A Qualitative Analysis of Self-Determination and Psychological Adjustment of Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Teachers' Perspective

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Abstract

This qualitative research explored Syrian refugees' self-determination and psychosocial adjustment in Turkey and teachers' experience working with refugees. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews from 12 vocational and language teachers (M_{age} = 34.27, SD_{age} = 4.94) who had an average of 9.58-year teaching experience and at least one year of teaching Syrian forcibly displaced people and refugees. The content analysis revealed three overarching themes: i) the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness facilitate refugees' adjustment in dealing with resettlement stressors; ii) trauma experience interferes with refugees' adjustment; iii) working with refugees transforms teachers to become more tolerant, resilient, patriotic, sensitive to diversity, and grateful for their relationships. The findings may stimulate psychosocial interventions and policies that would mitigate contextual barriers as well as create an inclusive psychosocial environment. Refugees are likely to benefit from a nurturing environment and teachers are likely to benefit from trainings focusing on trauma informed teaching skills.

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Introduction

Out of the Arab Spring a resistance erupted against Asad and his Syrian regime in March 2011 (Sharara & Kanj, 2014), which created one of the biggest refugee crises of our day. Since then, the Syrian civil war has ravaged the country without a foreseeable peace in the near future. Approximately 6 million people fled the country, more than 6 million Syrians internally displaced, and 3 million are in besieged areas (UNCHR, 2020). According to the UNCHR report, Turkey is hosting the largest number of Syrians: Nearly 4 million Syrian children, adolescents and adults fled to Turkey, a majority of them live in urban areas while a small number of Syrian refugees live in camps. The crisis continues to be a substantial concern with a potential threat to uproot more Syrians. However, the Syrian refugee crisis is not an isolated event. Worldwide, over 70 million people fled their country of origin and millions of people do not have access to basic human rights in their country of origin (UNCHR, 2020). Statistics show that approximately 85% of displaced people[1] live in a developing country just across the border of their country of origin (UNCHR 2019, 2020). Drawing from the experience of teachers working with refugees in Turkey, this present study explores the motivational dynamics in Syrian refugees and their psychological adjustment within the context of a self-determination theory as well as teachers' experience working with refugees. The findings may assist in developing more inclusive policies and interventions to help refugees with their post-migration adjustment.

Self-Determination Theory

SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017) is a theory of human motivation and development, and emphasizes that human organisms have an innate drive to grow an internal unified sense of self and self-determined living. SDT explains human behavior with six sub-theories: Cognitive Evaluation, Organismic Integration, Causality Orientation, Basic Psychological Needs, Goal Content and Relationship Motivation Theories. The present study is particularly interested in the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT; Ryan & Deci, 2017). BPNT identifies three universal needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness). Self-determination through these needs "is an energizing state that, if satisfied, conduces toward health and well-being but, if not satisfied, contributes to pathology and ill-being" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 74).

According to BPNT, the need for autonomy drives people to engage in activities with congruence and vitality. The need for competence drives people to produce effective outcomes and

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[1] Researchers use the terms *refugees*, *asylum seekers/asylees*, *involuntary migrants*, and *forcibly displaced people* to describe people who left their country due to war, torture, and political violence, and for many other life-threatening reasons. In this present study, *refugee* is used as an umbrella term in references to people who flee into another country for protection regardless of their legal status in the host country.

exercise one's capacities. The need for relatedness drives people to connect with others and feel respected and cared for in relationships. The theory makes a distinction between a controlling vs. nurturing environment. A nurturing environment enhances individuals' sense of competence and autonomy through an ongoing process of elaborating on their unified self-structure (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Conversely, a controlling environment compromises this innate motivation, intensifies need frustration, and leads to passive/avoidant self and mental health concerns (Bartholomew et al., 2011; Chen et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

Psychological Adjustment in Refugees and Self-Determination

Migration problems challenge refugees' psychological adjustment. The vast majority of refugees have pre-migration traumatic experiences caused by exposure to war, including torture, political, physical and sexual violence, and human trafficking (Fazel et al., 2005; Gürel & Büyükşahin, 2020; Lindencrona et al., 2008; Nickerson et al., 2015; Steel et al., 2017). They face harsh violent conditions threatening their life or physical integrity. Also, arriving in the receiving country means going through a long and dangerous journey. Survivors spend a considerable time in refugee camps where resources are extremely scarce (Bemak, Chung, & Pedersen, 2003; Bhugra, 2004). Most refugees face hardships during post-migration like problems with learning local language (Boylu, 2020). They report facing difficulties accessing education, healthcare, psychosocial services, and the labor market. In addition to these difficulties, due to society's prejudices or the media's effort to portray them as criminals, refugees face harsh discrimination in host countries (Reitmanova, Gustafson, & Ahmed, 2015; Schmitt, Branscombe, & Postmes, 2014).

SDT provides a useful perspective in exploring and understanding refugees' psychological adjustment. We hypothesize that a controlling environment (e.g. discriminatory) hampers the need satisfaction and leads to a passive self whereas a nurturing environment (e.g., inclusive) facilitates this motivational system and leads to a productive self (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2017). For example, a meta-analysis of 59 independent comparisons of refugee and non-refugee participants, including 67,294 participants (22,221 refugees), provided evidence that refugees who had favorable post-displacement conditions (e.g., accommodation, access to labor market) tended to show fewer psychological symptoms compared to refugees who did not have this opportunity (Porter & Haslam, 2005). The same study showed that refugees in permanent, private accommodations tended to have significantly better mental health outcomes compared to refugees in institutional and temporary private accommodations. Consistently, Deci and Ryan (1985) propose that "integrated self-regulation is the natural outcome of internalization that is not impeded or thwarted by environmental influences" (p. 186). Refugees, however, experience fundamental challenges in obtaining authorization to have residency in the host country. The host country expects them to repatriate to their country of origin, but it is beyond their control as their homeland is mostly unsafe. This situation of not having access to

the basic rights and opportunities like education, healthcare and labor market harms their sense of autonomy and competence (Porter & Haslam, 2005). Favorable post-displacement conditions would thus activate refugees' adjustment and self-determination, yet constraining post-displacement conditions would frustrate this motivational system. Therefore, there is need for more research investigating the role of basic psychological needs in refugees' psychosocial adjustment in order to develop more inclusive policies and interventions.

The Present Study

The present research includes vocational and language teachers in Istanbul, Turkey. We have several reasons to explore teachers' observations and their experience working with Syrian refugees. Syrian refugees seek education because they may obtain essential qualifications through education in Turkey, leading to a recognized profession or help them document professional skills through vocational training. Teachers become the *welcoming* face for those refugees who receive education and they serve as a bridge between the local Turkish culture and refugees. In addition, teachers spend a lot of time in the classroom. This length of teacher-student relationship provides teachers with many opportunities to observe refugee students on multiple occasions (e.g., in- and out-classroom activities). It is, therefore, essential to know what teachers observe in their refugee students and how they locate themselves in helping their refugee students. Consequently, we hypothesize that self-determination is the major energizing factor for refugees in navigating their life and they are motivated to meet their basic needs. We also aim to explore the teachers' experience working with Syrian refugees.

Based on this purpose, the following research questions are examined:

1. What are the characteristics of psychological adjustment of the Syrian forcibly displaced people in Turkey?

2. How does self-determination theory explain the psychological adjustment of the Syrian forcibly displaced people in Turkey?

3. How is the teachers' experience working with the Syrian forcibly displaced people in Turkey?

Method

The present study is a qualitative analysis of 12 vocational and language teachers' accounts of refugee child/adult students' resettlement experiences in Turkey. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted in the first half of 2019. A content analysis was applied to the verbatim transcription of these interviews as described in previous research (e.g., Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The study was conducted according to the Declaration of Helsinki. Participants were recruited

through list-serve invitation emails and the interviews were conducted with the teachers who volunteered to participate in the study after signing the informed consent.

Participants

Participants were self-identified Turkish, full-time teachers, working at vocational (N = 4) or language (N = 8) schools. Their age ranged from 29 years old to 42 years old (M = 34.27, SD = 4.94), one of them did not report their age but had 30 years of teaching experience (Females = 7, Males = 4, Not reported = 1). Participants had an average of 10 years of teaching experience (M = 9.58, SD = 6.86), ranging from 4 years to 30 years, and they had a work experience with forcibly displaced people of at least 1 year (M = 4.25, SD = 2.57) and were working in their current position for at least 3 years (M = 7.75, SD = 7.16). In terms of socio-economic status, one of them reported having a low-income, nine of them reported having middle income, and two of them reported having an upper-middle income status. Two of them had a doctoral level, four had a master's level and six had an undergraduate level training in teaching.

Interviews

The researchers designed the interview questions based on the premises of BPNT (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2002). These structured questions allowed in-depth analysis of teachers' experiences and views related to the refugees' experience in navigating their lives in Turkey. The first author of the present study conducted all interviews at the participants' work environment. The interviews were conducted in a confidential area where only the interviewer and interviewee were present. The interview length thus varied across participants, ranging from 32 minutes to 53 minutes. With the participants' permission, the interviews were voice recorded. The authors in the present study transcribed the interviews. The voice records were kept in a secure folder and were all deleted when the transcription process was completed.

Analysis

Three coders, who are the first three authors of the present study, completed the analyses. The coders had at least master's level training in counselling, received graduate level training in qualitative analyses, and are familiar with conducting qualitative research. Analyses were completed in two phases, using the Atlas.ti analysis program. The team independently coded all of the 12 transcripts. The team decided to code the transcripts sentence by sentence. Because the present study aimed to explore if they acted on their basic needs as described in self-determination theory, the team tested whether the themes of autonomy, competence and relatedness emerged consistently across the coders. In the second phase, the team met to discuss and organize the themes, and resolve disagreements in the codes. During this phase, the team went through the individual codes and discussed the meaning of each code. Table 1 presents an example of the codes. These individual codes

were named as subordinate themes. The team reviewed the transcripts and codes in order to analyze these individual codes. Then, these codes were reorganized under the superordinate themes. When there is consistency in terms of reorganizing the subordinate themes under superordinate themes, the individual codes were moved directly under the superordinate theme. As disagreements arose between the coders, the team made the final decision through consensus, which either resulted in deleting or retaining codes. In the final step of the second phase, the team organized and named the superordinate themes, which resulted in three major overarching themes.

Table 1. Coding Example

Coded original transcript	Subordinate Themes	Superordinate Themes	Overarching Themes
Participant_11: *Children do not have major problems adapting to the life in Turkey because they learn Turkish faster. However, the students who were older than 25 or 30 years old experience major problems.* Participant_9: *They share that they avoid speaking in classroom. They think that when they use Turkish wrong, it will get warning from teachers or undermined by their friends.*	Being good at local language, Turkish	Competence	ARC Facilitates Refugees' Adjustment

Results

The content analysis revealed three overarching themes. These overarching themes included superordinate and subordinate themes identified with the consensus of the three coders. Table 2 presents the subordinate, superordinate and overarching themes. This section explains these themes with direct quotes from the teachers who participated in the study.

Table 2. Overarching Themes, Superordinate Themes, Subordinate Themes

Overarching Themes	Superordinate theme	Subordinate themes
Autonomy, Relatedness and Competence (ARC) Facilitate Refugees' Adjustment	Autonomy	Drive for self-expression and growth
		Gender differences in autonomy
		Independence orientation
		Self-regulation skills
		Barriers to autonomy
	Competence	Drive to build professional skills and qualities
		Competency in planning future
		Being good at local language, Turkish
		Personal strengths and keeping calm facing challenges
		Barriers to competency

	Relatedness	Drive to form relationships with locals
		Available support from family, relatives and friends
		Social skills and time spent in the host country
		Being good at local language, Turkish
		Barriers to relatedness
Trauma Experience Interferes with Refugees' Adjustment	Symptomatic distress	Prevalent trauma exposure;
		Internalized problems and complicated grief;
		Avoidance of disclosure of trauma
		Time passed since trauma exposure
		Material loss
Teachers Transform through Working with Refugees	Teachers' Attitude	Approach vs. Avoidance Oriented
	Teacher Transformation	Increased sensitivity towards others' problems;
		Revaluing their relationships and increase in patriotism
		Vicarious resilience through indirect trauma exposure;
		Trauma informed teaching
		Intercultural sensitivity

ARC Facilitates Refugees' Adjustment

Autonomy

The need for autonomy emerged in subordinate themes of self-expression, self-regulation and orientation toward self-sufficiency and independence. Teachers also noted barriers and gender differences in the autonomy expressions. Teachers shared that refugee students are "*…driven to express their abilities and thoughts freely…*' (P4) and have '*… ongoing plans to stay in Turkey or go back to Syria, one way or the other they continuously plan their future'* (P5). Teachers agreed that their students strive to be active in daily life in Turkey. They would like to be self-sufficient and build their own livelihood: '*a few of them seek financial assistance, but usually the others pursue a dignified life, equal opportunities, more self-sufficiency, working toward building a world belonging to themselves*' (P11). Teachers emphasized gender differences, indicating that males have more autonomy in decision-making and females face more familial/cultural restrictions. These restrictions for females may include early departure from education to get married. Participant 10 narrated a story:

> *…some females are eager to attend higher education, buying books, attending extra courses, however, females who are accompanied by a male usually have a mindset to get married sooner than later…For example, I had a female student whose brother was sick during her university registration. She was not able to complete the registration because her brother was not available to escort her.*

Teachers proposed that their students who have personal strengths and capacity to regulate conflicts and emotions are better at being autonomous. Participant 4 noted that '…*some of them are capable of silencing their pain and tolerating challenges in daily life, and they are successful at redirecting their life. These students are usually more hard working and show faster improvement.*' Teachers also marked a difference between barricading and facilitating factors in autonomy expression, including financial and socio-political problems (e.g., problems in documentation or work/education authorization). They noted that it is not that easy to sustain their autonomy, '…*their opportunities are limited, dependent on finance. If you do not have money, it is difficult to make choices…*' (P8).

Competence

Teachers all agreed that their refugee students were driven to exercise their capacities. Coders reached a consensus that the subordinate themes of professional/vocational skills and proficiency in local language, emotion regulation and planning skills tapped into this drive to build competency. Teachers particularly pointed at emotion regulation, indicating their refugee students' ability to tolerate stress and persist on the task. Participant 5 noted that '*they do not stop trying, do not give up easily. When they face a problem either in education or social life like documentation, they do not give up till they solve it.*' They noted that students who remained solution focused, '… *grasping their goals with four hands…*' (P8) kept their peacefulness in face of negative events because '… *they know that they have to succeed, they do not have any other option*' (P8). Participant 6 shared that '… *these students do not complain or do not give up…*' (P6). Teachers claimed that proficiency in Turkish and transferable skills (e.g., technical and technological skills) help their refugee students to act more competently.

Teachers noted that the major barrier in developing competency stems from lack of proper documentation: Refugees' professional degrees and skills are unrecognized in Turkey. Refugees thus work at a position below their qualifications, '…*working long hours for less income…*' (P9). Their degree or qualifications are usually not valid in Turkey. Participant 6 noted that '*a doctor had to study at a Turkish university because his degree was not accepted here. He was working as an assistant pharmacist.*' Teachers consistently emphasized the role of language and professional skills in the sense of competency. Teachers thus often noticed the intellectual loss that led refugees to feel inadequate in dealing with daily problems. Participant 11 noted:

> … *Syrian refugees face major problems in finding jobs. Particularly, those who were civil servants at Syrian state face major problems. For example, some of my students had mastery in a second language; they were mathematicians or French language teachers. However, they were working at construction because they are undocumented or can find a day job here and there. At this point, they were having major adaptation problems.*

Relatedness

Another theme emerged repeatedly was relatedness, which can be examined in terms of their will to form ingroup and outgroup relationships. According to teachers' reports, refugees' sense of connection improves throughout time despite the challenges in negotiating heritage and local cultural expectations in forming relationships. Teachers highlighted the refugees' need '… *to be part of the Turkish community*' (P1) and '… *to be part of our* [Turkish] *culture'* (P8). However, this integration has a cost. Participant 8, for example, noted that students' acculturation into Turkish culture sometimes cause them to have conflict with their community, '…*they are changing and their family does not accept this change…causing discord* [between refugees and their families] *like especially in females, cloths, dresses and in their social relationships.'*

Teachers though emphasized the importance of family ties and kinship, noting that '… *they are strongly affiliated with their families'* (P7), '*they live in a crowded family, sometimes more than one family live in a flat'* (P5), and '*they collaborate with one another to start a business, they prefer working with other Syrians'* (P11). Teachers reported that refugees had a strong motivation to support one another, '*… some students even sending money to their family members back in Syria'* (S6). According to teachers, students who set themselves apart from all members of their families look isolated and lonely in the classroom and report fewer connections with locals. Teachers also emphasized the essential role of language in their adaptation. Refugees are less isolated and become more confident with their improved Turkish. '*Students who acquire language skills become happier. They become more positive and joyful, make friends with Turkish people, even begin to visit other cities in Turkey*' (P11). Some teachers added that *'quickly learning to speak Turkish helps them participate in social life'* (P3).

Teachers emphasized ingroup or outgroup conflicts and emotional barriers as risk factors in thwarting the relatedness needs. Participant 2 noted that '*students with similar faith and religious practices hang out together, go to mosques to pray and visit historical locations together. I think they communicate easier and receive support within this community.'* However, political division back in Syria has the risk of polarizing the students in the host country. When students develop '…*opposing views due to ethnic or sectarian differences…*' (S6), they are likely to fend off or become involved in '…*prolonging debates…'* (P6). Therefore, students seemed to refrain from sharing opposing or controversial opinions in the classroom. Teachers also highlighted the between-group barriers, concentrating on fear of rejection as this teacher puts: *'They try not to interact with locals as much as possible because of fear of rejection. … Unfortunately, this leads to social isolation in their lives'* (P10).

Trauma Experience Interferes with Refugees' Adjustment

Teachers identified prevalent symptomatic distress, evident in the subordinate themes of prevalent trauma exposure, complicated grief, avoidance of trauma disclosure and material loss. This symptomatic distress appeared to be severer depending on the time passed since migration. Teachers reported that trauma exposure is prevalent, '*I did not see a student who did not lose a loved one to the war*' (P2), and some refugees continue to face post-migration traumatic experiences like '*during my class, one of my students learned his brother killed in the war*' (P12). Teachers proposed that refugees '*… choose not to share their traumatic experiences*' (P7) as a way of self-preservation and avoiding the risk of overwhelming others with their traumatic stories. This symptomatic distress alleviates through time. Participant 9 noted about the symptomatic distress:

> *They have to cope with it. It is an internal challenge for them. When they overcome it, they slowly begin engaging in the* [host] *society, make sense of their experiences, then by communicating with their environment, they find their place in the community. Of course, it progresses in phases.*

Teachers also shared symptoms of complicated grief and trauma in their refugee students. Participant 5 shared:

> *One of my students said that she was a war reporter and working at a hospital there. She was reporting about the wounded or killed people in the war. She stated that she saw her cousin, and the day after, she saw her brother among the dead bodies. She shared feeling shocked and not being able to move at the time of seeing her brother. She was under the influence of the event when she was telling the story to me, even after five years had passed.*

Teachers noted that refugees learned how to suppress their traumatic memories and experiences. However, teachers highlighted that the traumatic experiences surfaced up during classroom interactions/activities through startle response, flashbacks or trauma memories. Some teachers reported that students had common traumatic memories and random triggers activated these memories during the instruction. Teachers also noted that it was not only about losing relatives, there was an added influence of losing their familiar environments (e.g., their friends, pets or other material losses), which often emerged in their assignments.

Teachers Transform Through Working with Refugees

The analyses revealed a consensus about two superordinate themes. First, teachers had either an approach-oriented or an avoidance-oriented attitude toward working with refugees. Second, teachers experienced transformation evident in their increased sensitivity toward others' problems,

intercultural sensitivity, resilience through indirect trauma exposure, trauma informed teaching skills, and dedication to their relationship with their family and country.

Teachers' Attitude – Approach vs. Avoidance Oriented

Some teachers were engaged in their refugee students' problems. They noted that 'I would like to educate them, be an ally for them achieving their goals' (P10). Participant 5 stated that 'we become like their mentors. When they have a problem, they reach out to us first to see how we can help them.' In this approach-oriented style, teachers also showed sensitivity about the differences between 'the local culture and refugees' heritage culture…' (P8) and their pain, '…multiple times I left the class with tears" because "they share extremely sad stories' (P11). They reported claiming an advocacy role, '…I tell their stories to my friends and relatives to raise awareness about their painful past' (P11), '… as much as possible, I do not allow them to be discriminated, I react very harshly, I am very protective of them' (P12).

The other major attitude in teachers can be described as avoidance. Some teachers reported avoiding discussing refugees' traumatic stories, 'I think I am a little bit distanced, they do not come to me with their personal problems' (P2). While they reported respect for refugees' pain, they remained distanced in order to protect themselves and their students from overwhelming emotions. Some teachers also reported not knowing how to handle the situation, 'We can empathize with them to some extent, but it is their trauma… I did not know what to say. I mean, you do not know how to intervene at that moment' (P5).

Teachers' Transformation

Teachers reported transformation in multiple areas due to teaching refugees. Working with refugees led teachers to be more willing to help others and aware of other people's problems, '… *My perception of other people's pain opened up. I think more about reasons underlying other people's behaviors when I get angry with them'* (P2). Another change was about their perception of their own problems, which may be called vicarious resilience. Teachers reported increased sense of gratitude for their own and loved one's safety, closer relationships with family, heightened empathy and motivation, and increased openness and tolerance toward others:

> *In general, we keep whining about the problems in our lives. These people increased my vigor toward life.... I became more grateful and developed awareness towards others' suffering... Actually, I gained a greater awareness about these issues after working with refugees. This awareness does not only pertain to refugees but towards everybody* (P2).

It was common to observe that subjects expressed patriotic feelings and gratitude for their country, sharing that:

… the more you think of nation, homeland, country, it created such a consciousness in me. Definitely, first a gratitude mechanism begins working because you see what happens when you do not have a nation. This definitely raised my awareness about my country (P12).

Another change was about their teaching practices. They reported being more mindful about potential trauma in their students, particularly refugees, '*I used to raise my voice to manage the classroom. I saw some students startling. I began not making sudden moves in the classroom…It was more obvious in children than adults*' (P11). For example, they emphasized the importance of choice of words (e.g., triggers, shouting), sense of humor, a safe classroom environment, being available for emotional support, and cultural dynamics.

The impact of working with refugees though is not always received well. For example, participant 9 shared that they are also '*being negatively influenced.*' Some of the teachers alluded to an indirect exposure to traumatic details, '*I remember getting out of the classroom to cry and collect myself. During the writing assignments – tell your closest friend, tell about your family. It is full of sorrow. These writing assignments transformed my perception of them*' (P10).

Discussion

The primary objective of the present research was to explore how teachers perceive the Syrian refugees' motivational dynamics and gauge teachers' experience working with refugees. The results of content analysis highlighted three overarching themes. The first theme indicates that self-determination is a major motivator in Syrian refugee students despite the horrendous traumatic experiences and present resettlement stressors. The need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (ARC) facilitate refugees' adjustment. A second theme kept repeating in teachers' stories of their refugee students. This second theme revealed that trauma is a major concern in their refugee students that often interferes with their psychosocial adjustment. The third theme pointed to a transformation in the teachers' view of themselves and others as well as a dichotomous attitude of approaching to or avoiding the refugee students' personal life.

Autonomy, Relatedness and Competence (ARC) Facilitate Refugees' Adjustment

Deci and Ryan (1985) state that self-determination "addresses the energization and the direction of behavior and it uses motivational constructs to organize cognitive, affective, and behavioral variables" (p. 7). The findings of the content analysis pointed to the significant role of the basic universal needs. It was evident in teachers' stories that each of the needs underlying self-determination was a major energizer in refugees' efforts to deal with daily stressors. First is the need for autonomy. Consistent with the theoretical framework, the refugee students were driven to express themselves, gain independence in their lives, and regulate their emotions and thoughts. Gender

appeared as a cultural difference in making decisions: males had more resources and space to navigate their life and make decisions independently. However, females were more dependent on males in making decisions like attending college. Second is the need for competency. In the given context of migration status, the refugee students strived to develop professional skills and competency in planning their future. Teachers reported that the language and emotion regulation skills were key in building competency in dealing with resettlement stressors. Third is the need for relatedness. For this basic universal need, the sense of connection with both the heritage and local community was essential. Teachers noted that refugees had close relationships with their family and friends as well as sought forming relationships with local people. Teachers also noted individual differences in the need for satisfaction of relatedness: it was easier to form relationships with local people for the refugee students with good Turkish and social skills.

SDT proposes that overpowering environmental control impinges on the basic needs and internalized motivational system, which eventually leads refuges to passivity and psychopathology (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Consistent with SDT, previous research found that financial problems, lack of a supportive community (Bogic, Njoku, & Priebe, 2015; Lindencrona et al., 2008), perceived discrimination (Kira et al., 2010) and mental health concerns due to past trauma and resettlement issues (Nickerson et al., 2015) impede refugees' post migration adjustment. The participants in the present research identified similar concerns. They shared that their refugee students work at underpaid positions, experience a loss in their professional status, and suppress their emotional difficulties in social environments. Research showed that refugees with nurturing relationships have better psychological adjustment (Schweitzer, Melville, Steel, & Lacherez, 2006; Simich, Beiser, & Mawani, 2003). In addition, all teachers agreed that language was a significant empowering agent for their refugee students in rebuilding their livelihood: Turkish language proficiency not only facilitates their refugee students' competence but also it paves the way for connecting with locals. This result is consistent with other studies suggesting learning the language of the host country is crucial in participation in the local social life (El Khoury, 2019; Vojvoda Weine, McGlashan, Becker, & Southwick, 2008; Waxman, 2000). The teachers also emphasized the importance of familial and friends' support in expression of the ARC needs and psychosocial adjustment. There is no doubt that a nurturing environment bolsters the expression of the ARC needs. The psychological or physiological needs underlying self-determination "…if not satisfied, contributes to pathology and ill-being" (Ryan & Deci, 2000. p. 74). The facets of a nurturing environment in the context of the present study included supportive teachers, welcoming local community, good relationships with the endogenous community and the presence of legal authorization to receive education and have access to the labor market.

The present findings reinstate a dimension of the inbuilt motivational factors: the autonomy, relatedness and competence are the persistent energizers. The SDT concept of needs '…supplies a

criterion for specifying what is essential to life' and the organism strives to satisfy these inbuilt needs (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 7). That is, according to the teachers' stories, their refugee students seek ways to rebuild their own livelihood despite all these war-related and post-displacement challenges. SDT actually points to an optimal level of environmental control (Deci & Ryan, 1985); When environmental resources exceed this optimal level of challenge, individuals become rigid and passive in meeting their basic motivational needs (Roth, Vansteenkiste, & Ryan, 2019; Ryan et al., 2016). However, the present findings propose that the inbuilt motivation system of the ARC keeps people active in seeking ways and enduring the life difficulties, resetting the tipping point of the *optimal level* at a higher point.

Trauma Experience Interferes with Refugees' Adjustment

Trauma is one of the most important issues in research focusing on refugees. This construct was also sound in the present study. Refugees experienced trauma during pre-migration and perimigration stages of their flight from their homeland, and some refugees continue to face insidious trauma during resettlement such as discrimination, unemployment, and social isolation (Kira et al., 2010; Li, Liddell, & Nickerson, 2016; Porter & Haslam, 2005). In our study, teachers noticed that their refugee students continue to face traumatic events through their family back at home, but suppress their traumatic experiences to avoid burdening other people. They also noted that these unresolved traumatic experiences interfered with their academic and social life. The present findings are consistent with previous research. Severely traumatized refugees use avoidance and emotional suppression as a maladaptive coping mechanism (Chung et al., 2018; Hooberman, Rosenfeld, Rasmussen, & Keller, 2010; Ssenyonga, Owens, & Olema, 2013). In addition, the present findings showed that refugee students rarely seek support and assistance for their mental health concerns. In our study, the teachers found out their students' traumatic experiences randomly during classroom activities. Studies about teachers' experiences indicated that teachers often come across expressions of PTSD symptoms during classroom activities (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Mitchell, Miller, & Brown, 2005).

Teachers Transform through Working with Refugees

The teachers reported both positive and negative impacts of working with refugees. Some reported changes in their worldviews and values, including patriotic feelings and revaluing their relationships. In addition, previous research primarily identified challenges (e.g., indirect exposure to traumatic event details) and difficulties in working with this population for teachers (Cho & Reich, 2008; Eryaman & Evran, 2019; Gürel & Büyükşahin, 2020; Roxas, 2010; Yıldız Çelik & Kodan, 2020) in addition to research investigating the positive influence on teachers' wellbeing (İra et al., 2021). In this study, teachers' attitude and potential transformations were identified in addition to these challenges. Teachers expressed approach and avoidance orientations, either a strong dedication

to refugees' success and wellbeing or distancing from refugees' struggles. The avoidance orientation was often due to teachers' sense of inadequacy in intervening in refugees' traumatic experiences and desire to preserve their own wellbeing.

Limitations

The present research has several limitations. Given that the sample size was limited to 12 Turkish teachers, this study is not a representation of all teachers who has taught Syrian refugees. Readers should use caution when interpreting these results and generalizing the findings to other teacher and refugee groups. This is a qualitative study, which compromises the objectivity of the findings. In order to increase the validity of the findings, three researchers separately coded the transcribed interviews. That is, the present findings are limited to the consistency in the codes. Another limitation is the location of the study. The study was conducted in a metropolitan city in Turkey and may not capture the environment of refugees who reside in rural areas or less developed locations.

Recommendations for Practitioners and Policy Makers

The interviews suggest that there is a strong need for more organized and comprehensive psychosocial services and policies for both refugees and the professionals working with refugees in order to create an inclusive environment. First, psychosocial services may emphasize refugees' inner motivation to improve their lives. That is, refugees are motivated to better their life and may benefit from an enabling public policy and interventions. Second, language skills emerge as a key in the refugees' psychosocial adjustment. Therefore, refugees may benefit from interventions to teach the local language. Third, refugees' relationships to their endogenous and local communities empower them in rebuilding their life. The policy and subsequent interventions may enable refugee groups to build their community. Fourth, trauma is a major concern and challenges refugees in their resettlement process. The interventions may focus on providing trauma informed care for refugees, which may include easier access to health care services. Lastly, teachers encounter challenges in teaching the refugee groups. Teachers thus may benefit from training and psychoeducation about appropriate boundaries, self-help strategies and trauma-informed teaching skills.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

There are several recommendations that we derive from the present research. The results discussed in this study represent the teachers' experience working with their refugee students. Even though these interviews provided valuable insights and findings, future researchers may replicate the findings through interviews with refugees. Future researchers may focus on specific age groups of teachers and the refugee population served. As stated in the limitations, the location of the study was a metropolitan city in Turkey. Therefore, future researchers may replicate the findings in different

settings, including rural areas, developing and developed countries or other refugee groups. Consequently, future researchers may replicate the study findings through interviews and/or quantitative methodologies by considering the aforementioned details.

Conclusion

The present study provides a notable perspective about teachers working with refugees, emphasizing the essential role of a natural motivation to build a nurturing and self-reliant life. Therefore, refugees are not only fleeing from persecution but also pursuing normalcy in their lives, which must support their autonomy, competency, and belongingness. There is a need for a paradigm shift in research, intervention, and mental health policy in refugee work, emphasizing their inner strength. We need more research to reveal their strengths and resources so that psychosocial interventions and inclusive policies can be implemented based on their strengths and resources.

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Appendix

Interview Form in Turkish

Görüşme Formu
Uygulayıcıya Yönelik Yönerge: Her bir soru için yeterli zamanı veriniz. Eğer kişi herhangi bir soruyu cevaplarken rahatsız olduysa veya cevaplamak istemediyse nedenini nazikçe sorun ve gözlemlerinizi not edin. Herhangi bir soruyu cevaplamaya kesinlikle zorlamayınız. Koyu yazılmış soruları sorun. Ok ve yıldız işareti ile belirtilmiş alt soruları ise sadece ana soruda verilen cevapta değinilmediği zaman ek bilgi almak için sorun. Eğer mülakatı veren kişi zaten bu konulara değinmiş ise zaman kazanmak için bu alt soruları geçebilirsiniz.
Eğitim geçmişinizi özetleyebilir misiniz?
İş tecrübenizi özetleyebilir misiniz?
Suriyeli sığınmacılar veya benzer gruplar ile olan iş geçmişinizi anlatır mısınız? Örneğin bulunduğunuz pozisyonları ve çalıştığınız kurumları.

Alan 1 – Aitlik Algısı	
Çalıştığınız sığınmacıların günlük hayatta karşılaştıkları zorlukları düşünün – sizinle paylaştıkları veya sizin gözlemlediğiniz (örn: sağlık hizmetleri, eğitim koşulları, iş olanakları, yasal gereklilikler, yerel halk ile ilişki, toplum beklentileri). Bu zorluklarla mücadele ederken çevreleri ile olan ilişkilerini nasıl tanımlarsınız? Lütfen örnekler ile anlatın.	
Ek bilgi almak için bu soruları sor!	Aile bireyleri ile olan ilişkilerini nasıl tanımlarsınız?
	Psikolog, sosyal çalışmacı, öğretmenler gibi çalışanlar ile olan ilişkilerini?
	Arkadaşları veya yerel halk ile olan ilişkilerini nasıl tanımlarsınız?
	Kendi etnik ve inanç grubundan olan kişiler ile olan ilişkilerini nasıl tanımlarsınız? Mesela aitlik duyguları?
Mülakatı veren kişinin yaşantısını öğrenmek için bu soruları sor.	Bu anlattığınız durumların yaşandığı anları düşünün. Nasıl tepki verdiniz?
	Nasıl müdahale ettiniz?
	Yaşadığınız hisleri tanımlar mısınız?
Alan 2 – Yeterlilik Algısı	
Yine çalıştığınız sığınmacıların günlük hayatta karşılaştıkları zorlukları düşünün – sizinle paylaştıkları veya sizin gözlemlediğiniz (örn: sağlık hizmetleri, eğitim koşulları, iş olanakları, yasal gereklilikler, yerel halk ile ilişkisi, toplum beklentileri). Bu tür zorluklarla baş etmede kendi beceri ve yeterlilikleri hakkında neler ifade ettiler – sözel veya davranışsal? Örnekler ile anlatınız.	
Ek bilgi almak için bu soruları sor!	Yeterli olduklarını nasıl ifade ediyorlar. Örneğin hedef belirleme ve hedeflerine doğru ilerleme, başarılı hissetme, zorluklarla yüzleşebilme, mücadele etme, bir uğraş bulma, vb.
	Hayatlarına yön vermelerini kolaylaştıran veya engelleyen kişisel veya çevresel faktörler nelerdir?
	Geçmiş travmatik olayların etkisi üzerine gözlemleriniz neler?
Mülakatı veren kişinin yaşantısını öğrenmek için bu soruları sor.	Verdiğiniz bu örneklerdeki kişileri düşündüğünüzde sizde uyandırdığı duygu ve düşünceler nelerdir?
	Nasıl müdahale ettiniz – soyut veya somut?