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EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS FACED BY YEMENI EXPATRIATE CHILDREN IN TURKEY (A QUALITATIVE STUDY)

Abstract

The present study aims to explore the educational problems faced by Yemeni expatriate children in Turkey. The current research sample includes eight Yemeni expatriate children studying at governmental schools in Ankara as well as five Yemeni families whose children study at those schools. The study employs the qualitative approach in the process of collecting and analyzing data in order to build a comprehensive picture of the difficulties faced by Yemeni expatriate children in Turkey. Additionally, the study aims to explore the experiences of Yemeni families in dealing with those difficulties. Focus group and semi-structured interviews were exploited as tools for gathering the data of current research. Results found that the Turkish language is not an obstacle for children while it is different for their families. The absence of student abuse (beating) was observed inside Turkish schools. Also, it was observed that racism was not practiced against foreigners, either by teachers or Turkish students.

Keywords: expatriate children, Yemeni children, educational problems

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ YEMENLİ GÖÇMEN ÇOCUKLARIN KARŞILAŞTIKLARI EĞİTİM SORUNLARININ BELİRLENMESİ (NİTEL BİR ÇALIŞMA)

Öz

Bu çalışma ile Türkiye'deki Yemenli göçmen çocukların karşılaştıkları eğitim sorunlarının incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Mevcut çalışmanın örneklemini, Ankara'da devlet okullarında öğrenim gören Yemenli sekiz göçmen öğrenci ile çocukları bu okullarda öğrenim gören Yemenli beş aile oluşturmaktadır. Türkiye'deki Yemenli göçmen çocukların karşılaştıkları zorlukları derinlemesine ortaya koyabilmek amacıyla çalışmada nitel araştırma yaklaşımı benimsenmiştir. Buna ek olarak çalışmada çocukların karşılaştıkları bu zorluklarla baş etmede Yemenli ailelerin deneyimlerinin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu çalışmaya ait verilerin toplanmasında odak grup ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniklerinden yararlanılmıştır. Çalışma sonunda ulaşılan bulgular Türkçenin aileler için güçlük yaratırken çocuklar için bir engel teşkil etmediğini göstermektedir. Buna ek olarak, Türk okullarında öğrenci istismarının gözlenmediği ortaya konulmuştur. Son olarak Türk okullarında yabancılara karşı öğrenciler veya öğretmenler tarafından ırkçılık yapılmadığı bulgusuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: göçmen çocuklar, Yemenli çocuklar, eğitim sorunları

Educational Problems Faced by Yemeni Expatriate Children in Turkey

The expatriation of people from their native lands to other countries has been increasing significantly in recent years, and expatriation has become a global phenomenon in which human beings cannot overcome their various impacts (Rawls, 2016). The various developments in the world have helped this, making the world more like an interconnected society affected by what is happening here and there. These developments have made people look for opportunities, jobs and better education to live a better life (Wilkins, 2013). On the other hand, political, social and religious conflicts, wars and lack of decent living have forced many families to leave their homes to survive. In this regard, the United Nations report on International Migration (2017) indicates that there are more than 255 million expatriates worldwide whereas Turkey has about 4.8 million expatriates, which is 6% of the total population.

Whatever the reason for these people to emigrate from their homelands, it can be said that these people left their communities and homelands looking for better accommodation. Silegren (2014) states that the expatriate is an individual who goes outside his country to achieve a certain goal. For example, the goal of students who study in other countries is education. i.e., expatriate professionals aim to find a better job, and the refugees escape the war and save themselves and their lives.

What should be noted is that expatriates start a new life that they are not accustomed to in their own countries when they move to new countries. That means they need to adapt to the host society and to try to understand the laws, customs, traditions and culture of that society, and they must respect that culture and live with it in peace and harmony (Vercruysse, 2002). Many studies conducted on expatriates have shown that expatriates face various difficulties -

whether these difficulties are psychological, social, economic or religious - when they move to the host community (Gonçalves & Farcas, 2014).

The characteristics of the family that affect the psychological and social adjustment of the expatriates have attracted interest in many researches and studies. These characteristics include the size of the family, the influence of the husband / wife, the presence of the parents and the family's attitudes towards the movement to the new society. In addition, the presence of children with expatriates during the transition to the host community should not be overlooked (Black & Stephens, 1989; Eroğul, & Rahman, 2017; Kupka & Cathro, 2007). According to Global Relocation Trend Survey Report (2011) of international companies employing more than 5.5 million migrant workers around the world, it is found that 47% of expatriate workers take their children with them to a country of expatriation (Lapinoja, 2012).

The experience of migration has some advantages for children such as visiting new countries, broadening the horizon of thinking and perhaps providing better education. However, on the other hand, leaving their friends, relatives, schools and social activities can be considered as a downside of this transition (Gonçalves & Farcas, 2014; Van Der Zee, Ali & Haaksma, 2007).

The study of Topsakal, Merey and Keçe (2013) found that expatriate children suffer from the problem of adapting to school as a result of migration. The children of families coming from different cultures suffer from cultural conflicts with their friends. Also, they cannot build good relations with their friends in the host community. The results confirmed that expatriate children face cultural conflicts and identity problems as a result of adjustment problems with the new society in general.

In the same context, the results of Miyamoto and Kuhlman study (2001) confirm that the good relationship between expatriate students and their teachers greatly helps to reduce the cultural trauma effects that expatriate children can experience as a result of their transition from one environment to another. Naumann (1993) refers to the role of children in the process of migration and family adjustment in the host country. He adds that the smaller the number of children in the family is, the faster the adaptation of the family in the new society becomes. Because young children easily adapt to the new environment more than teenagers. Develioğlu (2002) adds that the problems of these children begin when they return to their own countries, because they were raised in a culture different from their mother culture.

The process in which children adapt to any new society includes three main aspects: (1) The general living environment which includes getting familiar with the new society style and way of life, such as food, weather, dress, etc. (2) The school environment which includes the adaptation of children with the new educational system, teachers, the language of teaching, friends, school activities etc. (3) Interactive aspects with the host community, which include aspects related to social activities, behavior of individuals and their culture to meet their daily needs. In addition to the participation of children with peers and neighbors in playing, various activities in non-school environment also are included (Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992; Eroğul & Rahman, 2017).

There are some behaviors shown by children in the new society, especially in relation to the new school environment such as teachers, classmates and the educational system. Plus, learning a new language often is a major impediment for both family and children (Gonçalves &

Farcas, 2014). Furthermore, children in adolescence may suffer from emotional and psychological problems when adapting to the new environment, which is in fact due to the difficulty of adolescence, the disturbances and changes in the various physical and mental aspects (Forster, 1997; Stuart, 1992).

The family and the school community play an important role in the process of adapting the expatriate children to society and to the new school environment. Some failures in the adaptation may lead to the unwillingness of children to go to school and become a source of concern for children. Failure to adjust can also cause mental problems for these children because they are more vulnerable to these problems than others (Alegria, Canino & Pescosolido, 2009).

Behavioral and emotional problems weaken many aspects of performance for children, especially those related to education. Children confront major obstacles to communication and integration into the new society, which requires the need to help these children overcome the cultural and social boundaries that impede their integration. In order to help these children, it is necessary first to identify what problems and difficulties these children encounter and what to do about those circumstances (Crijnen, Achenbach & Verhulst, 1997).

Crijnen, Achenbach and Verhulst (1997) point out that identifying problems and obstacles faced by expatriate children is not easy because of cultural and social differences in the concepts of pathological psychology. Moreover, the need to involve several parties that have a direct link with these children is important. These parties such as school, family, teachers and colleagues are often from different cultural environments. It is also sometimes difficult to say that expatriate children face the same problems in the same host country.

Based on the aforementioned issues, it is clear that the expatriate children are facing many problems and difficulties in the host society and neglecting or not identifying the educational problems of the expatriate children aggravates these problems. This requires exploring and identifying these problems. Because they affect the psychological adjustment of children, which may raise negative consequences on the children's life and their families in general.

Purpose of the Study

The current study seeks to explore the problems faced by Yemeni expatriate children in Turkey and to identify the difficulties that impede the adaptation of children in the educational environment. Also, it aims to explore the experiences of some Yemeni families in coping with those difficulties in order to form a deeper picture of the educational problems of Yemeni expatriate children in Turkey.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study stems from the importance of the topic which is the problems of expatriate children in Turkey. The lack of educational adaptation to the environment is a problem that disturbs both the child and the family. This leads to the failure of students to complete their educational tasks in addition to the impact of these problems on the psychological stability and mental health of children. This study is the first of its kind - according to the knowledge of researcher -that is concerned with Yemeni expatriate children in Turkey in particular while there are some studies that targeted Syrian and Iraqi refugees living in Turkey. The present study also uses the qualitative approach in identifying the problems of expatriate children and the experience of family in dealing with those problems. It should be noted that the

results of the current study might be used to design a training program that helps Yemeni families residing in Ankara to overcome educational problems faced by their children.

Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the educational problems faced by Yemeni expatriate children in Turkey?
2. How do Yemeni families deal with educational problems faced by their children in Turkey?

Method

Qualitative researchers seek answers to questions that explain how social experiences and behaviors have been shaped and they try to give meaning to those behaviors and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative research also focuses on the study of behavior in the context in which that behavior is formed and may go further to assert that interpretation of context is the basic process that must be studied (Heppner, Kivlighan & Wampold, 1999). In contrast, quantitative research seeks to investigate the phenomenon and turn it into numbers that illustrate the depth and intensity of these behaviors (Jalma, 2008).

In order to explore the problems experienced by Yemeni expatriate children in Turkey and to better understand the educational experiences of these children, the qualitative phenomenological approach was used in this study. The qualitative phenomenological approach allows participants in this study to describe their experiences in adapting to the new learning environment. In addition, a qualitative approach leads to specific knowledge that adds depth and produces rich descriptions of human experiences that cannot be identified using other research approaches. Applying a phenomenological approach within this qualitative method of inquiry allows for the study of the “how-and sometimes why-participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations” (Charmaz, 2007).

Participants

In the current research, a purposeful sample participated in the study consisting of eight Yemeni expatriate children in Turkey (see Table 1). Those children have spent at least a full semester at Turkish government schools in Ankara as criterion sampling. As well, the sample included five Yemeni families which have children studying at Turkish schools. This sample achieves the purpose of the current study, which makes it saturated.

Table 1

Gender and Educational Level of Participants

Participant's Number	Sex	Level
Participant 1	Female	Primary school
Participant 1	Male	Middle school
Participant 1	Female	Primary school
Participant 1	Male	Primary school

Participant 1	Female	Middle school
Participant 1	Male	Primary school
Participant 1	Male	Primary school
Participant 1	Female	Middle school

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Since the aim of this study is to explore the educational problems of the expatriate children in a comprehensive manner from more than one data source, the triangulation approach was used. The term of triangulation refers to the use of more than one way and source to collect the data about the phenomenon, in order to understand the different dimensions of the same phenomenon from several angles (Carter et al., 2014).

To collect current research data, the following methodologies were used:

Focus Group Interview. The researcher did one focus group interview for Yemeni children studying at Turkish schools. In the focus group, eight students participated.

Semi-Structured Interviews. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions to explore the experience of people concerned with the problems of Yemeni expatriate children in Turkey. Five interviews were conducted with five Yemeni families who have children studying at Turkish schools to explore their experience in dealing with their children's educational problems and difficulties.

Procedures

Firstly, the researcher communicated with the families of the targeted children under scrutiny to request their consent to their participation and the participation of their children in the study. Families were asked to agree to participate in the study and signed the approval form for participation in the study, which was prepared in advance. After that, the children were contacted through their families, and focus group interview was implemented at the Yemeni Students Association in Ankara. At the beginning of the focus group interview, the participating students were welcomed. The researcher created a stimulating game for the children before the discussion began as a kind of psychological preparation for the children. The focus group interview continued for 40 minutes. Focus group interview and semi-structured interviews were recorded after receiving permissions from participants to record these interviews. At the end of the session, children were thanked, and some gifts were given to them as incentive for their participation in the study.

Data Analysis

Current research data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis method. According to Sparker (2005) both content analysis and thematic analysis have the same aim. They analyze qualitative data taken from the stories and experiences of individuals through dividing the content of the text into relatively small units. Then, they describe and interpret those experiences by contributing to build a more comprehensively understanding of the phenomenon. Braun and Clarke (2006) added that thematic analysis provides a rich and detailed interpretation of the data and it attempts to identify common and cross-cutting points through an

entire interview or several interviews. However, content analysis allows quantitative analysis of data using a descriptive approach to data encryption and interpretation of the quantum frequency of these codes by giving them meaning, which contributes to the qualitative analysis of data (Gbrich, 2007).

Results

Through the results of the focus group interview that was performed on children, the following results were reached:

All children participating in the research love school in general, and this is due to the fact that the school represents the place where children learn different subjects and the future gate which opens doors for them. Most children are convinced that studying is the way to succeed in life. The presence of friends at school and the many different activities such as painting, theater, sports and excursions are among the most important things that made children love school.

For school time, there are 6 students who study in the morning period, while there are only two students out of eight studying in the evening period. The average school hours are 5-6 hours per day, except for the weekend. Three children prefer to study in the evening than the morning period.

The results concluded that the six children did not take any course to learn Turkish before starting school. Two children had difficulty understanding the curriculum in the first year. However, this difficulty faded as the student progressed into the next grade due to his/her increased language acquisition.

When talking about school courses, it was found that seven children love mathematics because of its ease from their point of view, except for only one child who hated mathematics. Sports and drawing are beloved courses by four children because they leave the classroom during the course. On the other hand, half of the children do not like studying the Turkish language course because of the many grammar rules. However, they prefer the Turkish language as a daily language for communication in the school with their friends.

Focus group interview findings also found that six children have a good relationship with their classmates. When asked about the closest friends of children, it was found that 60% of Yemeni children have a good friendship with a Turkish friend or friends, while 40% of Yemeni children have a good friendship with an Arab person.

From the results of the research, it was clear that all the children participating in the focus group interview had previously studied before they migrated to Turkey, whether inside or outside Yemen. It was found that six of them had previously studied in Saudi Arabia, while two of them had previously studied in Yemen. Two children did not feel a difference in the study environment between Turkey and the country in which they previously studied, while the rest of the children preferred to study in Turkey over the countries in which they had previously studied. The reason for this is due to the few of courses in the first grades and the presence of various activities in the school in addition to the absence of student abuse inside Turkish schools.

Regarding the daily homework, the participants indicated that the average daily homework is three pages per day, and this number increases as the student progresses at the academic level, reaching about six pages per day in the advanced classes. Also, half of the Yemeni chil-

dren are not helped by anyone in homework, especially middle school students, while primary students get help from their families to do homework.

It was also clear from the results of the study that all Yemeni children participate in different school activities except for one student. Sports, theater and drawing activities are the most prominent activities that Yemeni children participated in. Also, some of the participants became members of the school team that represents the school in competitions with other schools.

With regard to the educational problems faced by Yemeni expatriate children from the viewpoint of their families, interviews were conducted with the families of the children participating in the study and the following results were reached:

The reason for the migration of Yemeni families to Turkey was due to the studying of the parents or one of them, or because of the treatment of a family member, or in search of a better place to settle, especially after the recent war that broke out in Yemen in the year 2015. The results showed that most of the families participating in the study consulted their children in the decision of immigration, and the children's responses were satisfied, accepted and welcomed.

Members of the Yemeni families communicate with each other in house using Arabic as the main language. Sometimes Turkish and English are used. Most of Yemeni children speak Turkish language. There are some families in which only father speaks Turkish, while some families both parents do not speak Turkish language.

All Yemeni families visited their children's schools before registering them. Most families chose the school based on the reputation of the teachers in that school in addition to the location of the school near the home. The average distance between the home and school is 10 minutes on foot. Most middle school students go to school on foot, while primary school students go by school bus.

Half of the Yemeni families communicate with the school daily, while the other half communicate with the school 2-3 times weekly. Most of the communication is by the mobile, because of the fact that there is a group on WhatsApp application that includes teachers and parents. Also, there are activities for parents, organized by the school, and all Yemeni families participate in them. All Yemeni families also visit their children in their schools and attend some classes with their children.

The results show that Yemeni families noticed the emergence of some psychological and behavioral disorders on their children at the beginning of their move to Turkey, due to the language barrier, but this was exceeded over time. Some families also faced some cultural and religious problems with their children, especially among girls, such as the veil, the relationship between boys and girls, and some other religious issues. Half of the Yemeni families showed that their relationship with their children changed after they came to Turkey as a result of changing the cultural and social environment in which family lives.

Discussion

It is clear from the results of the study that the Turkish language is not an obstacle for children, while it is different for their families. The absence of student abuse (beating) was also observed inside Turkish schools, which is found at some schools inside Yemen.

Also, it was observed that the secret of children's love for school is a large number of activities accompanying the courses, as well as the lack of courses in the first classes, with a focus on cultivating school love and learning in general in the hearts of children.

Through the results, it was observed that racism was not practiced against foreigners, either by teachers or Turkish students. This prompted Yemeni children to build a good friendship with their Turkish peers.

There is a good adaptation of Yemeni families to the Turkish environment. As an evidence for this adaptation there is no Yemeni child who is studying in Arab or foreign schools in Ankara in contrary to what was existed years ago.

It was also observed that school administration benefited from modern technology in communicating with the parents of Yemeni children, through mobile programs and applications. It is a good point if it is well tapped.

There is a challenge faced by Yemeni families represented in the cultural differences between the Turkish environment and the Yemeni environment, which means the necessity of providing the family with good tools to deal with their children's questions related to cultural and religious differences.

Limitation of Study

In this study, results of the present research are limited to the experiences of participants. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize the results of this study because the purpose of using the qualitative approach is not to generalize the results or illustrate the spread of the phenomenon as much as it is a help to build a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007). Also, there is a limitation regarding the sample of study. The sample of the current study is limited to just eight Yemeni expatriate children and their families living in Ankara. So, there is a need to expand the sample in future researches to include a larger sample and other cities.

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