has a small ornamental pool in their garden. There was a small ornamental pond in our garden back home, and I wanted the children to feel our culture even though we are in containers. That's why my wife and I did something like this (Field note, May 2019).*

Hacer stated that the ornamental waterfall called "nahura" reminded her of the houses in her country with the words *"Hodja, I think of the houses in Syria when this water flows"* (Field note, May 2019).

Behind every discourse in the shelter, there was an action and a story behind every action. Sometimes it could be an artificial waterfall, and sometimes a child who looks like an introvert. Some students in the class were quiet, non-attentive students. Musa was one of the students who did not participate in the activities in the lessons. Musa showed the same attitude and behaviour in Arabic lessons as he did in Turkish lessons. Musa had never seen his father after immigrating to Turkey. His mother, Fatima, explained this situation when I visited their house: *"Musa never saw his father, he doesn't even remember him, we don't know if he's dead or alive, but since we haven't heard from him until now, he must've died (in a sad tone). For this reason, my son may speak less"* (Field note, April 2019). On the other hand, Teacher Emine expressed her opinion about Musa by saying, *"Musa wants to be close to me, but he always seems to have a wall in communication with me"* (Field note, April 2019). After the 23 April National Sovereignty and Children's Day ceremony, Musa came to me and said, *"I don't want to go back to Syria. I am worried about my father and want him to come to the shelter. There is trust here, but my father ... I wish he could come and see me"* (Field note, April 2009).

The temporary shelter had three playgrounds, and the children played in the playgrounds close to their homes. While some children were playing marbles, pentacles, and football, some rode bicycles and competed on the playground sports equipment.

### Image 3.

*Children Playing with Sports Equipment in the Playground*



It is noteworthy that there are toy model aeroplanes while children play with their toys in the playground. To find out whether the war process they experienced was effective in their love of aeroplanes, the researcher asked them whether they liked aeroplanes or not. Yamen replied, "This plane is very fast, just like the planes flying in Syria, but it has no bombs" (Interview, May 2019). Faisal said that when he first came from Syria, he heard the sound of planes around the temporary shelter and he was terrified, "Here, too, I was terrified at first when I heard the sound of aeroplanes, but now I am used to it, this is a reliable place" (Interview, May 2019).

The students declared the student who knew Turkish best among themselves as the "interpreter student". The students in the class accepted this situation so much that when a question was asked in Turkish, all of them said, "Teacher, this is the translator," by pointing to the student who knew Turkish best and asking that student to translate what was said (Field note, March 2019). On the other hand, at the shelter, children sometimes said in their prayers that the war in Syria would end and they wanted to return. The children stated that their families also prayed with these discourses and were affected by them.

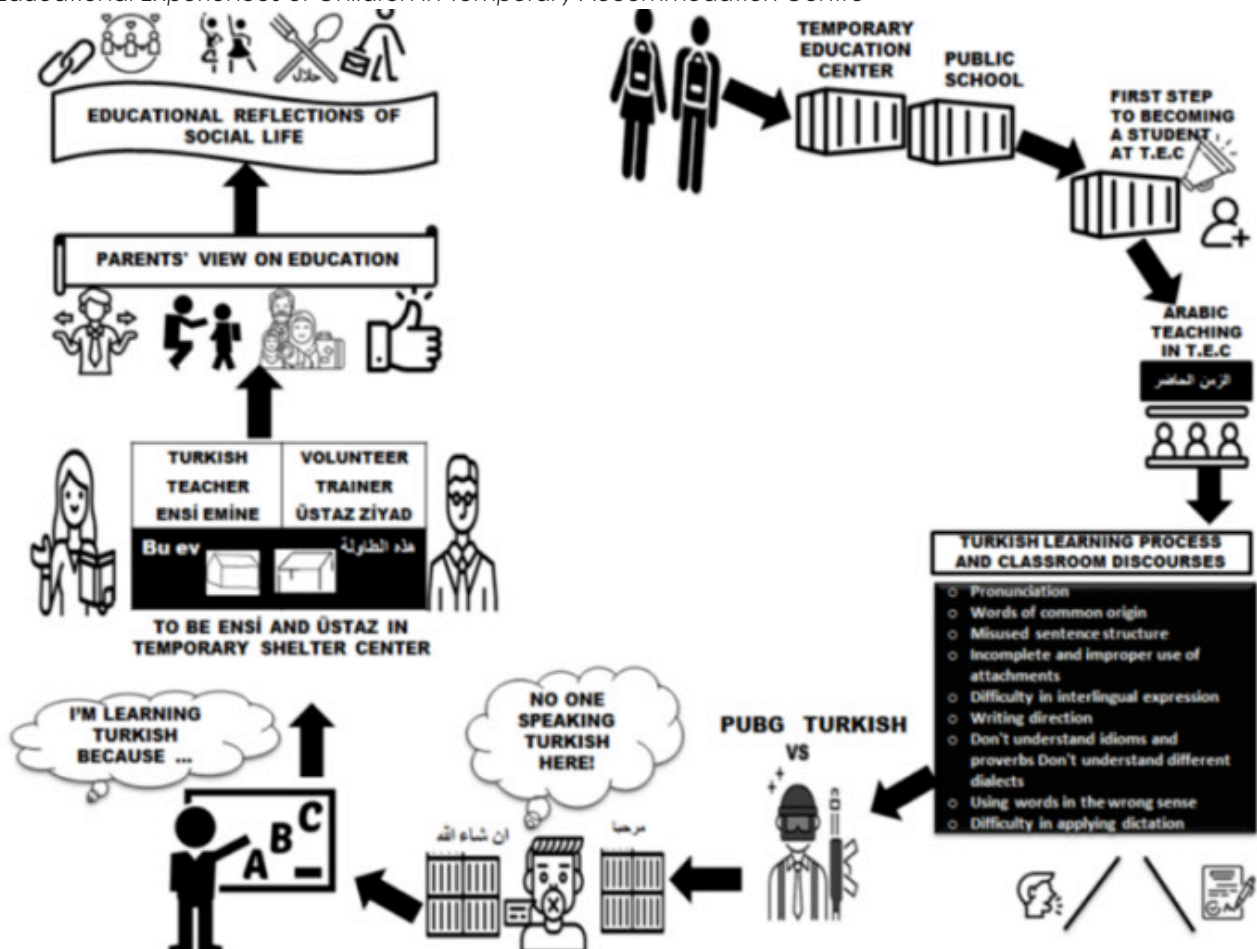
**Educational Experiences of Children in Temporary Accommodation Centre**

The re-schooling period of the students after the migration, their Turkish and Arabic lesson experiences in the TEC, the connection of the games played by the children with Turkish, the effect of life in the temporary accommodation centre on Turkish learning, the professional experiences of the teachers, the parents' perspectives on education in the camp, and the educational reflections of the social life are explained in this section.

"Turkish is beautiful, Arabic is beautiful, but only Turkish next year": TEC and Public School

In the temporary accommodation centre, there were two different schools, the TEC, where the children were educated in two different languages, and the lessons were taught in Turkish and Arabic, and the state school, where only Turkish education was given. Since the temporary accommodation centre is a settlement area of 140,000 square meters, announcements were made by the central administration to the people staying in the shelter centre. Announcements were made with the sound system placed between the neighborhoods. Those who did not have a

**Figure 2.** Educational Experiences of Children in Temporary Accommodation Centre



foreigner's identification card were not registered to the temporary accommodation centre and school. Students gradually transition from the TEC to the public school within the housing centre. During the academic year the research took place, while the 4th, 7th, and 8th grades were receiving education at the TEC, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 6th-grade children were educated in the public school.

Students do not receive education in Arabic after transitioning from the TEC to the public school. While chatting about the courses at school during a break, Yasin, one of the students, spoke about the courses he took at the TEC and the process in the next academic year, "Master, courses are in Turkish and Arabic. Turkish is beautiful, Arabic is beautiful, but next year only Turkish". (Field note, April 2019).

#### Teaching Arabic and Turkish at TEC

At the TEC, 15 hours of Turkish and 15 hours of Arabic lessons are given. The teaching of Arabic, Mathematics, Science, Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge, Visual Arts, Music, Games and Physical Activities, and Traffic lessons, apart from Turkish lessons, is carried out by a volunteer trainer. Bilingual education causes children to exhibit different behaviours from writing to speaking. Since the Arabic writing direction is from right to left, there is a difference in the reading and writing behaviours of the students in the course when switching between Turkish and other courses. Students were more flexible in terms of discipline in Arabic lessons than in Turkish lessons. When the children could not see the board well, they wrote by leaning their notebooks against the wall adjacent to the board, or they got up from the bench and sat on the floor near the board. The course teacher felt the need to warn students when such behaviours were exhibited excessively. However, he did not take action to prevent this situation.

In the volunteer trainers' lessons, besides the language spoken in the lesson, the direction of the notebook and pencil and the children's behaviours were also changing. After completing the writing on the board, Rima looked at the researcher and, with a smile, said, "Master, writing from here, then from here (pointing to the left and right sides of the notebook). It is very difficult at first, but easy now." He expressed the difference in spelling in Turkish and Arabic lessons (Observation, May 2019). Children's participation in Arabic lessons was also higher than in Turkish lessons. The effect of the student's mother tongue being Arabic was evident in the high participation rate. Qusay said, "Ammo, I don't understand much in the other lesson, but in Arabic always finger." [Uncle, I do not understand the Turkish lesson very much, but this lesson is in Arabic, I always raise my hand.] He explained that he wants to participate in Arabic lessons because he knows Arabic (Interview, May 2019).

To motivate the children at the TEC to learn Turkish, the Turkish teacher took them to the library in the shelter, made them watch animated films, had drama shows, and taught vocabulary with the help of visuals. Sometimes, students were doing a reading activity in the library opposite the watchtower.

#### Image 4.

*Children Reading Across the Watchtower in the Refuge Centre*



In teaching Turkish, Emine Teacher also made children watch Turkish animated films at the TEC, saying they did not watch Turkish broadcasts outside of the TEC. The teacher also made children play games to reinforce the children's Turkish learning. One of these activities was the finger paint game.

As a result of the analysis of my observations and classroom discourses in Turkish lessons, the difficulties experienced by the students in the process of learning Turkish are; pronunciation, use of words of common origin, misused sentence structure, incomplete and incorrect use of affixes, difficulty in interlingual expression, writing direction, not understanding idioms and proverbs, not understanding different dialects, misunderstood words, and difficulty in dictation.

#### Image 5.

*Finger Painting Activity of Students*





**PUBG and Turkish: "Ustaz, we really love it, babci babci"**

During the research process, a parent complained that their children were constantly playing games, saying they were always on the phone. Yahya, interrupting his mother's discourse, said, "Master, we are playing games. Ustaz, we really love it, babci babci." Yahya described his experiences playing PUBG with the Turks outside the temporary shelter with the following words; "I tell them I want a gun, go home, beat him, look behind you, hit hit hit him. Ustaz, everyone in the game is fighting as in Syria. Get powerful weapons then win" (Field note, May 2019). With this game, the children in the temporary accommodation centre could communicate with people outside the camp, and speak Turkish with Turkish players. However, they also learn words that are not suitable for their age.

**Nobody speaks Turkish here!**

Those who stayed in the temporary accommodation centre always spoke Arabic. Zeynep participated in the conversation the researcher had with them in Arabic and explained why she did not speak Turkish: "Teacher, it is very difficult to speak Turkish here. Only a few know the language. There is a Turkish lesson at school. But is it enough? Maybe if I lived in Istanbul, I would learn. My uncle's son lives there and speaks Turkish better." (Field note, May 2019). Halime explained why she does not speak Turkish by saying, "There is no internet at home, it is very difficult to speak Turkish because no one speaks Turkish at home, parents heb [always] use Arabic. Only the internet has Turkish" (Field note, June 2019).

**I am learning Turkish because...**

While there with them, I wondered what the Turkish lesson meant to the students. When explaining why they learn Turkish, Yasin said: "If we go anywhere other than Hatay, we have to speak Turkish. If we live in Turkey, we must learn this language." Since Arabic is spoken in daily life in the settlements of the Hatay region close to the border, this situation made me think that "In children's minds, they don't think they need to learn Turkish in Arabic-speaking regions."

*Seyfettin: Because we will not have any Arabic lessons next year, we need to learn Turkish.*

*Bilal: For example, go to the hospital we do not know Turkish. Or go to Antakya; again, we do not speak Turkish.*

**Being "Ensi" and "Ustaz" in a temporary shelter**

Female teachers at TEC are called "ensi", and male teachers are called "ustaz". Since I am a teacher myself, my meeting with the teachers developed as a conversation between two colleagues rather than a researcher-participant relationship. Emine Teacher, a

Turkish teacher at the TEC, described her experience as follows: "I remember that I had a lot of trouble in the first week. When I couldn't manage the classroom, I left the classroom crying. I didn't know what to do. Even though the children did not understand my language when they saw that I was sad, it changed, and a bond was formed between us at that moment. Later, I realised that the children here need education more, and I started to work with more devotion" (Interview, June 2019).

There are also volunteer trainers of Syrian nationality assigned to teach Arabic to students in the temporary accommodation centre. While we were chatting with Teacher Ziyad, there were children playing ball on the football field across from where we were sitting, and there was a Syrian village that could be seen in the distance behind the wire fences behind them. While thinking that Teacher Ziyad was watching the children, he suddenly pointed to the Syrian village with his finger and said, "Look, teacher, it is the village of Syria. Since Turkey and Syria are so close geographically, I am not alienated [to Turkey] at all." He expressed his feelings and thoughts about living in Turkey. Teacher Ziyad explained being a teacher in a temporary accommodation centre with the following words (Interview, July 2019):

*These children need education. Living as a refugee is very difficult. We lost everything we had, our home, our school. But you have to live like other people. As refugee teachers, we are the only ones who can understand the difficulties of these students and what they are going through as refugees. I'm with them inside the shelter. I am an asylum seeker like them.*

**Parents' view of education**

During the home visit I made with the Turkish teacher, the parents wanted to talk to me about their children's schooling process, as they knew that I was a field coordinator and a researcher. Hediye's mother, Fattum, said, "Teacher, I really don't understand this school process either. One of my children takes Turkish lessons for 15 hours a week, and the other always takes Turkish lessons. My child who goes to the Turkish school has very low grades" (Field note, May 2019). There could be more than one student at different grade levels in the same house. While sipping my sugary tea, a parent, who is worried that his children will forget Arabic expressed his views on the subject by saying, "It is good that children learn Turkish, but they forget Arabic. I'm afraid tomorrow they will forget Arabic, and then they will not be able to get along with us." (Field note, April 2019). I observed a dilemma in which some parents welcomed their children to learn Turkish, a new language, but feared they would forget Arabic.

I accepted the coffee invitation of a grandparent who taught in Syria in order to comprehend his grandson's educational process. Ubayd's grandfather was a

67-year-old retired teacher. Ubayd's grandfather expressed his satisfaction with the process of learning Turkish with his grandson and my visit with the following words:

*Since I had nothing to do here, I went to a Turkish course. I continued for two weeks but then quit. The teacher was young, and he explained things very quickly. I guess I couldn't keep up with his pace because I was old. I work on it at home with my grandchild whenever I have time. I worked as a teacher in Syria for 35 years. Now my granddaughter is my teacher, teaches me Turkish (parent laughs) (Field note, March 2019).*

"We will celebrate holidays like other children."

#### Image 6.

*The Moment of Conversation with Parents During Home Visits*



The students I observed learned that their friends living outside the shelter would play games at school during the 23 April National Sovereignty and Children's Day Ceremony. This official holiday was presented to the children of the world by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Founder and First President of the Republic of Turkey.

In our conversation with Teacher Emine, I said that I could teach children the local folk dance called Reyhani, which belongs to the Mardin region of Turkey, and that I could help them in this process. Since Reyhani is a dance played by male and female students together, I also paid attention to the attitude of the students' families towards this dance. Reyhani is played by two people. However, when I saw that the children in the temporary shelter wanted to do it, we decided to do it as two girls and two boys. The mothers of the children playing at the ceremony had hand-sewn the clothes that the students would wear for the 23 April National Sovereignty and Children's Day.

#### Image 7.

*23 April National Sovereignty and Children's Day Ceremony*



After Zeynep's performance, Amine said, "Hodja, I liked the dance too, now I'm looking at Turkish dances on the internet; there is also the plum dance. I will learn Turkish more." She stated that he loved the local dance game he played at the ceremony, watched other Turkish regional dances on the internet, and wanted to raise his Turkish level to a higher level (Interview, April 2019).

#### Conclusion

Each of the children in the temporary shelter had a life story. As the first author, I wanted to participate in the lives of these children and describe their thoughts from their indigenous and unique perspectives to make sense of these stories. These stories allow us to understand the refugee children better, describe their school culture, and overcome the obstacles in the schooling process. This research also revealed the schooling process of children under temporary protection and the importance of this process.

In the study, it was concluded that the migration journey of the Syrians to the temporary accommodation centre under the temporary protection status took place in difficult conditions. They migrated from Syria forcibly and had to stay in the accommodation centre due to the difficulties of their living conditions. Participants preferred border provinces such as Hatay in their escape from war. Some participants made such a choice because they are close to their villages. In addition, many participants are grateful to Turkey for hosting people from Syria. For some, life in a temporary shelter is considered a bad fortune. In contrast, a temporary accommodation centre is considered safe or even a unique opportunity for most people staying in a shelter. Monlaveli's (2021) research in an emergency shelter in Osmaniye Province found that camp residents viewed their social life in the camp as limited, but were generally satisfied with their living conditions.

Students studying at the TEC gradually enrol in public schools. While this transition is primarily a language problem, it has also revealed that children have adaptation problems before transitioning to public schools. In interviews with 1418 households and 6527 Syrians residing in these households for the research titled "Barometer of Syrians 2019," three factors came to the forefront in terms of the path to be followed in education. Students from Syria and Turkey should study together, and Syrian children should learn Turkish before beginning formal education. Syrians should not abandon their native language (Erdogan, 2020). Among the findings of our research is that the children in the temporary shelter center must communicate with the locals, and when they transfer from the temporary education center to the public school, they encounter academic difficulties due to their inability to speak Turkish. In a separate study, it was found that the fact that Syrian parents and students do not speak Turkish is a barrier to communication and school adaptation (Aykut, 2019).

Similarly, Shuayb et al. (2016) described that refugee children in Lebanon and Germany face many difficulties coping with and adapting to the education system in host countries. In this research, students attend Arabic lessons more than Turkish lessons, and it is understood that the student's knowledge of Arabic is effective in this participation. As the first author, the problems I observed in the process of learning Turkish by participating in real classroom practices and children's daily lives in the TEC are; pronunciation, use of common origin words, misused sentence structure, incomplete and incorrect use of affixes, difficulty of interlingual expression, writing direction, not understanding Turkish idioms and proverbs, not understanding different dialects, misunderstood words, and difficulties in dictation practices.

The research findings concluded that the students learned Turkish by playing PUBG with Turkish players outside the temporary accommodation centre. Chen and Huang (2010) argue that computer games played by students will support their second language learning. However, PUBG, a war game, also causes the development of Turkish vocabulary unsuitable for the participating children's age. In addition, children playing PUBG linked the war environment in the game to the war environment in Syria and stated that the war would be won if powerful weapons were purchased. This shows that the children's experiences in Syria are also effective in the war games they play. In their research, Can and Türkmen (2017) concluded that computer games contribute to foreign language acquisition and should be incorporated into language education programs. It has been observed that the children in the center for temporary housing have fun with the mobile games application and learn Turkish by playing PUBG. In this context, it can be said that digital games provide children with the opportunity

to communicate with locals outside of the camp and boost their confidence by speaking Turkish. If the need for language learning, environmental conditions or the urge to learn is not strong and continuous enough, the success in foreign language teaching may be low (Özcan, 1994). It can be said that the students in the temporary accommodation centre cannot communicate with Turkish-speaking locals due to their accommodation in the centre. As a result of being housed in the temporary shelter, the children were unable to communicate with the locals and had difficulty learning Turkish. Therefore the accommodation centre is effective in failing to improve their Turkish level. It is thought that children's desire to learn as a second language and their perceptions are important in meeting their needs.

It is understood that the Turkish teacher in the temporary accommodation centre had no professional experience with foreigners and had difficulties in the early stages of education. Finding an expert Turkish tutor for the students with a temporary accommodation status, which has reached gigantic proportions, has become an important problem for Turkey. For this reason, experts who were Turkish teachers but did not have experience in teaching Turkish to foreigners were trained in the process. Furthermore, teacher Ziyad described that he was also an asylum seeker and argued that the only people who could understand what the participant students were going through as refugees were refugee teachers. Hek (2005, p. 160) emphasises that teachers coming from the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds as new refugee students are very important.

Since the parents of refugee students do not know Turkish, they cannot make sense of the Turkish education given to their children at the TEC. Some parents are worried that their children may forget their mother tongue, Arabic, in the future, as their children are taught in Turkish in public schools. As parents have a refugee status, they may be more attached to their culture, experience stress and feelings of loss, and grieve for their weakening ethnic identity (Lewig et al., 2010). In this study, it was observed that the parents' learning Turkish positively reinforced the Turkish learning process of their children, and it provided a bidirectional motivation for learning Turkish between the student and the parent. This is a two-way process, and establishing clear communication channels with parents is mutually related to increased parental involvement in schools (Hamilton, 2004, p. 92). It turns out that teaching the host country's language to parents in the TECs positively affects their children's education.

It can be said that children's social life is described more strongly with the fact that the research was carried out with ethnography, and the communication that

developed between the first author as a researcher and the participants provided new gains. It has been observed that children's interest in Turkish songs increased with the dances they learned in the 23 April National Sovereignty and Children's Day ceremony activities. Many researchers (House, 1997; Jolly, 1975; Shin, 2006) state that songs are an important source of motivation in the language learning process.

It is thought that the research findings will increase the understanding of refugee children's life and education experiences under temporary protection in Turkey. Describing the social structure of an Italian slum in America as the Cornerstone Society (Whyte, 1943), reflecting the realities a manager faces every day (Wolcott, 1973), depicting the place of breakdance in the utopian aspirations, and subjective transformation of the soul (Bode Bakker and Nujiten, 2018) are important research in an ethnographic context because all of them offer important findings related to the field to researchers. This research also presents ethnographic findings describing Syrian primary school students' life and education experiences under temporary protection in the temporary accommodation centre. As the first author during the research process, it was not possible for me to understand them without being there to see the contexts and interpret them. In this sense, the process I went through can also be described as me meeting with the ethnographer identity and meeting my ethnographic character.

### Suggestions

- Additional ethnographic research can be conducted with children under temporary protection who are unable to communicate in their native language, and their life stories and indigenous perspectives can be described.
- The processes of learning Turkish and adapting to the Turkish culture can be strengthened by organising activities where children in the temporary accommodation centre can communicate with local students outside the shelter; • More research can be conducted on the difficulties temporary protection children face in the process of learning Turkish and possible solutions to these difficulties.

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