Leading & Managing, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2018, pp. 28-43

These Students Need Love and Affection: Experience of a Female School Leader With the Challenges of Syrian Refugee Education

KHALID ARAR
The College for Academic Studies, Israel

Email:khalidarr@gmail.com

DENIZ ÖRÜCÜ
Faculty of Education, Başkent University, Turkey

Email: orucu@baskent.edu.tr

GÜLNUR AK KÜÇÜKÇAYIR
Teacher, Ministry of National Education Turkey, PhD Student, Gazi University

Email: gulnurka1@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Research on schools under challenging circumstances has received much attention in recent years. In this article, we seek to understand the challenges faced by a female school principal educating Syrian refugees together with Turkish students in a public school in a large Turkish city. The nature and complexity of her school context as well as her leadership strategies in challenging circumstances are explored.

To explain the challenges faced by the school and the school principal's coping strategies to deal with them, we interviewed the principal and two teachers, and conducted observations at the school. The findings delineate that: (1) the appointment of a woman to a management position evoked opposition from the community and doubt from the staff; (2) when refugee waves started coming in from Syria, her challenges increased ranging from accepting and including battered refugee children to building social cohesion under the shadow of ambiguous policy concerning their integration. Lack of comprehensive planning is a challenge in itself, alongside the uncertain future of the proposed framework. Moreover, the gender-related challenges in a conservative society brought double-sided issues for her. Further conclusions and implications are discussed.

Introduction

Refugee crises reshape the political, economic and cultural systems of the world as a result of conflict or persecution (Banks, 2017; McCarthy, 2018; Norberg & Gross, 2018; Waite, 2016). According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 22.5 million people were forced to leave their homes as refugees and over half of them are under the age of 18 and in need of education (UNHCR, 2017).

The Syrian civil war is the latest cause of the massive refugee numbers in the world, which led more than six million Syrians to dislocate and seek shelter elsewhere. Turkey has

had to host half of this population since 2011 within its open-door policy (Directorate General for Immigration Management, 2016) and as a neighbouring country (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). As of September 2016, more than three million refugees were registered in Turkey, 2.7 million of whom are Syrians. Fifty per cent of this population are school-age children (Education Reform Initiative, 2017). Educational provision for these children is a critical issue within the Turkish education system (TES), which is already laden with its own challenges. In what is by nature a highly centralised and bureaucratic system, schooling of Syrian children has been a priority because it is considered as *education for emergency* (Arar, Örücü & Ak Küçükçayır, 2018). As the system was caught off guard initially, it still lacks the necessary infrastructure in this sense, as the number of Syrian students accommodated within the TES was 527,860 in 2017 (Education Reform Initiative, 2017). The state of the TES, after the Syrians arrived, can be characterised by the third level of turbulence in organisations as severe where a sense of control of the organisation's direction seems at least temporarily lost (Norberg & Gross, 2018).

The school system has recently been restructured accordingly, with two options for the Syrian children to pursue. One is to get placed in the state schools and become directly exposed to the standard Turkish school curriculum if the child's Turkish language proficiency is sufficient. The other is a new structure called Temporary Education Centres (TECs). TECs are located either within the camps or attached to some public schools as an additional school shift operating in the afternoon. When a TEC is attached to a school, the school continues its standard education service in the mornings, inclusive of both Turkish and Syrian students following the standard Turkish curriculum. In the afternoons, TEC service is provided only to Syrian students of different ages, mostly with gap years (due to the war, most of them had to leave school in Syria and spend some years without schooling), by following an adapted Syrian curriculum and providing a 15-hour Turkish language course. Syrian teachers and coordinators are recruited in TECs, and the school principal is the legal authority responsible for the operation of both shifts. Given this new school type in the dominantly Syrian settlement areas in different cities, the challenges are inevitable (McCarthy, 2018). The responsibilities of the school principals have dramatically increased since the TECs were introduced to some schools which had already been embedded with their own challenges previously.

The Turkish Educational Administration context is based on the motive of 'the essence of the profession is teaching' (Özdemir, 2013, p. 4) and the main problems are the lack of professional training and support along with limited authority given to the school principals within the hierarchy. Yet, the high expectations of different stakeholders place them in a critical situation (Özdemir, 2013). Furthermore, the challenge of being a female principal leading a refugee school in Turkey could add more complexity (Çelikten, 2005).

As educational scholars, we have yet to conduct further studies on the phenomenon (Brown & Krasteva, 2013) especially in such fragile contexts where the principal is marginalised without prior relevant experience. Therefore, this study seeks to explore and understand the challenges faced by a female school principal educating Syrian refugees together with Turkish students in a TEC-attached public school. The difficulty of being a female school leader especially in traditionally conservative societies has already been confirmed (Arar, 2014; Shapira, Arar &Azaiza, 2011). Being a female principal brings double marginality because women have to struggle twice as much to legitimise their position in a patriarchal and conservative society in performing their tasks (Arar et al., 2013; Çelikten, 2005; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Oplatka, 2006). In our case, we are already informed by Çelikten (2005) that Turkish society privileges males as school leaders and it is not socio-culturally easy for women to access the principalship and to get accepted by the community. Schools in Turkey have a dominant proportion of female teachers, yet female school

principals are almost non-existent (Altınkurt & Yılmaz, 2012). Although there is no legal restriction for women to become a principal in Turkey, the prevalent view that school administration is a man's job and gender-based prejudice in this sense are the main dynamics of the social structure that lead to twice as many challenges for the female principals. Therefore, the principal in this case experienced a double-sided challenge in the form of being female and in leading a new type of disadvantaged school harbouring diversity and post-war trauma. When compared to a male principal in an advantaged school with a relatively homogenous student body, her case poses critical challenges which deserve a thorough exploration. As being a female principal in a turbulent school context is problematic (Arar, 2018), this study, in its endeavour to understand the challenges, will explore her experience and the strategies to deal with these complexities.

Theoretical overview

Leading refugees' schools facing challenging circumstances

Turkish schools confronted the problem of Syrian refugee education with its humanitarian, social and educational aspects (Arar, Örücü & Ak Küçükçayır, 2018; McCarthy, 2018) with the sudden flight of the Syrian population in masses. Consequently, schools in Turkey face multiple humanitarian, economic, structural, organisational and pedagogic challenges. Since the Syrians' arrival, education policy and practice domains, which already incorporate problems of equity, school improvement and access to education and fast-paced reforms, have been interwoven with greater struggle (Education Reform Initiative, 2017). As a result, the school principals' already challenging role has become more crucial in ensuring school improvement, especially in these vulnerable schools (Education Reform Initiative, 2017).

We know that the growing diversity and dramatic social change around the world place tremendous pressure on school leaders (Lopez, 2016). The need to explore the influence of distinctive school contexts on the nature and character of school leadership (Gillett, Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2016) is manifest. The nature of challenges brought up by the school contexts globally shows variations, yet the reality is we *all* must deal with growing diversity and the dramatic social change. There are differences in coping with the challenges in different cultures. In this sense, it is the first time Turkey has been faced with refugee education phenomena to this great extent. Therefore, the challenge is felt more intensely (Arar, Örücü & Ak Küçükçayır, 2018).

Investigating the practices and strategies by school leaders in these kinds of contexts assumes great importance considering the implications of 'good' leadership (Abaya & Normore, 2014) or culturally relevant leadership that nurtures and improves these vulnerable, post-war, traumatised students (Arar, Örücü & Ak Küçükçayır, 2018; Lopez, 2016). In this respect, school leaders have to adopt new ways to cater for the diversity and complexity. Studies have focused on identifying the value-related and skills-related educational leadership qualities, especially under centralisation of responsibility, including the patterns and influence of such leadership on leading the school community (Brooks, Normore & Wilkinson, 2017; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). Researchers have also noted the effect of relevant leadership on the formal level within the school and the informal level in the leadership of an entire community associated with the school, which increases cultural relevance (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016). Furthermore, researchers warned that 'the cross-cultural transferability of educational leadership theories and practices is subject to the degree of similarities between the cultures' (Goh, 2009, p. 319), whereas 'culture is ... related to environmental factors, assumptions and constraints' (p. 319) in dealing with culturally unique and challenging contexts (Lewis, 2000). Therefore, adopting the theories of educational leadership with

sufficient local sensitivity is critical, which is a problem in the field of educational leadership in Turkey (Özdemir, 2013).

Therefore, the growing interest in the leadership of schools facing challenging circumstances (Ahumada, Galdames & Clarke, 2015; Bush et al., 2010) is evident. In terms of Syrian refugee education in Turkey, the challenges for the schools are language and cultural differences, community prejudice and reactions, curriculum alignment as well as the inexperience of the school staff in leading diversity and multicultural education (Tamer, 2017). Moreover, the psychological trauma and related needs of the Syrian students, especially the children, emerge as the most urgent issues to tackle, since education is the sole remedy to reduce uncertainty and rebuild the sense of care and confidence lost during the war in Syria for those who experienced massive trauma (Şirin & Şirin, 2015). This demands high-quality, relevant performance from the school leaders. They need to consider the political, socio-cultural and humanitarian context and adopt a reality-relevant pedagogy to build a school community and lead it by successfully tackling the complex challenges (Ahumada et al., 2015; Arar, Örücü & Ak Küçükçayır, 2018; İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016).

Alongside the complex teaching–learning challenges reported in the literature, the socio-cultural, economic and educational background of refugee students, namely, poverty, economic insecurity, and the war traumas they have experienced, are serious issues for conventional schools. Moreover, the wider policy context creates a challenge in the provision of quality education for Syrian refugee students (Culbertson & Constant, 2015) whereas the limits of hospitality are also debated (Dinçer et al., 2013).

Any school-level insensitivity plays a critical role in school failure and drop-out, and often in social deviancy, especially in such fragile school contexts. For instance, schools challenged by complex circumstances in developing countries in Africa and South America (Ahumada et al., 2015; Bush et al., 2010) encountered contextual difficulties regarding teacher recruitment and the quality of their performance. They also experienced challenges such as non-involvement of parents in the school, low accessibility due to geographic distance, dilapidated buildings, and poorly performing teachers. These variables, coupled with the students' socio-economic background, leave their mark on the quality of school performance (Ahumada et al., 2015). To make matters worse, on the humanitarian level, refugee children also bring their war traumas and the adverse effects of breakdown of societal structures (Askerov, 2017; Jabbar & Zaza, 2014; Şirin & Şirin, 2015) to such school settings. Some of them could be cut off from school for years, and most have a different language and culture, all of which increase their alienation and hybridity (Norberg & Gross, 2018; Waite, 2016). The exclusive power of education (Thomas, 2016) in reconstructing these young lives brings urgency to especially the host countries to develop new educational opportunities for them as in the case of Turkey (Askerov, 2017), which poses a further serious challenge for the schools.

In such complex contexts, culturally relevant leadership has noticeably succeeded in bridging vague policy gaps and establishing empowering pedagogy (Brooks & Sutherland, 2014). Therefore, leading by building, developing and improving teaching strategies alongside inclusion and commitment serves as an educational incubator enriching the achievements of students from difficult social and educational backgrounds (Lopez, 2016). Adding to these issues, the demographic characteristics of the school principals such as gender in traditional societies can bring more challenges (Arar, 2018). Indeed, the work of female school principals in 'masculine societies' has been equated to 'mountain climbing' (Alston, 2000). One should note Blackmore's (1999) description of educational administration as a hegemonic male culture, and resort to her proposal of exploring marginal cases and experiences of the 'Other' in culturally diverse communities and schools (Blackmore, 2010). In Turkey's context, the barriers and the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership roles are evident (Çelikten , 2005) and this situates the female principals as 'the Other' in Blackmore's (2010)

terms, which emerge from the very conservative and patriarchal values of the society towards gender roles (Altınkurt & Yılmaz, 2012; Oplatka, 2006). Even if they choose to become school principals, their challenges double those of the males in task performance and legitimisation of their position (Shapira, Arar & Azaiza, 2011).

Given the challenging circumstances of Syrian refugee schools in Turkey, this study reported here examines the experience of a female principal in a TEC-attached school in Turkey. The nature and complexity of the school context, and her leadership strategies, as well as the implementations within this challenging school are examined. To this end, we report a rich case, which, we believe, offers enlightening insights into the above considerations.

Rationale for selecting the case

The school we selected is located in a deprived neighbourhood situated in a large city of Turkey. It was one of the first settlement areas for the Syrians. Among similar schools located in the area, it has the highest number of Syrian students. It only serves at primary school level and the Syrian teachers working for the TEC section were also teachers in Syria, which is an advantage for the school. In contrast, Syrian teachers in the neighbouring TECs had different professions in Syria before their arrival in Turkey. The principal is a female who had never worked in such a school context previously. She is the only female principal amongst the TEC schools in this city, which brings more challenges for her in a traditionally male-dominated profession in Turkey. Her school currently hosts 600 students, only 100 of whom are Turkish. The dominance of the Syrian student population puts this school in a unique position to allow examination of its challenging circumstances. Moreover, the impact of a female principal, we thought, necessitated investigation into this new school structure.

Methodology

We adopted a single-case study approach (Yin, 2011) to understand the challenging circumstances and the strategies implemented by the school to deal with these complexities. Three interviews were conducted with the school principal, and one interview was conducted separately with a Turkish and a Syrian teacher working in the same school. Ethical permissions were sought from the relevant authorities and a consent form was signed by the participants. We addressed our interview questions and asked for narratives concerning the challenges experienced by each and the school principal's leadership strategies before, and during the phenomenon in question. Their reflections on future directions were also sought. The Syrian teacher was interviewed in Arabic by one of the researchers in mother-tongue, whereas the Turkish school principal and the teacher were interviewed in Turkish by the Turkish researchers. Interviewees were informed about the purpose of the research and told that their participation was voluntary and that their identity would remain confidential (Cresswell, 2013). Fictitious names were used to ensure anonymity. Interviews were transcribed in Arabic for Arab staff and in Turkish for Turkish staff.

Content analysis was grounded in three dimensions of the principal's career stages, namely before the flight of Syrian refugees; the encounter with Syrian students; and the post-refugee stage. Validity and reliability were ensured through separate analysis of the findings by each researcher following the same method. Accordingly, we triangulated our data from all sources through member checks and agreed on the common themes. This allowed us to interpret our findings from multiple perspectives and reinforced the analytical structure of the different stages of analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The systematic data collection and analysis procedure employed contributed, it is assumed, to the credibility and authenticity of the data.

First, the collected data were sorted inductively according to the above three dimensions, then an iterative process was employed to thematically code the data, allowing the identification of themes and sub-themes. Next, patterns were identified across the challenges to complete the picture (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). For example, the initial analysis guided the construction of a picture of the broad context where respondents work, including the challenges that they face. Triangulation of findings from the different sources of information, namely, the interviews with the Turkish principal, the interviews with a Turkish and a Syrian teacher, as well as the observation impressions and analysis exchanged between the researchers, reinforced the trustworthiness and quality of the data (Creswell, 2013).

Findings and discussion

The findings revealed the challenges faced by the participants. The school principal's story follows a chronological path and the challenges show a changing pattern since the day when the school first received Syrian students in 2015. As the challenge primarily lies in receiving the traumatised children and the evolutionary state of the relevant policy, the findings will be discussed according to a story-line in chronological order. The story-line is divided into three periods, namely, 'before the flight', 'encounter and experience with the Syrian students', and 'what next'. The challenges that emerged through these periods are grouped as technical, psychological, sociological and pedagogical. The principal's leadership style is characterised by 'inquiry', 'breaking the prejudice' and 'spontaneity'. The examples for both the challenges and for leadership style are provided. Table 1 is the illustration of the challenges and strategies chronologically, which could help the reader to follow the story-line more easily.

TABLE 1: Challenges and Strategies

Chronology	Challenges	Strategies
Before the flight	• Appointment of a female principal • Opposition from the community and even teachers	• Communication • Building trust • Demonstrating her leader capability • Breaking prejudice
Encounter	• Unexpected arrival of the Syrians • Traumatic state of the students • Inadequate policy development and implementation • Instructional differences of two teacher communities • Workload of increased bureaucracy • Construction of a communication bridge	• Linking home and work • Persuading parents and motivating the teachers • Reliance on humanitarian values and empathy • Motherly approach • Participatory decision making • Contingency in urgencies
What next	• Possible closure of TECs • Limited resources for the children • Integration problems	• Recognising need for support • Revealing expectations and worries

Before the flight

İnci had already been struggling with her own challenges in her school before the Syrian community and students arrived. It was already a deprived area with disadvantaged families and children. When she was assigned to that school in 2013, the community was not really welcoming because they were unfamiliar with the idea of having a 'female school principal'. It was a small primary school with 100 students back then. When she learnt that she was assigned to this school, she decided to move to this area to avoid the long journey from home because her daughter was a baby then. She tried to get to know the parents, most of whom are still her neighbours. She recalled the initial reactions of the parents when she met them:

> They looked at me strangely with shocked faces and said things like – We were expecting a middle-aged GENTLEMAN. You are a mother, don't you think you should take care of your baby and just teach if you can? Why are you a head teacher?

She had to prove that it is not the gender but the skills of the school principal that are required to succeed. She had a real struggle to persuade the parents about the fact that she, as a female school principal, was strong enough to handle all her responsibilities. At times, she had to work twice as hard to demonstrate her leadership capabilities. After a while, as she nurtured relationships with the community both as a neighbour and a school principal, she perceived that trust was built between them. Witnessing how she solved some financial issues with the Directorate of Education and how she cared about their children and their needs, the school community changed their perception positively in time. The children had typical and mostly fun school days and, after some struggle, the technical issues, including the bureaucratic procedures and smooth running of the school, were under her control. The Turkish teacher, Semih, who remembers those days, also added his reflection:

> I had never worked with a female principal previously. We were worried and when we heard about İnci's assignment to this school we weren't really sure how she could have survived in this area and in this deprived school context as a new mum with a baby. But after a while, seeing the balance she created with the community and the good deeds she managed for the sake of the students, it created trust and comfort in everybody. Yes, sometimes she is 'being a bit emotional' but she is a woman. This is understandable.

The quotations by the teacher and the principal above reflect the community's approach towards the idea of a female school principal. The challenges before the Syrian influx were primarily about her effort to change the community perception of 'the traditionally gendered' form of school principal. She tried various ways to encourage the community, as well as the teachers, to trust her and their beliefs were modified. The school facilities were poor and it was not ready to encounter a new challenge, whilst hundreds of traumatised children were about to arrive.

The encounter and experience with the Syrian students

In the meantime, the news of the Syrian War was everywhere and there were already camps formed on the Syrian border. The local community realised that Syrians had already arrived and settled in their neighborhood as they started to see shops opening with Arabic names, and hear people speaking Arabic. Violence was evident and there were often fights between the Syrians and the Turkish for daily manual jobs because it was believed that the Syrians would replace the Turkish workers by providing cheaper labour. They initially were not 'very friendly' to their new neighbours as they thought 'they ran away instead of fighting back'. İnci observed that the number of Syrian children on the street increased day by day. Everyone was saying that it was a temporary situation and they would go back. She was sad about the scenes, children begging or selling tissue papers by jumping in front of cars on the roads. One

day, she was urged by the Ministry to enroll Syrian students in her school. She was scared and worried, but she thought of the humanitarian help and envisaged that the children she saw in the street would have a safer shelter in the school.

During our interviews, İnci reported a dramatic incident as an example of the tragedies of war-torn Syrian people and children in her school. The children, as the most fragile group in any catastrophe, suffered the worst, psychologically and physically. Their flight experience was traumatic and some ended up in Turkey and found themselves in this poor and deprived neighbourhood, seeking security and safety. She went on, in tears, to report the story of a student in her school:

> Habib, a 7 year old student here, had lived in a small village near Aleppo. One night he woke up with the huge sound of bombs. He said his parents pushed him under the bed with his two sisters. They were crying and shouting. They waited for the bombs to stop. Suddenly there was a big sound and an explosion on their house. When he opened his eyes, he was injured at the hospital, lost his sister and his one hand.

Their traumatic state on arrival, as reflected by Habib's story, was the biggest challenge for the school and its staff as they had never before encountered such a student population traumatised by the effects of war. İnci went on to narrate:

> The hearing of a bomb, even if it does not hit a child or damage any of his beloved ones, is traumatic in any case. And imagine these innocent children, they lost their beloved ones, their homes were destroyed, their schools, teachers, friends ...They lost everything. They arrived devastated with fear, pain and loss seeking protection and shelter. When I heard that my school would be restructured in the form of TEC, I had dilemmas and there was officially no way to resist. I made up my mind to do what I can to help these innocent children.

Persuading parents and motivating the teachers at this point was a massive challenge. She was sleepless thinking how she could have persuaded the community to believe in the significance of this issue:

> I couldn't sleep at nights, anxiety and all sorts of thoughts distracted my mind all the time. I held regular meetings with the parents and the teachers, explaining that this is for humanity. I reminded them about their first reaction even to me as a female principal. I told them how I solved a lot of hard issues before, together with their help and this would have been no different. I asked for their help and reminded them of the Turkish hospitality that we all needed to show.

Repeating these above-mentioned values and trying to build cooperation, she welcomed the first groups of students. There was chaos at the beginning. The new form of school structure was established in the afternoon as Syrian teachers and Turkish language teachers were recruited for TEC level. Her school received frequent visits from the Ministry, UNICEF and EU officials, as well as from smaller NGOs and researchers from the universities. Then the number of Syrian students rose to 500. Her workload increased day by day. This was another challenge voiced by her. Moreover, the language barrier emerged as the main hindrance for communication across the groups and in achieving educational aims. She described the issue as follows:

> Some countries think that we speak the same language. They speak Arabic, we speak Turkish, totally different from each other. It was very hard to communicate at the beginning to communicate with the students and parents until they grasped a bit of Turkish. We tried to find volunteer translators. Then the Syrian teachers were recruited and some of them could speak Turkish. The Syrian teachers with Turkish language proficiency help us communicate with the Syrian students and parents. We write the instructions for students both in Turkish and Arabic and hang on the walls. We still have difficulty but this 15-hour Turkish language courses within the TECs help a lot.

In terms of participation, she appreciated the teachers and the Syrian coordinator:

> Whatever I do, I share with them, I ask their needs and opinions. I'm lucky. Syrian teachers and the coordinator were also teachers before in Syria. In other schools, the Syrian teachers had completely different jobs in Syria, which is harder. Here, they are already familiar with teaching at least but they have a different educational approach.

Her primary concern was the trauma. Although the Syrian staff were teachers previously, they also arrived affected by traumatic experiences. They often reflected their educational philosophy at home, which they introduced to her school. This, she described as 'strict, highly disciplined, highly structured and resorting to corporal punishment'. It was also approved by the Syrian teacher, Mohammed:

> Our system was very regimented in Syria. We have strict rules and rituals for the students. We kept on doing this here but we received reaction from İnci and other teachers. We are trying to change our approach but it is not easy to do it in a short while.

The Turkish teacher narrated this experience in his own words:

> One day, I found myself running after a Syrian teacher who was trying to beat a Syrian student. I seriously warned him. I said, you can't beat a student, it doesn't matter Syrian or Turkish. These are my students and your students and in Turkey corporal punishment is banned. I found myself protecting their children from them.

İnci managed to build collaboration among Turkish and Syrian teachers, as well as among the parents as time passed. She struggled at the beginning but by resorting to her teachers' participation in fragile decisions, she made use of spontaneity and contingency leadership. She also focused on participatory decision making to confirm her decisions with the teachers as well as using her intuition in emergency situations:

> I have to improvise at some instances. When there is urgency including some crisis in it, I have to choose the best way applicable in a given situation. These urgent situations range from receiving a serious call from the Ministry or dealing with an ill teacher as well as a student who cries out loud to escape from vaccination. Immediacy and taking situational actions form the most of my approach in the school. If we have enough time in other situations, I ask the teachers to build consensus on the decisions. This way they feel better and I feel more secure with the decisions.

Being a female and a mother was both an advantage and disadvantage for her, as indicated by her positive or negative portrayals during the interviews. She, for example, referred to her state of 'motherhood' while tackling difficult situations:

> These students need love and affection. Sometimes even if I'm angry, I don't want to react harshly. Some people assume these kids have already recovered the war trauma. This is totally wrong. As a mother, I believe, I build more care and empathy with their state and keep telling others about the trauma these innocent children had before. It is not easy. They lacked trust at the beginning. They were introverted and had that state that anything could happen at any time. Ready to fall down any time. When they heard an aircraft flying above, they were suddenly running to the door or hiding under the desks in the classroom. We had to heal the wound and I support the two school counsellors in the school. We need more of them.

Her leadership strategies are driven by her belief in letting the teachers be flexible in their implementation of practice. Her priority was rehabilitation and fulfilling the emotional and psychological needs of the students before they achieve academic goals. She said:

> By letting teachers be free and provide guidance when they need it, I saw that they started to manage teaching reading and writing after a short time. I wasn't expecting this to happen before one month, but they were able to read after a week after they built positive rapport with the Syrians. We didn't initially focus on the academic development but on lower level physical needs and rebuilding their trust.

The challenges were numerous. Language difference, traumatised and deprived students, school absenteeism, prejudice, financial problems – all added to the already difficult school circumstances that she encountered. The tension between her feelings of humanity, and her formal position as a school principal, once led her to cry in the Directorate office after a severe issue in an implementation of policy. She referred to the reason why she was emotionally aroused:

> I know that mid-level bureaucrats also try hard to regulate the Syrian education issues. But they are not fully aware of what we experience at school level. There is frequently dissonance and discrepancy between the decisions and the speed of bureaucratic procedures. The chain of command makes things slow down. I have to be ready for surprises during any work day. For instance, they sent Arabic teachers for my TEC level but I needed them in the morning shift as well and I can't legally have them teach in double shift. They already teach 30 hours a week in TEC. Syrian students in the morning shift are mostly deprived of the courses related with their home culture. I would like them to have Arabic courses as well as Turkish courses but the system needs to take the relevant measures. I can't do this with my initiative because I don't have the legal authority to do so. There is good will but things fail because of lack of comprehensive planning.

İnci narrated an incident that concerned her with a high level bureaucrat in the Ministry. While she was talking about a student who got enrolled in the previous April for the first time, she mentioned that she was worried about the gap in terms of catching up with the curriculum. This was the bureaucrat's response, which reflected the strict policy of schooling the Syrian children regardless of their academic levels or schools' registration periods:

> April, it doesn't matter when, it may even be the last week of the school term, you have to get them into the school and keep them there. We can't risk having any children out of school. This is his ticket, his access to survival. He was right …We can't say you have missed the train already.

It seems that the complexity of the principal's challenges stems from the combination of constant policy and bureaucratic changes, and the urge to ensure the students' basic needs as well as the struggle to position their academic status and integration into the school (Dallal, 2016).

What next

Given the challenging circumstances, İnci and her team worry about the future. İnci mentioned the plans of the Ministry to close the TECs for full integration. That is, the Ministry has plans to close the TECs in 2 years' time with a proposition that Syrian students would get integrated more effectively by being placed in public schools and receiving education together with Turkish students in mixed classes. On the other hand, there are still newly arrived students, without any language proficiency and it is likely that the influx will continue. In this respect, İnci believes that TECs act as transition centres for these students without any Turkish language proficiency. She thinks that placing the newly arrived Syrian students directly in the mainstream schooling will make the situation more chaotic. Moreover, she is worried about the job security of her Syrian teachers. The incentives Syrian educators

receive from UNICEF are not sufficient and their future is full of insecurity and ambiguity. İnci articulated her worry on this as follows:

> When TECs close, what will they do? They already receive a small amount of money, but better than nothing. Necessary precautions need to be considered for them for the future.

She also raised her concern about the integration process, which was reiterated by Turkish and Syrian teacher participants in the study. She reflected on the expectations from the authorities:

> While seeking integration, we lock these kids in the school and in this neighbourhood. Even a hamburger or a pizza! These children have never seen such food, never been out of this neighbourhood. The Turkish children here are in need. We don't have the resources to acquaint them with the outside world. Presently no one focuses on the psychosocial development, their primary concern is about keeping them safe here. It would be helpful if we had the resources to take them to field trips, theatres, exhibitions and other social activities for their psychosocial development but we can't afford it. Integration has to be tackled in a wider context.

To summarise, the challenges voiced and observed are the traumatised state of the students, language problems, cultural resistance, prejudice within the society, disciplinary issues, diverse habits and traditions, age and level differences of the Syrian students, absenteeism, indifference of the families towards their children's schooling, financial problems, the inexperience of the education staff in refugee education and immature policy leading to slow bureaucratic procedures. In addition, being a female principal in a traditional community within a male-dominant world of educational administrators in Turkey was a challenge, doubled up with the Syrian influx for the school principal.

The reaction of the local community against a female school principal at the beginning essentially reflects the socially embedded belief that a school principal should be male. They hesitated to accept and trust her at the beginning. Even the description of the school principal by the male teacher as 'sometimes emotional' signifies the mindset of the society. Moreover, the societal prejudice towards the refugees is reflected in the way they criticised the Syrians for not fighting back at home. We witness 'othering' in the form of gender and race in the school's neighbourhood. Yet, the principal reminded them of their initial reaction towards herself as a female school principal to break their prejudice towards the Syrian refugees in the long run. Moreover, the language barrier and the traumatic state of the students, as reflected in the quotations, required the mutual support of both parties as well as a caring approach. Although she was emotional about the traumatic state, she had to struggle, think and stay strong to find the best means to meet the needs of her students through her goodwill and contingency approach to leadership, which is about the fit between a leader's traits, style, and orientation and follower-maturity and situational challenges (Avolio, 2007). In her case, she tried to choose the most appropriate strategy and approach based on the urgent situations emerging daily in her school which is contextually challenging. Moreover, her efforts to mediate the relevant policy at school level brought up more work load and risk-taking for the principal. Giving teachers flexibility, although risky in a centralised system, and having them participate in the decisions are her working strategies. The story and the quotes of different participants provide us with the challenges and her coping strategies. The next section, in this respect, will discuss the findings in detail.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This article aimed to explore the complex challenges faced by a female school principal in a TEC-attached school for Syrian refugees in Turkey and the strategies the school adopted to deal with these complexities.

First, the principal's challenges began with the community's opposition to her appointment, including the male teachers' doubt about her ability to face the authorities as a female and maximise the chances of students from a repressed community, consistent with the description of women entering leadership positions in traditional societies (Çelikten, 2005; Oplatka & Arar, 2016). Thus, with her appointment, she had to prove her capability by building the school community and strengthening the trust between and across the teachers, parents and students (Bush et al., 2010), while striving to challenge the distinct gender perceptions of a traditional society (Arar, 2018). She also had to balance her responsibilities as a mother with her challenges at the school. Her strategy was linking home with school by bringing her daughter to the school to make her life more manageable, which also enhanced the school climate in her case as the school community loved the little girl and the Syrian students built friendships with her, which have led to more sincere relations. She thus prioritised her 'state of motherhood' and humanitarian care for the students' emotional deprivation and basic physical needs, including language and communication skills. Her strategy might be controversial to the feminists' rejection of gender-based emotional and personal positioning (Jaggar, 1989). However, from a critical feminist perspective (Blackmore, 2013), through her marginal state, she represents the case of 'an already marginalized school leader (female) serving marginalized students (Syrian refugees)' and confirms the view that leadership takes on 'different forms when situated within specific cultural contexts'. Her priority was care; before developing the academic skills of the students, she had to rebuild their trust in the system (Ahumada, Galdames & Clarke, 2015). In fact, the adapted Arabic curriculum in TECs reflects a culturally responsive pedagogy (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016), together with the Turkish language support, which she found helpful during the transition period. Yet, their planned closure may generate further challenges in the future.

Second, the unexpected arrival of the Syrians added to her role's complexity, in an intractable context, with scant resources over which the two student cohorts and their communities had to compete. This, in turn, undermined social cohesion even more, and reduced the Syrian refugees' chances to integrate into this basically underprivileged community (Taştan & Çelik, 2017). The Syrian refugees, on their part, traumatised by loss and war, wanted to fulfil their basic needs of security, shelter and protection (Arar, Örücü & Ak Küçükçayır, 2018; Waite, 2016). With this complex socio-cultural and economic situation, the principal coped by emphasising the 'vulnerability of refugees' and their need for humanitarian support (Şirin & Şirin, 2015), while underlining the values of Turkish culture that embraces its guests. She based her work on the values of moral leadership including caring, in order to reinforce social cohesion (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016). At the same time, and in an attempt to broaden the support circles of the entire community (Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016), she established cooperation with various public and aid organisations, and tried to define the relevance of her role on a value-oriented and practical level (Khalifa et al., 2016). She mediated the tension to construct collective concern and care encompassing the weakened students to form social cohesion and to ensure a 'corrective educational experience'.

Third, it should be noted that the relevant policy to integrate and naturalise Syrian refugees is still in its early stage, which raises further complex challenges concerning identity, citizenship and education (McCarthy, 2018). The frequent dissonance and discrepancy between the decisions and the speed of bureaucratic procedures is a great challenge, which

increases principals' stress and anxiety (Taştan & Çelik, 2017). In addition, the principal had to deal with bureaucratic decisions that were detached from the school's reality and immediate needs and were characterised by a lack of comprehensive planning. Further, the integration is more about language support, but the priority is healing the traumatised children and safeguarding. One needs to remember that these children are under Temporary Protection and this ambiguity of temporariness limits the forms of integration at different levels. Some want to immigrate to other countries and avoid being legally registered in Turkey to keep their path open for other options in European countries, which leads to an unknown number of unschooled children. In this way, the level of integration and provision of education service is under scrutiny with multiple reasons behind the uncertainty.

Fourth, alongside social integration challenges, the principal aimed to build a communication bridge with the refugee parents and students through the Syrian teachers in the school, to help her and the Turkish teachers to expand the common space and communicate with Syrian children and parents (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Lopez, 2016). However, the complexity of her challenge increased vis-à-vis the tension between two educational perceptions – the more liberal view of the Turkish teachers and the authoritarian style of the Syrian teachers embracing corporal punishment. The Turkish teachers opposed these practices, especially regarding the traumatised children. To bridge these cultural and educational gaps, the principal tried to build 'working communities' that emphasised the moral imperative/agency of a school dealing with a humanitarian emergency (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Zembylas & Iasonos, 2016).

If all the above-mentioned challenges were not enough, the future of these schools is precarious, due to the continuation of the Syrian influx and the insufficient readiness of the policy decisions to integrate them in regular public schools (Arar, Örücü & Ak Küçükçayır, 2018; İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016). This makes one wonder about the future policies of integration and its nature, especially with the lack of resources to fully integrate the students in extra-curricular education programs that could serve as a tool for their sound psycho-emotional development, alongside dilemmas regarding civic education in the light of the Syrian refugees' undetermined status (Taştan & Çelik, 2017) and the open-door policy of the Turkish government in its coping with the refugee crisis (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; McCarthy, 2018).

In a broad sense, the research findings offer an understanding of the coping mechanisms of a female school leader in a complex political and human reality. It is clear that she and the teachers, who were less than ready to deal with the phenomenon, adopted reflection and observation of the phenomenon while striving for educational–cultural relevance by means of joint work, value-based commitment, and an attempt to establish community cohesion (Beachum, 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016). In such a conflictual context, educational leadership is based on moral imperative. It should be capable of building cohesive community Moreover, contingency leadership (Avolio, 2007) and collaboration within the school staff to ensure staff cohesion, teachers' empowerment, teachers' commitment to the school and the establishment of harmony would facilitate the work of the school as a professional community (Arar & Abramovitz, 2013).This requires the establishment of multicultural discourse among the students and the teachers from the two distinct cultures in her case.

These challenges and strategies of the female school principal were highlighted to provide insights for an international readership about the Syrian refugee education in Turkey, which poses harsh realities that may not be fully realised with the limited exposure within the media coverage. The case of this principal could be exemplary in a peculiarly challenging context in terms of reconsideration of the gender-related issues in educational leadership. What we saw in her case is a successful female school leader removing the barriers and prejudice of the community towards the idea of a female principal in her conservative and complex context

(Altınkurt & Yılmaz, 2012). By using common cultural and traditional modes of behaviour dominant in her society about gender relations in the public sphere (Arar et al., 2013), she tries to legitimise her position in the conservative community. On the other hand, she challenges the masculine-dominant perception by addressing the needs of the fragile community in a determined manner.

Moreover, she challenges the rationality and emotionality debate (Crawford, 2007) in educational leadership as bringing the school principal's infant to her school may sound unprofessional and irrational in professional leadership literature. Yet, this emerged as a positive construct in building communication and trust across and between the two communities. This brings us to revisit the claim that educational leadership is a highly contextualised domain (Hargreaves, 2005) and the theories valid elsewhere need to be approached and adopted carefully while exploring the culturally unique contexts of challenge and complexity. Consistent with Oplatka and Arar (2016), the need to respect local systems of education and their community's cultural traditions and norms is evident in this study.

We also noticed that the double marginality, a female principal in a disadvantaged school with TEC revealed the interconnectedness between culture, norms and the survival of a woman principal through self-determination and by using the cultural and humanistic approach. However, educators in challenging contexts need professional support and development along with appropriately shared pedagogical and social learning experiences. It can be suggested that academic lecturers in leadership development programs take these local challenges into consideration even if they live in the same country and focus on the issue of gender in educational administration.

This case could instil hope and provide motivation for the female teachers who hesitate to move forward to principalship because of the barriers in similar traditional societies. In this sense, the female vs. male school principal strategies in inherently challenging contexts and investigating community perspectives to form welcoming and healthy school contexts not only for refugees but also for all groups of disadvantage deserve more scholarly exploration. Despite the limitations of this qualitative case study, it attempts to shed light on a complex context, and the findings can add insights into similar educational realities in similar international arenas.

References

ABAYA, J. & NORMORE, A. (2014) The contextual impact on school leadership in Kenya and need for trust formation, *Planning and Changing,* 45(3/4), pp. 285-310.

AHUMADA, L., GALDAMES, S. & CLARKE, S. (2015) Understanding leadership in schools facing challenging circumstances: A Chilean case study, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 19(3), pp. 264-279. DOI: 10.1080/13603124.2015.1048744

ALSTON, J. A. (2000) Climbing hills and mountains: Black females making it to the superintendency, in C. C. BRUNNER (Ed.), *Sacred Dreams: Women and the superintendency* (Albany: State University of New York Press), pp. 79-90.

ALTINKURT, Y. & YILMAZ, K. (2012) Being a female school administrator in Turkey: Views of teachers and administrators, *Energy Education Science and Technology Part B: Social and Educational Studies*, 4(4), pp. 2227-2238.

ARAR, K. (2014) Female supervisors of Arab school education in Israel, *Gender and Education*, 26(4), pp. 414-431.

ARAR, K. (2018) Female Arab faculty staff in the Israeli academy: Challenges and coping strategies, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 62, pp. 313-321.

ARAR, K. & ABRAMOVITZ, R. (2013) Teachers' attitudes toward the appointment of women as school leaders: The case of the Arab education system in Israel, *Management in Education*, 27(1), pp. 32-38.

ARAR, K., ÖRÜCÜ, D. & AK KÜÇÜKÇAYIR, G. (2018) Culturally relevant school leadership for Syrian refugee students in challenging circumstances, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143218775430.

ARAR, K., SHAPIRA, T., AZAIZA, F. & HERTZ-LAZAROWITZ, R. (2013) *Arab Women in Management and Leadership: Stories from Israel* (Switzerland: Springer).

ASKEROV, A. (2017) Effects of the Syrian civil war on children: Socio-psychological effects, in S. ABULFEZ, P. SONMEZ, F. DEMIRBAS, S. UNVER & M. AKBAB (Eds), I*nternational Migration and Children-Uluslararasi Göç ve Çocuklar* (London, UK: Conference Series by Transnational Press), pp. 159-163.

AVOLIO, B. J. (2007) Promoting more integrative strategies for leadership theory-building, *American Psychologist*, 62(1), p. 25.

BANKS, J. A. (2017) *Citizenship Education and Global Migration: Implications for theory, research and teaching* (New York, NY: American Educational Research Association).

BEACHUM, F. (2011) Culturally relevant leadership for complex 21st century school contexts, in F. W. ENGLISH (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Educational Leadership: Advances in theory, research, and practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage), pp. 27-35.

BLACKMORE, J. (1999) *Troubling Women: Feminism, leadership, and educational change* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press).

BLACKMORE, J. (2010) Preparing leaders to work with emotions in culturally diverse educational communities, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(5), pp. 642-658.

BLACKMORE, J. (2013) A feminist critical perspective on educational leadership, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 16(2), pp. 139-154.

BROOKS, J., NORMORE, A. & WILKINSON, W. (2017) School leadership, social justice and immigration: Examining, exploring and extending two frameworks, *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(1), pp. 3-26.

BROOKS, J. S. & SUTHERLAND, I. E. (2014) Educational leadership in the Philippines: Principals' perspectives on problems and possibilities for change, *Planning and Changing*, 45(3/4), pp. 339-355.

BROWN, E. L. & KRASTEVA, A. (Eds) (2013) *Migrants and Refugees: Equitable education for displaced populations* (USA: Information Age Publishing).

BUSH, T., JOUBERT, R., KIGGUNDU, E. & VAN ROOYEN, J. (2010) Managing teaching and learning in South African schools, *International Journal of Educational Development*, 30(2), pp. 162-168.

CRAWFORD, M. (2007) Rationality and emotion in primary school leadership: An exploration of key themes, *Educational Review*, 59(1), pp. 87-98.

CRESWELL, J. W. (2013) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage).

CULBERTSON, S. & CONSTANT, L. (2015) *Education of Syrian Refugee Children: Managing the crisis in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation).

CELIKTEN, M. (2005) A perspective on women principals in Turkey, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 8(3), pp. 207-221.

DALLAL, Y. M. (2016) Saving Syria's lost generation through education, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 15(3), pp. 107-114.

DINÇER, O. B., FEDERICI, V., FERRIS, E., KARACA, S., KIRIŞCI, K. & ÇARMIKLI, E. Ö. (2013) *Turkey and Syrian Refugees: The limits of hospitality* (Turkey: International Strategic Research Organization (USAK)).

DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR MIGRATION MANAGEMENT. (2016) *Immigration Report Turkey 2016*. Retrieved 3rd August 2018, from: http://www.goc.gov.tr /files/files/ 2016_goc_ raporu_.pdf.

DRYDEN-PETERSON, S. (2016) Refugee education in countries of first asylum: Breaking open the black box of pre-resettlement experiences, *Theory and Research in Education*, 14(2), pp. 131-148.

EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE. (2017) *Education Monitor Report*. Retrieved 25th June 2018, from: http://www.egi timreformugirisimi.org/egitim-izleme-raporu-2016-17/.

FRAISE, N. & BROOKS, J. (2015) Toward a theory of culturally relevant leadership for school–community culture, *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 17(1), pp. 6-21.

GILLETT, J., CLARKE, S. & O'DONOGHUE, T. (2016) Leading schools facing challenging circumstances: Some insights from Western Australia, *Issues in Educational Research*, 26(4), pp. 592-603. Retrieved 2nd August 2018, from: http://www.iier.org.au/iier26/gillett.pdf.

GOH, J. W. P. (2009) Parallel leadership in an 'unparallel' world—cultural constraints on the transferability of Western educational leadership theories across cultures, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 12(4), 319-345.

GROGAN, M. & SHAKESHAFT, C. (2011) *Women and Educational Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass).

HARGREAVES, A. (2005) Educational change takes ages: Life career and generational factors in teachers' emotional responses to educational change, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), pp. 967-983

İÇDUYGU, A. & ŞIMŞEK, D. (2016) Syrian refugees in Turkey: Towards integration policies, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 15(3), pp. 59-69.

JABBAR, S. A. & ZAZA, H. I. (2014) Impact of conflict in Syria on Syrian children at the Zaatari refugee camp in Jordan, *Early Child Development and Care*, 184(9-10), pp. 1507-1530.

JAGGAR, A. M. (1989) Love and knowledge: Emotion in feminist epistemology, *Inquiry*, 32(2), pp. 151-176.

KHALIFA, M., GOODEN, M. & DAVIS, J. (2016) Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature, *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), pp. 1272-1311.

LEWIS, K. M. (2000) When leaders display emotion: How followers respond to negative emotional expression of male and female leaders, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 21(2), pp. 221-234.

LOPEZ, A. (2016) *Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Leadership in Diverse Contexts* (New York, NY: Palgrave).

MARSHALL, C. & ROSSMAN, G. (2011) *Designing Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications).

MCCARTHY, A. T. (2018) Politics of refugee education: Educational administration of the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey, *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 50(3), pp. 223-238. doi:10.1080/00220620.2018.1440541

NORBERG, K. & GROSS, S. J. (2018) *Turbulent Ports in a Storm: The impact of newly arrived students upon schools in Sweden*. Paper presented at the AERA Conference, New York (13-17 April).

OPLATKA, I. (2006) Women in educational administration within developing countries: Towards a new international research agenda, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(6), pp. 604-624.

OPLATKA, I. & ARAR, K. H. (2016) Leadership for social justice and the characteristics of traditional societies: Ponderings on the application of western-grounded models. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 19(3), pp. 352-369.

ÖZDEMIR, S. (2013) *Türk Eğitim Sistemi ve Okul Yönetimi* (Ankara: Seçkin).

SHAPIRA, T., ARAR, K. & AZAIZA, F. (2011) They didn't consider me and no-one even took me into account: Female school principals in the Arab education system in Israel, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 39(1), pp. 25-43.

ŞIRIN, S. R. & SIRIN, L. R. (2015) *The Educational and Mental Health Needs of Syrian Refugee Children* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute).

TAMER, M. G. (2017) Geçici koruma kapsamındaki Suriyeli çocukların Trabzon devlet okullarındaki durumu, *Göç Dergisi*, 4(2), pp. 119-152.

TAŞTAN, C. & ÇELIK, Z. (2017) *The Education of Syrian Children in Turkey: Challenges and recommendations* (Ankara: Eğitim-Bir-Sen Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi).

THOMAS, M. (2016) *Why Education Is So Important for Refugees Around the World*. Retrieved 31st July 2018, from: https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/the-iceberg-that-will-sink-our-kids/.

UNHRC. (2017) *Figures at a Glance Statistical Yearbooks*. Retrieved 12th October 2017, from: http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

WAITE, D. (2016) The where and what of education today: A leadership perspective, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 19(1), pp. 101-109.

YIN, R. K. (2011) *Case Study Research: Design and methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage).

ZEMBYLAS, M. & IASONOS, S. (2016) The entanglement of leadership styles and social justice leadership: A case study from Cyprus, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 15(3), pp. 297-322.