Journal of Educational Administration and History

Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

ISSN: 0022-0620 (Print) 1478-7431 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjeh20

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To cite this article: Aslihan Tezel McCarthy (2018) Politics of refugee education: educational administration of the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey, Journal of Educational Administration and History, 50:3, 223-238, DOI: 10.1080/00220620.2018.1440541

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2018.1440541

JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND HISTORY, 2018
VOL. 50, NO. 3, 223–238
https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2018.1440541

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ABSTRACT

The main contention of this paper is that the interrelationship between ideology and policy shapes both the overall organisation of refugee education and the operational practices and procedures of staff working to provide education for refugees. Accordingly, this paper tries to answer how the education dimension of the Syrian refugee crisis is managed by the central education authorities in Turkey by assessing the political dynamics and milieu regarding the education of refugees. Building on a document analysis and interviews, this article traces educational administration of Syrian children with a focus on the political dynamics at play affecting the status quo in national education agenda in Turkey. While the impact of the refugee crisis on the greater national education agenda is revealed, the trade-offs involved in adopting certain governance strategies including decentralisation and recentralization is explored.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 28 February 2017
Accepted 8 February 2018

KEYWORDS
Refugee education; educational administration; Syrian crisis; policy making; de/recentralization in education

Introduction

A political focus on education allows us to 'highlight the critical and often overlooked role politics play in all policies' (Johnson 2003, p. 46). Although education is accepted as a universal human right, due to its coexistence with institutions within a state, the scholarship on politics of education is still very much limited to analysis of educational policy content for the citizens. In today's world inflicted with mass displacement and refugee crises, there is a need for assessing political dynamics and milieu regarding the education of refugees. In that context, the main aim of this study is to explore the directions of the state ideology for displaced people in education sector and try to answer how the education dimension of the Syrian refugee crisis is managed by the central education authorities in Turkey.

Agreeing that the process of formulating a national curriculum is mainly a translation of political ideology into subject knowledge (Ball 2012), I try to reveal whether refugee children's needs or the Turkish state's political interests are served through prevailing education measures for Syrian refugees. While the impact of the refugee crisis on the greater national education agenda is revealed, I intend to understand the trade-offs involved in adopting certain governance strategies including decentralisation and recentralization.

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Policy is derived from the dominant political ideologies at any particular time in a particular state and refugee education policy is no exception for that. Therefore, it is important to recognise that the work of those within educational institutions for refugees cannot be understood without being located in a context that acknowledges the centrality of policy and of the ideologies that shape policy. The interrelationship between ideology and policy shapes both the overall organisation of refugee education and the operational practices and procedures of staff working to provide education for refugees. Alternatively, educational policy for refugees is not 'particularly autonomous' since the environment in which school leaders and teachers work is shaped by educational policy (Bell and Stevenson 2006, 2016, Cibulka 1994).

Emphasising educational administration as an ontological practice, Newton and Riveros (2015, p. 331) argue that educational administration requires an exploration of the 'social and material configurations that are brought into existence as school actors interact in their contexts of practice'. Likewise, Flessa (2009) emphasises the importance of studying micro politics of educational administration to explore the ways that ideals and realities or plans and implementation diverge. However, the 'critical junctures' brought about by mass population movements require top down decisions in education as an emergency intervention for the refugees. Thus, although individual school practices matter, looking into the management of refugee crisis in education sector requires exploration of the decisions and practices of the central administration, thus macro politics, as a meaningful unit of study in Turkey.

Since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, the number of refugees in Turkey increased gradually. In 2016–2017, Turkey hosted over 3 million Syrian refugees with over 800,000 school aged children. The Temporary Education Centres (TECs) opened and operated by non-state actors to meet the education needs of these children is argued to be in contradiction with the national education law based on mono-cultural education content in this article.

It should be underlined that the aim of this work is not to discuss human rights issues related to mother-tongue education. Rather, through putting the parameters of educational administration of the refugee crisis under scrutiny in line with the chronology of the refugee crisis, this article argues that Turkish state historically had limited support to teach languages spoken by ethnic groups in Turkey whereas it has shown unprecedented tolerance to education in Arabic for Syrian refugees due to the greater political objectives of the current government as well as the critical junctures brought about by the crisis.

The methodology for the research relies mainly on gathering the official documents decreed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE), official declarations and press releases by MoNE between 2011 and 2016. Transcriptions of 12 semi-structured interviews conducted with ministerial administrators and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also utilised to evaluate the motives and assumptions behind the adopted strategies. Key informants were identified through snowball sampling method to reach the staff actively occupied with education policies and facilities for Syrian refugees. The bulk of the information utilised for this article is from the semi-structure interviews conducted with two representatives of MoNE in 2016 in Ankara. In order to make data sets gathered through documents and interviews manageable for analysis, data sets were refined via structural and a simple frequency coding in this research.

In addition to the abovementioned methods, this paper also greatly benefitted from early field observations, which I obtained as an administrator at the Turkish MoNE between late 2011 to early 2016.

Rethinking politics of education in the era of mass displacement

Politics and policy are concepts easily mistaken for each other. Changes in social programmes, governance structures, and organisational institutions are typically considered as policy changes, but usually these are changes made in order to alter the political balance of power. Generally, 'every political action has some kind of policy consequence and every policy emerges from some political process' (Mitchell 2013).

By its very nature, education, its policy and its administration have political aspects. According to Milley (2008, p. 54) these politics pertain to questions about both educational goals and how educational processes and institutions should work. Although popular ways of thinking about educational organisations and their administration often mask these political dimensions, inherent in education is the struggle 'over definitions of legitimate authority', including the dominant language and culture (Apple 2003, p. 1).

As put by Samier (2008, p. 1) 'not only is politics endemic to administration, and intensified when leadership is added, but it comprises a necessary foundational dimension to the political character of nations, upon which their administrative systems, political roles, and patterns of political behaviour and conceptions are built'. That said, when the line between different nations, cultures, languages and the state borders constantly wither in the era of mass displacement and refugee crises, educational policy makers and administrators find themselves in intractable situations. While unprecedented population movements prompt questions about social cohesion and solidarity within nation states today, national education paradigms undergo tremendous challenges that naturally affect educational administrators at all levels. Indeed, as Lopez (2003, p. 72) addresses, educational administrators are usually not prepared to work with individuals who are culturally different and to help create learning environments that foster respect, tolerance, and intercultural understanding in this rapidly changing demographic and linguistically diverse society.

In mass refugee influxes due to conflict, policy-makers often have to confront the issues that go straight to the heart of the conflict itself. Subjects such as history, geography, religion, language, literature and even music become battlegrounds that reflect the lines of conflict inside and outside the classroom (Murray 2008). Whose history, religion or language to teach are questions that are present in educational debates that are also integral to how we understand citizenship. Thus, education for refugees is not a neutral service provision but an ideological battle that negotiates key issues of national identity and a larger international political agenda. Meanwhile, the involvement of non-state agencies in education provision for refugees raises questions about power relations in education among different actors, and about what constitutes 'legitimate knowledge' for refugees (Murray 2008, p. 39).

Beyond providing children with literacy, numeracy and an array of crucial skills, education opportunities for refugee children in protracted situations is vital because schools can give social and emotional support. Indeed, schools are places that can be safe and

protective environments, provide refugee children with hope and aspirations. In the refugee crisis of this century, education provision for refugees brings about many strategic questions for education policy-makers of the host states: Should longer-term measures be implemented to allow refugee children to follow the host country's curriculum? Or should parallel systems be set up for children to follow an adapted curriculum? How far should refugee's own culture and language be sustained? Should the priority be adaptation to the new environment or preparation to return home? (Beste 2015). Finding the most suitable solution is not only crucial to prevent a 'lost generation' of refugees but also to prevent chaos within the host country (Girit 2015).

The nation-state with centralised educational governance could handle the presence of a random and seldom non-citizen entities in its territory, however when the numbers grow, provision of education becomes a fiscal and organisational challenge to be overcome without breaking the delicate equilibrium of citizenship, nationhood and the universal rights regarding identity and the perpetuation of culture and language. During cross border mass displacements, the political aspect of education intensifies, and an international dimension is added to domestic issues. International organisations like the UN and NGO bodies are involved in the education provision process for the refugees. Meanwhile the political interests of the host state might conflict with the international norms that prescribe the content and form of education to be provided for refugees.

The inclusion of the huge number of displaced children into state education system especially in developing countries can only be realised by the provision of services in diversity and the reconceptualization of the role of the state away from being the exclusive provider of education. In some cases, para-formal education programmes like online distant education services are used to prepare refugee children for examinations (Morpeth and Creed 2012). Many countries also decentralise education to achieve advantages, such as: relieving the central government from the financial burden by allowing schools to raise funds, reducing the unit costs by responding to divergent local needs, achieving a sense of commitment and ownership to the decisions taken by involving the various stakeholders in the decision-making process, as well as representing the interests of marginalised groups (Gessler and Ashmawy 2016). The next sections will look into how the Turkish state as a developing country deals with education provision during a refugee crisis.

Educational administration in Turkey prior to the refugee crisis

Education is the biggest state institution centrally governed by MoNE in Turkey. According to Article 42 of the Constitution, everyone has the right to receive education. Primary and secondary education is free of charge in public schools. There are over 25 million students and 800,000 teachers in public education. According to MoNE sources, the annual budget of MoNE has gradually increased in the past 12 years (MoNE 2015). In line with the increasing share of education in general budget, there is a rapid transformation in public education system based on neoliberal and neoconservative policies effective under Justice and Development Party rule (Soydan and Abali 2014). Although there has been considerable improvement in terms of access to education, Turkish education system still suffers from a big opportunity gap for children of different socioeconomic backgrounds in different regions.

That said, private primary schools make up less than 10% while private secondary schools make approximately 20% of all schools in Turkey. All private schools in Turkey are subject to Law No. 625 and fall under the administration and inspection of MoNE. There is no curriculum freedom for private schools. All curricula are prepared by MoNE and private schools must use them. Curricular innovations in schools are not allowed (Cinoglu 2006).

Considering the relative power and legitimacy of the state bureaucracy in the education sector, the Turkish State can be described as 'strong/centralized' in the education sector (Hage and Garnier 1992). The national character of the Turkish education system is determined by centralisation. In this system, individual school administrators do not have authority to take decisions to meet different local needs. Although the neoliberal restructuring of the Turkish education system dictated by supranational organisations emphasises the necessity of decentralisation, Turkish governments abstained from decentralising education system in the past two decades (Ada et al. 2016). According to the Turkish constitution, education is under state responsibility and the central ministry of education is responsible for planning, implementing, monitoring and inspecting education and training services for students and teachers at all levels of educational institutions in order to raise citizens who are aware of their responsibilities for the Turkish Republic and behaves accordingly. Before it was dismantled by the Justice and Development Party with a statutory decree in 2011, the mission statement of the MoNE referred to the citizens to be raised through education as people who are 'committed to Ataturk's revolutions and principles, have adopted Turkish national ethics, spiritual, historical and cultural values'.[1]

The highly centralised educational governance does not however 'permit more rapid response to external changes' as the sudden population movement during the Syrian crisis cracked it wide open. As a matter of fact, centralised education systems are known to be 'burdening top level administrators' (Lunenburg and Ornstein 2012, p. 29), and this is a phenomenon that has been at play in the education sector during the Syrian refugee crisis. The following sections will look into the historical, political parameters of educational administration of refugee crisis.

Initial assumptions and education policies for repatriation for Syrian refugees

As suggested by Smith (2013), the 'assumptions' of policy makers at different levels affect education policy making for refugees. Smith uses the word 'assumption' to highlight the taken-for-granted truths about what refugees needs. In the case under study here, education policy-makers' assumptions about the durable solutions for a particular group of refugees also affect education policy making. The conflict in Syria was assumed to be short-lived by the policy makers in Turkey. The assumption, or wishful-thinking of the foreign policy makers, that the refugees would be repatriated soon was the main factor affecting education policies for Syrian refugees, which led to the neglect of non-camp refugee children.

The Turkish central education authorities responded to the first wave of refugee influx in April 2011 with a field work to explore the newly established camps and a following order dated 18 June 2011 on the formation of educational institutions and the standards of educational services to be given in the camps. In early regulations of MoNE regarding

education provision for the Syrian refugees in camps, it was emphasised that the courses for the Syrian refugees were to be conducted in Arabic according to the Turkish curriculum so that education for the Syrian refugee children would not be ignored while approaches that would reinforce the prospects for the refugee families' settlement in Turkey would be evaded. In that respect, education was not delayed for the newly arrived refugees, however it was restricted to the camps without any opportunity for acquiring Turkish language skills. Stating that education aiming for Turkish skills may prevent rapid voluntary repatriation, in a press release in 2012, the Minister of Education Omer Dincer emphasised that the ministry had 'no effort to teach Turkish language to Syrian children'.[2]

The education provision for Syrian refugees was perceived to be as important as basic humanitarian response in Turkey in the camps. However, there was no mention of children out of camps despite their ever-increasing numbers. Although measures were taken to provide education for the camp refugees until they return their home countries, the provision of education for the non-camp refugees was seen as an unjustifiable service that would affect the decision of the refugees to stay or return rather than as a human right. Lack of any measures for education of the non-camp refugees or ignoring the education rights of these refugees in fact was reinforcing a 'nation-state that set all measures for services provision only for the citizens' (Xenos 1996, p. 243). Such education policies ignoring the right to education for Syrian refugees, however, underestimated the fact that guaranteeing that all refugees have access to a set of rights reduces the likelihood that people will fall outside the state system and so become a potential source of threat.

In a circular titled 'Measures for Syrian Guests Residing out of the Camps' sent by MoNE to provincial education administrations on 26 April 2013, MoNE tried to explore the educational needs of Syrians living in host communities for the first time since the beginning of the Syrian displacement to Turkey. In this circular, it was stated that all the needs of the Syrian citizens residing within the camps were met by related state institutions. It was also underlined that MoNE was aware of the educational institutions – pointedly not designating them as schools – operated by civil initiatives out of the camps. With that circular, MoNE ordered local public authorities to inspect these institutions in terms of infrastructural standards and suitability for educational facilities. In the same circular, data on the number Syrian students and the capacity of these institutions were also inquired. Asking for inspection and detection of these institutions, while praising local authorities and civil society for their efforts, no important implementation was referred to as a possible solution to the education problems of Syrian refugees out of the camps. However, this circular was important for two reasons: it was the first formal document addressing issues regarding education of the Syrian refugees out of the camps and it was admitting the presence of Syrian schools with Arabic language and Syrian curriculum in Turkish territory operated by civil initiatives.

The right to open schools operating in languages other than Turkish and with a foreign curriculum was limited in Turkey (Taskin 2010). Accordingly, international schools could be opened only for students of foreign nationals by foreign legal and private entities in partnership with entities holding Turkish nationality in line with Direct Foreign Investment Law of 4875 only under a Cabinet decree. Therefore, the presence of the Syrian schools for Syrian refugees were against the law, and under normal circumstances they

could not be allowed. However, the state turned a blind eye to the existence of these schools until it developed a means to control them.

Decentralisation of education for Syrian children

One of the most comprehensive documents regarding the education of Syrian refugees was issued on 16 September 2013 under the heading 'Education services for the Syrians under temporary protection'. This circular was important as it aimed to regulate and standardise educational facilities for Syrian refugee children in and out of the camps while accentuating the significance of coordination among different organisations for resolutions of problems regarding education of Syrian refugees. In this circular, it was underlined that education services to be provided was to be planned, coordinated and monitored only by MoNE and the staff appointed by MoNE locally, in an effort to control the unlawful Syrian schools proliferating.

This circular also reveals the politicised nature of refugee education just like education in general as was discussed earlier in this study with reference to Ball's argument (2012) that formulating curriculum is mainly a transition of political ideology into subject knowledge. Accordingly, an important aspect of the circular was the fact that it envisaged a new curriculum to be prepared in cooperation with Syrian National Coalition, alternatively Syrian Interim Government. Cooperation was important for at least two reasons. Firstly, cooperation was technically necessary in a highly centralised national education system not allowing educational planning and material development suitable for non-citizen children. Secondly, it served for the international policy of the Turkish government looking for a resolution of the crisis without Assad.

Purging curriculum and text books from the elements reflecting a Syria with Assad was essential because of the general stance of Turkish government in support of Syrian opposition groups. The images of symbols of Syrian Arab Republic under Assad rule were replaced with symbols adopted by The Syrian Opposition in the books to be used in Turkey for primary and secondary education of Syrians in Turkey. For instance, the subject of 'Love for the homeland and the leader' was replaced by 'love for the homeland'.

Envisaged in the aforementioned circular was the outstanding reference to schooling of Syrian children out of the camps. It was stated that MoNE authorities would provide convenience for domestically accredited/recognised international and national organisations on condition that they provide facilities within MoNE standards for education provision for Syrian children out of the camps. In that context, the state gave way to the non-state institutions to fill the gap for legislative barriers for access of irregular Syrian migrants lacking documentation to enrol in public schools.

This document was a milestone in terms of meeting the education needs of Syrian refugees according to which Provincial education authorities started taking action (Seydi 2013). This document was succeeded by another circular titled 'Education Statistics on the Syrian Citizens under Temporary Protection' circulated on 7 October 2013 requesting data on educational facilities in camps and in host communities. These two documents show the efforts of MoNE to regulate educational facilities out of the camps despite not restricting their facilities. Neither of the circulars put any restrictions on Syrian schools despite the fact that the Turkish constitution and the national education law confines the provision of formal education and training only to institutions following a curriculum

accredited by MoNE. This decision making is a clear example of the way in which bigger political pictures can affect education policies. In that case, a crisis situation leads to ignorance of extra-legal activities in education and the state shrinks to a managerial role giving way to non-state agents to fill the structural gaps.

The tolerance for the existence of Syrian schools and education programmes apart from the centralised education is in contradiction with the historical national education policies aiming at solidifying national unity through centralised curriculum and the emphasis on the Turkishness and Turkish language since the republican nation-building process (Gok 2007). Indeed, secular education under the 1924 Unification of Education Law was attributed a critical function in the modernisation efforts of the nation-building process. It was strongly believed to be a positive agent for the transformation of the traditional, Islamic community into a 'modern society', as in many of the newly established nation-states. This function of education was essential in terms of the development of Turkey's new citizenship identity. Meanwhile, other multicultural educational content and organisations were not well tolerated in Turkish state education since the state building process. For some scholars, Turkey pursued a strict assimilationist domination policy towards its minorities in the early republican period which was best reflected in the national education programmes exalting the Turkish nation and aiming to produce loyal Turkish nationalist citizens. As put by Sarioglu, (2004, pp. 215–216) assimilationist policy was apparent from the pressure applied to Greek Communal Schools for their transformation into Turkish state schools. The Greek schools constituted the main target of Turkish nationalism. Under the strict supervision of MoNE, a nationalist programme was systematically imposed on these establishments: 'Their curricula rapidly became 'Turkified'; teachers were dismissed and students were faced with the dilemma of trying to maintain their own identity and culture whilst satisfying the demands of Turkish teachers and co-directors' (Sarioglu 2004, p. 215).

The unprecedented tolerance of the Turkish state to decentralised educational practices for Syrian refugees is a sharp departure to the historical intolerance to non-Muslim, non-Turkish schools in Turkish territories. That said, this tolerance emanates from Justice and Development Party's official ideology as the ruling power based on nationalism with Islamic references. As put by Inal (2012, p. 23), the idea of a religious 'brotherhood' already became dominant in the national text books published during the Justice and Development Party's education reforms in the past two decades. Assumed to be a homogenous Muslim community, Syrian people as a foreign policy asset for Turkey to advance interests in the Syrian crisis thus were given the space for continuing education in Arabic.

Creation of a legal basis for education of Syrian children

It was not until the enactment of the new immigration law (Foreigners and International Protection Act no. 6458) in April 2014 that the education provision for Syrian refugees had a legal formal basis. Following this development, MoNE circulated a notice titled 'Education and Training Services for Foreigners' signed by the Minister to all the provincial education authorities on 23 October 2014. With reference to the recent law on international protection, the existing law on primary education on national education, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and International Covenant on Economic, Social

and Cultural Rights, this circular envisaged actions and procedures related to the coordination of education activities targeting foreigners. Accordingly, a Ministerial commission under the undersecretary was to be established.

The circular also envisaged the establishment of Provincial Commissions under the auspices of the National Education Provincial Directorates to carry out actions and procedures concerning foreigners. Accordingly there shall be at least one principal from educational institutions of every type and level and a foreign language teacher who has the capability to make interviews with foreign students or an interpreter as well as one official from other related institutions to (Provincial Directorate of Migration, Provincial Security Directorate, AFAD, Provincial Directorate of Religious Affairs, Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Policies, Provincial Directorate of Health) as deemed appropriate by the Governor and education coordinators in the provinces where there are temporary education centres.

Bringing further flexibility to increase the school attendance rates of the Syrian children, the circular decreed that a 'foreigner identification document' – not a residency permit – was sufficient for registration in the Turkish public school system.[3] Indeed Turkish authorities clearly expressed their commitment to increasing schooling rates of Syrian refugee children.[4]

The applicability of the circular in general was questionable considering the limited capacity of national education institutions in Turkey; however, it is important to underline that this document tried to find a resolution to education problems of not only Syrian but also other refugees and irregular migrants under the shade of a highly centralised education system based on nation-state practices. These practices have a long history of ignoring the needs of non-citizen entities in Turkey. Furthermore, the legal basis for the education for non-citizen entities indicates that initial short-term policies for repatriation were replaced by long-term policies that leave space for the integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey. The issuance of Circular 2014/21 arose out of MoNE's recognition that it needed to work toward the 'elimination of barriers' such as language barriers, legislative barriers, and technical infrastructure gaps that prevented Syrian refugee students from attending school.

Another important aspect of the circular was the intention of MoNE to regulate all educational facilities that had been continuing with the initiative of different non-profit civil organisations and private enterprises through an accreditation system naming them as 'temporary education centres/TECs'. In that context there were to be two parallel systems of formal education for Syrian refugees at primary and secondary level in the host communities: public education and TECs, which are argued to be the institutions of a para-formal education system in this article.

During the Syrian refugee crisis, a para-formal system as suggested by Morpeth and Creed (2012) was developed in Turkey to meet educational needs; that is, despite the central national education system. Accordingly, the state gave semi-formal status to the schools by entitling them TECs operated by non-state actors. Thus MoNE put TECs under partial supervision while disseminating the financial burden on the state. This strategy was seemingly similar to the global neo-liberalisation in education, and the increasing role of non-state actors in education provision. However, the deregulation of education as a public service was temporary rather than permanent due to an emergency in this case.

According to the aforementioned circular, TECs were to be established to carry out activities under the national education provincial/district directorates with the approval of governors in provinces affected by mass influx. The aim of education provided at these centres was described as enabling foreign students who had fled to Turkey in masses to continue their education, to prevent any loss of year when they return to their country or when they want to continue to any type and level of education institution under MoNE and continue their education in Turkey. In that context, TECs aimed not only education for repatriation but also supportive compensatory education to integrate them into public education system. To that end, Turkish Language courses of four to six hours were held compulsory at these centres operating with an adopted Syrian curriculum with Arabic language. Accordingly, the activities were to be carried out over the weekly course schedule and education programme to be specifically determined by MoNE in order to ensure unity in implementation.

What is important is that the related circular emphasised that TECs abide by the principle of education for national unity. According to circular the 'Education against the unity, security and interests of Turkish nation and state and contrary to the Turkish people's national, moral, humanitarian, spiritual and cultural values shall not be taught at the temporary education centres.'

According to MoNE figures during the 2014–2015 school year, there were 34 TECs in camps and 232 outside of camps in 19 provinces. In 2014–2015, total primary and secondary enrolment in TECs was 74,097 in camps and 101,257 outside camps. By February 2016, this number reached 247,844. While some TECs were established and operated by non-state organisations and individual donors in private buildings, some were operated by local authorities through making use of public buildings. There were also several ones that were operated on a private basis with tuitions, which in turn creates questions about the essence of primary education as free for all.

MoNE tried to expand the capacity of public schools to accommodate the massive influx of Syrian children in coordination with different organisations through allocating public school buildings as TECs. In 2015, more than 100 public school buildings in the provinces of Adana, Ankara, Diyarbakir, Gaziantep, Hatay and Kayseri were allocated as second-shift Syrian schools operated though different organisations as partners of MoNE. As part of the new measures, Turkish students in these provinces attended classes before noon and refugee students attend in the afternoon. In these schools, Syrian teachers were employed on a voluntary basis and the incentives were met by non-state bodies. The course books were based on the revised Syrian curriculum.

TECs have become a part of an education system in which the traditional relationship between the education and the nation-state does not exist, creating an anomaly in centralised education system. Firstly, the curriculum followed in these centres does not reflect the socio-cultural values to be transmitted to the next generations to contribute for social cohesion in a nation-state. Secondly, neither Syrian teachers and administrators nor the students are citizens of the country these schools are located, which naturally keeps them exempt from any responsibility towards the Turkish state that normally is expected from citizens.

Out of the formal national education system, lacking sustainability enjoyed by the public schools, the quality of education is questionable at TECs. Their presence, on the other hand, has one theoretical implication. Accordingly, the schools operated by non-

state institutions is a paradigm for surrogate state or a pseudo nation-state in the provision of education which refers to the extending international and national non-state actors in providing basic services to refugees which normally should be provided by the state (Kagan 2011, 2012). It is generally recognised that all states have an obligation to refugees to provide their basic rights. However, the said principle is only the part of customary law and thus the legal status of refugees is mostly governed by the host state's national laws concerning foreign nationals. And beyond the national law, it is a set of political interests that make a state decision in the refugees. (Betts 2009, 2011).

Recentralization and integration of Syrian children into public education

Domestic politics, international and regional equilibrium led to the formulation of new scenarios for resolution of Syrian refugee crisis in the long run and the service providing state units started taking new measures. With a change of policy in 2016, MoNE is now trying to integrate all Syrian children into public schools. Turkish public schools are officially available to all Syrian primary and secondary school-aged students. If they are able to present a 'Foreigner ID' they may register at any Turkish school under Circular 2014/2132. Enrolment is free, although parents may be charged additional 'activity fees' throughout the school year. In urban centres, schools are generally available within walking distance of residential neighbourhoods, and in rural areas of the country the government provides buses for free for primary school students.

In early 2016 almost 80,000 Syrian children were studying in Turkish public schools. In 2017, the number of Syrian students in public schools reached 170,000 whereas the number of students in TECs reached 300,000. (CNN Turk 2017) The rise of the number of Syrian students in public schools is in line with Turkish government's agenda to integrate all Syrian children into public education system in the long run. The road map of the Turkish government regarding education of Syrian children is based on transforming the TECs with adequate physical structures into public schools and giving an end to TEC's presence (Haber Turk 2016). In that context, Turkish state does not tolerate the existence of autonomous non-state structures within its national education system in the long run.

According to Ackerman (2015), language is the most formidable barrier to enrolment, especially for older children who struggle to learn by immersion. The fact that language support programmes are limited and that teachers don't receive training for multilingual classrooms in public schools in Turkey also detrimental for the Syrian students.

Educational needs assessment of Yuva Association points out the mixed benefits of attending Turkish schools. Accordingly, for some Syrian parents sending their children to public schools is a double edged sword.

> It's good because they learn in another language that they will keep learning and they don't have to stop, but at the same time they will forget the Arabic education. Also it's a way to integrate into the new society unless other students accept the idea of Syrian students learning with them (Dorman 2014).

That represents pros and cons of integration into the public education system from the view point of refugees themselves, however there is another aspect, which is the burden on the public education system, and thus the Turkish state.

In a report published by ORSAM (2015) it is suggested that class sizes have increased (on average 1–5 students per class) after Syrian refugee entry in the provinces bordering Syria. For example, in Gaziantep the number of students per teacher would, on average, be 19% lower (per year) if there were no Syrian refugees. This figure shows the impact of the Syrian refugees on a Turkish public education already notorious for being overburdened in especially disadvantageous slum areas of the big cities. This situation brings about the question of quality and equality in education once again not only for the Turkish students but also for the Syrian ones.[5] It can be argued that the centralised school system does not currently have enough room and funding to create effective solutions that would cater to the needs of Syrian children.

In the south eastern provinces of Turkey, which host the highest percentages of Syrian refugees, schools 'were already in a disadvantaged position [prior to the arrival of the Syrian population] in terms of basic education indicators such as enrolment rates, student per teacher, or student per classroom ratios.' Public educational services in these areas are 'extremely strained' now that they are faced with an influx of Syrian students (HRW 2015, p. 19).

> Out of 40 students in Kiziltepe whom we taught Turkish this year only 2 were enrolled in public schools. The principals do not want Syrian children into the schools because the classes are already overcrowded. (Interview with The RET International regional coordinator, 06.05.2016, Gaziantep)

The unwillingness of the school administrators to admit Syrian students into their schools demonstrates the gap between the top down policies and the realities of the field in Turkey as well as the unpreparedness of administrators to work with refugees as culturally and linguistically different populations as was implied by Lopez (2003).

The challenges faced by policy makers in Turkey in terms of education provision to the Syrian refugees in public sector can be put under three main headings: (a) infrastructure and equipment; (b) human resources; and (c) institutional capacity. Accordingly, the sudden influx of the refugees that stroke urban areas and refugee camps pushed the limits of infrastructural capacities of public schools. Indeed, some of the cities were harbouring more refugees than the native population in 2016, which put a significant strain on the physical capacities of public education. Secondly, the teachers and administrators lack experience on dealing with the case due to its unprecedented scope and nature. Human resources are not sufficient to manage students with traumas. Last but not least, MoNE lacks the institutional capacity for effective response to the crisis (Interview with MONE central educational administrator, 08.03.2016, Ankara).

Turkey recently changed the related legislation to enable Syrian refugees to access the labour market. This decision has the potential to help approximately one million working age Syrians to find jobs. In that, Syrian teachers are to be formally appointed by MoNE directly to support the needs of Syrian refugees. In that respect, different from the refugee and immigrant receiving countries in Europe, in Turkey hosting more than 3 million refugees, teachers should be incorporated into the education system and integrated in public education intuitions as well, which duplicates the dilemma of education provision for refugees in Turkey. This dilemma is expected to be solved by a new unit established in April 2016 within MoNE named 'Directorate for Migration and Emergency Education'.

The formulation of curricula and education materials is particularly problematic as both are conventionally means for transmission of republican history and the related cultural values which contributes to national solidarity in an ethnically and linguistically divided Turkish society. Public schools in Turkey are institutions where future citizens are educated and socialised in the values that underpin Republic of Turkey. In that respect, how the education programme will be created by the state institutions for non-citizen children and young people is highly paradoxical. It is envisioned that the TECs, tutoring in both Arabic and Turkish, will allow for a smooth transition to the public schools that teach the national curriculum and language.

With that said, Turkish language has had a great importance in national policy with an unstated goal to develop a sentimental allegiance in individuals to their nation. In fact, Turkish national education has repeatedly targeted other languages as a corrupter of the ideal mono-ethnic state (Smith-Kocamahlul 2001). Turkish language has always been exalted through education system which is evident in the assignment of 'Turkish Language and Narration' courses at all grades at high school as the 'threshold' course, which means that a student who do not have a pass mark in that course cannot proceed to the next grade regardless of their success at other courses. Naturally, ensuring the children to speak Turkish properly is one of the general aims in Turkish National Education Basic Law (Article 20). Furthermore, the same Law also had general equality principle taking the needs of the society into consideration. According to Article 4 and 5:

> The education institutions are open to anyone regardless of language, ethnicity, religion and race. No privilege shall be given to any family, party or class (Article 4)

National education service shall be organised in accordance with the demands, competence of Turkish citizens and the needs of the Turkish society (Article 5).

In that context, how the possible demands of Syrian refugees to maintain their native languages will be addressed in the shadow of many other ethnic groups in Turkey is a very controversial issue with regard to the existing goals of Turkish National Education.

Education provision to keep the mother tongue of Syrians born in Turkish territories alive could lead to segregation and thus problems of integration into the Turkish society. On the other hand, there is a thin line between assimilation and integration when these children are mainstreamed into the centrally governed education system designed for national solidarity. In that sense, on the way from being a source of refugees to being a refugee hosting county, Turkish education might need multicultural transformation. On the other hand, as is implied by the Islamic undertone in general education policies of the Justice and Development Party government, it is more likely that the Syrian refugees will have privileges in accordance with their ethnic and religious backgrounds as opposed to the other ethnic and religious minorities among host communities and the refugees. Indeed, while the emphasis is on the maintenance of the language of culture of the refugees through revision of national education policies, Syrian refugees of Kurdish origin are ignored.

Education in mother tongue, or teaching of the mother tongue is allowed in Turkey for the first time in the history of the Republic in accordance with a 'democratization package' in 2014, however this type of education is restricted to private institutions on secondary school level comprising only certain lessons and to private non-formal education institutions. In public schools, on the other hand, mother tongue education can only be given as an elective foreign language course. Providing education that will allow for the

Syrian children have courses to help them maintain their mother tongue and culture within public education will be double standard unless the different ethnic groups have the same opportunities.

Conclusion

This article revealed that educational policy making for refugees is an extremely complicated task that at times contradicts with the political realities of a nation-state. Tracing education provision for refugee children alongside the chronology of the refugee crisis has shown that it is political assumptions and ideology rather than the needs of Syrian children that matters in education policy making and curriculum development for refugees in Turkey. One of the main finding of this paper is that temporary decentralising of state responsibility for education is evident in the recent policy documents and regulations relating to the education provision for Syrian children. The decentralisation strategies adopted by the ministerial administration are based on the partnership with non-state organisations to fill education gaps in national education originally designed for the citizen child in a nation-state framework. It is evident that the top down decisions in a centralised educational governance is not able to meet the micro realities of the field emanating from the unpreparedness of school administrators and teachers to deal with culturally and ethnically diverse populations.

Notes

1. The law on the duties and organisation on the Ministry of National Education is available at http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/73.html. It was abrogated by the article 44 of the statutory decree the organisation and the mission of MoNE on 14.09.2011 available at http://mevzuat.meb.gov.tr/html/mebtesvegorevkhk_1/KHK.pdf
2. MoNE Press Release, 31 November 2012, translated into English from Turkish Web Site available at http://www.meb.gov.tr/haberler/2012/03102012.pdf, accessed 04.04.2012
3. The circular envisaged that 'foreigner identification document' given by the respective institution is required for the registration of school age foreigners and requesting adults, who came to Turkey as part of a mass influx, to the TECs or to all types and levels of education institutions under MoNE (except higher education institutions) and they shall be registered by the provincial commissions to the appropriate education institutions under MoNE or TECs through student placement and transfer commissions.
4. Press Release to Reuters published in 'No School for 400,000 Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey – Official,' Reuters, October 2, 2015, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/10/02/uk-mideast-crisis-turkey-education-idUKKCN0RW1WK20151002 accessed 15.02 2016
5. Before the crisis, while the student number per classroom was 21,6 in OECD average, this number was 31 for Turkey. Besides this number varies to a great extend regionally (Kılıç and Tanman 2009).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This research was supported by the TUBITAK [grant number 2214-A].

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