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## DEVELOPING THE SOCIAL COHESION OF SYRIAN CHILDREN TO THE WORLD

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### Abstract

When schools are interrupted, closed or destroyed, that essential core function ceases. That happened to children in Syria. This civil war caused millions of Syrian children to move to the Turkish border. In addition, the Syrian school system has been severely damaged since 2011 and its schools could not fulfill one of its most important responsibilities: contributing to the development of social cohesion among students. Turkey is hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees of any country, with an estimated population of over 2,5 million registered refugees (as well as another 2,5 million unregistered refugees) of Syrians within its borders. Ahmet Davutoglu, ex-prime minister of Turkey, stated in his/her speech at the meeting of the United Nations that 540,000 Syrian children in Turkey are of school age and 400,000 more will reach school age in next year. The paper discusses how to build awareness on the critical importance of social cohesion for peaceful coexistence, how to promote cultural rights, cultural diversity, exercise of freedom of religion and belief, respect for minorities and differences within Turkish society and how to teach common values through sharing ideas about social and historical perspectives to foster social cohesion.

### Keywords

Pedagogy and migration, border policy, social cohesion

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## Introduction

There are various problems affecting large masses in almost every part of the world we live in, and these problems do not only affect their places or regions, but also the whole world. Recently, immigration and immigrants are among the main issues that have influenced the world agenda. Immigrants bring about problems of social acceptance and cohesion. Therefore, migration and immigration issues have an important place in the world agenda.

## Migration

According to Fichter, migration can be divided into two groups as “forced migration and voluntary migration” (Fichter 1969, 78). Forced migration is caused by negative situations in the country beyond the control of individuals. Terrorism, armed conflicts, civil war and natural disasters in the country can be listed among the factors that cause forced migration. The voluntary migration can be expressed that individuals leave their country with their own wishes to achieve a better life, education and work.

## Turkey and Migration

Turkey carries a central feature of the transition between countries due to its geographical location. Especially since the recent years, Turkey has been both a transit country and country of migration for migrants. Migration seeing as the world problem is also known to be on the agenda of Turkey.

With the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Syrian citizens have begun to migrate to Turkey and this migration has been continuing to increase. Comparing with her neighbors and European countries, Turkey is country where Syrian citizens migrates the most.

## Problems Caused by Migration

Both individuals migrating and countries being emigrated are influenced by migrations. It is known that

this situation in which mutual interaction is experienced may have good and bad consequences. Immigrants are confronted with a new culture and a new state structure in the country where they settled. This new culture and state structure causes immigrants to experience various difficulties in their lives and make behavior changes. Similarly, the countries being emigrated has to make and implement policies for the socialization of the immigrants it hosts. It is accepted that ensuring the social cohesion of immigrants, the difficulties brought about by multiculturalism, employment and education of immigrants are among the problems created by migration. These problems affect both the immigrants and the citizens of the country being emigrated. Achieving social cohesion, which can be seen as the first step of these problems, can be considered as a starting point for the solution of other problems.

The below research questions will be discussed at the article:

1. How to build awareness on the critical importance of social cohesion for peaceful coexistence?
2. How to promote cultural rights, cultural diversity, exercise of freedom of religion and belief, respect for minorities and differences within Turkish society?
3. How to teach common values through sharing ideas about social and historical perspectives to foster social cohesion?

## The importance of social cohesion for society

### Cohesion

Cohesion is expressed as “the action or fact of forming a united whole”<sup>1</sup> in the Oxford dictionary. The positive reaction of the individual to his/her inner demands and the demands of the environment he lives with can be expressed as cohesion (Napoli, Kilbride and Tebbs 1992, 43). The behaviors of the individual are shaped according to his/her environment and experiences and a behavior developed by the individual

1. “Cohesion”, accessed June 15, 2019. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>.

cause later behaviors. It is possible that interactions resulting from communication with people in the living environment may lead to changes in the individual's behavior (Akert, Aronson and Wilson 2010, 98). Cohesion is an important factor in the development of social relations in the society we are in. One of the reasons we have been studying for many years is to adapt to the society and the constantly developing world.

The individual needs to develop himself in order to adapt to the society. If the individual tries to learn the culture of the society he is in, habits and desires of individuals, he can develop a healthy cohesion against his/her environment. In addition, it can be said that the individual will develop appropriate behaviors, if individual evaluates that his/her life will change positively and his/her desires will be fulfilled when showing the cohesion expected from him.

### **Social Development**

We stated that an individual needs to develop himself in order to show a healthy cohesion in the environment he lives in. Therefore, it is useful to talk about social development. It can be defined as social development that the development of behaviors similar or appropriate to the behaviors of the society in which the individual lives. Social development is a process that continues until the end of an individual's life. Social development is influenced by the society in which the individual lives, the education received by the individual and the personal abilities of the individual. Individual who can realize his/her social development, increases his/her skills and can overcome the cohesion obstacles that he will encounter in the society he lives (Antia Kreimeyer 1988, 329).

### **Social Cohesion**

Individuals form a society coming together and make a division of labor in order to achieve certain goals as a society. Therefore, individuals prefer to live in common with other individuals in order to achieve their goals easily. The point that draws attention here; individuals prefer environments where their own de-

sires are met and their ideas are adopted by other people (Atkinson et al. 1999, 76). It can be said that the social cohesion of the individual, whose demands are met and whose thoughts are adopted, will develop in a positive way with the society in which he lives. Accommodation, education, health and communication are services that individuals need. In this context, it can be said that the concept of social cohesion can be evaluated within the scope of deficiencies in social life.

Social cohesion, which is one of the most important problems experienced by immigrants, can be expressed as an individual's ability to establish healthy and good relations with the society in which he lives. It is interpreted as social cohesion that immigrants can live their own culture and at the same time learn and apply the culture of the country they migrate.

The individual's travel abroad for various reasons causes the cultural environment in which he is accustomed to change and the individual experiences cohesion problems in the country where he goes. Similarly, an individual returning from abroad may have difficulties in achieving social cohesion to society. Many studies have been done related to social cohesion of Syrian immigrants to Turkey and it was learned that Turkish people and Syrian immigrants have problems because of their language, lifestyle and cultural differences. It is possible to say that not being able to speak the language of the new country and cultural differences negatively affect social cohesion.

The acceptance of the immigrants to a country by the people of the country they migrate can be considered as the most important element of their social cohesion. In interviews with Syrian immigrants, it is understood they interact better with the people living in the provinces of the border with Turkey. However, the interaction decreases while progressing toward western Turkey and it is stated that there is a problem in social cohesion. In order to achieve social cohesion, immigrants must first be accepted by the citizens of the country being emigrated. As a matter of fact, Syrian immigrants state that Turkish society must accept immigrants before they can adapt to the Turkish society (Yıldırım alp, İslamoğlu and İyem 2017, 15).

## Social Cohesion and Education

The immigration caused by the uncertain situation in Syria has negatively affected the education process of Syrian citizens in the education age. Longer duration of presence in Turkey of Syrian citizens increases the importance of education. It can be thought that the participation of Syrian children and youth in education will accelerate the social cohesion of Turkish society.

Social cohesion requires a bi-directional process that can be realized mutually. In Turkey, researches have been made to develop the social cohesion of Syrian immigrants to Turkey. However, there are some arguments about the social cohesion of immigrants to Turkish society is not realized at a high level.

Especially in recent years, a system in which Syrian migrants are actively involved in education has been tried to be established. In Turkey, education is accepted an important factor in achieving social cohesion and it is observed that the practices in which immigrants are introduced into the Turkish education system. In addition, individuals who are educators (teacher) among immigrants are appointed as teachers of immigrant students in schools.

In their study in Turkey, Ergin and Ermağan state that “foreign students (immigrant and minority) who have a high level of friendship cohesion are able to adapt to the class more easily” (Ergin and Ermağan 2011, 1760). In the same study, it was found that there was a relationship between school achievement and cohesion to class as well (*ibidem*). According to the study (*ibidem*), it can be said that there is a relationship between social cohesion and education.

Although the level of education is high and their awareness is more advanced, it can be seen that immigrants studying at university also have difficulties in social cohesion. Immigrants who are university students may face problems such as being a member of a group operating in the university and adapting to the city and its environment.

In Turkey, the Council of Higher Education has carried out several initiatives to ensure social cohesion of the Syrian immigrant youth. Some decisions taken by the Council of Higher Education are as follows:

- Syrian students are provided to register as a special student at the universities located in provinces on the border with Syria and Turkey (Seydi 2014, 21).
- It was decided that students wouldn't pay tuition fees (*ibidem*).
- Students starting university in Syria will be able to transfer to universities in Turkey (Sezgin and Yolcu 2016, 430).

Furthermore, Syrian university students are provided with housing and scholarship opportunities in state dormitories during their education. With these decisions, it can be assumed that the most important factor in the social cohesion process of Syrian immigrants is education and Turkish government is aware of this.

## Social Cohesion and Language

According to Tomlinson, “the educational process, school curriculum, language acquisition difficulties and lack of self-confidence” (Tomlinson 1982, 160) are among the factors affecting the social cohesion of the child. Besides, communication plays an important role in achieving social cohesion. A good communication can occur when the receiver and the sender use the same language. Not knowing the language of the country being migrated is another obstacle for the social cohesion of the immigrants. For this reason, it is important to teach to immigrants the language of the country being migrated. In order to achieve social cohesion, it may be useful to provide language courses to adult Syrians and to teach local language to immigrant students in schools.

It can be said that learning the language of the country being migrated is an important factor in ensuring social cohesion. Syrian immigrants state that they are inadequate in adapting to Turkish society and that this is because they do not know Turkish language very well. Due to language differences, immigrants spend their daily lives with other immigrants and thus, they do not break with their own culture. However, this situation causes them not to merge with Turkish culture. The language problem has to be solved in order for immigrants to spend more time with the people of the new country.

There are researches that reveal communication with the local population is the biggest problem that Syrian students in Turkey experience about social cohesion. It is seen that Syrian students do not communicate with local people because they do not speak Turkish.

Teaching the culture of the new country with planned programs, introducing the rules in the country and providing employment opportunities can be considered as part of the education and these initiatives may contribute to the rapid development of social cohesion of immigrants with the new community.

### **Cultural Rights, cultural diversity, religious freedom and the exercise of freedom of belief, respect and differences to minorities**

Turkey hosts the citizens of different countries due to take migration. It can be seen that diversifying society constitutes different cultures, religions and beliefs in the country. It can be said that the increase of ethnic and religious differences leads to the increase of cultural differences. Differentiation in religion, belief and culture can be expressed as multiculturalism. Turkey has been known to host the people with different cultures, different religious and national identity. For this reason, it can be said that it comes into prominence as a problem that these differences live together.

### **Cultural Right**

Culture is the values that shape the identities of individuals, learned, accepted and shared by a community and developed after many years (Tayeb 1992, 119). The fact that individuals have different cultures causes them to have different beliefs and values. In this case, it is certain that individuals with different cultures will have different behaviors (Earley and Mosakowski 2014, 142).

Cultural rights are that society continues the existing culture of the society, preserving its language, and transferring its culture and language to future generations. It must be ensured that individuals who settle in other countries voluntarily or compulsorily maintain their human rights. Turkey is between the countries

approving “The United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” came into force on January 3, 1976. With this Convention, Member States are committed to the exercise of the cultural rights of all individuals in their countries.

With this covenant, it can be assessed that the regulation or maintenance of cultural rights requires state intervention. In international documents and agreements, it is emphasized that the state should ensure that the rights are protected or exercised. It is imperative for democratic societies that minorities, immigrants, etc. all kinds of differences living in the country is being recognized and enabled them to express themselves in society. The state may also need to invest in providing cultural rights.

It can be thought that culture can be transferred to future generations through language. Thus, according to a 4771 law in 2002 in Turkey,<sup>2</sup> the facility of broadcasting in different languages and dialects used in cultural life were introduced in television and radio.

### **Multiculturalism**

Changes in societies are observed with the effect of both globalization and migration. This has caused cultural interactions between countries and between people and It has made multicultural life compulsory in countries. In the Oxford dictionary, multiculturalism is defined as “the existence of several different cultural or ethnic groups in a society”.<sup>3</sup> Multiculturalism is to be aware of language, religion, race, gender, age, social class, ethnicity, disability and other cultural values (APA 2002, 13). In the multicultural society, interactions occur between the culture of the new society and the ethnic culture.

We have already mentioned that language is an important factor in ensuring social cohesion of immigrants to the society they migrate to. In particular, children of migrant families face problems in adapting to society due to differences in language and experience. Due to the structure with Turkey’s multicultural soci-

2. “4771 Law”, accessed June 20, 2019, <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2002/08/20020809.htm>.

3. “Multiculturalism”, accessed June 15, 2019. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>.



ety, it is necessity that immigrants adopt the language of the host country as well as their native language.

It can be expressed as multiculturalism that an individual learn the new culture and live in cohesion with this new culture without losing the cultural identity of the individual (Gül and Kolb 2009, 139). There are differences in the values, thinking styles, ways of living, public and political practices of all societies in the world. However, multiculturalism requires that these differences coexist equally. In short, eliminating inequality and ensuring social equality of differences can be seen as an important factor in the creation of a multicultural society.

Individual development of individuals is also considered important for the formation of a multicultural society. Living in a multicultural society is effective both in the social and educational life of the individual. Education is the right of individuals and it is recognized that no individual should be discriminated against in education. According to the universal principles adopted in education, all individuals have the right to receive education regardless of their language, origin and gender. Exclusion of children from minority or immigrant positions in a country will reduce their learning capacity and make learning difficult.

In multicultural societies, education programs should be prepared and implemented in a way that will create interest for individuals learning about other cultures (Parekh 2000, 224). In a society of more than one culture, it can be considered that the provision of educational services only in the dominant (host) language is incompatible with multicultural understanding. Education and teaching staff in the country should be aware of the importance of multicultural education (Gay 2019, 27). Multicultural education should be provided to children in order to live in cohesion in countries with different cultures.

It can be said that families, who are the first individuals to provide education to their children, have an important place in the process of multicultural education and have responsibilities (Geel and Vedder 2011, 188). This situation can be evaluated as follows: In countries where a multicultural society exists, families should always be involved in the education process with the understanding of lifelong learning and families should be brought together with other minority or

immigrant individuals in the country. In this case, it can be said that adults with different cultures can also interact with each other.

### **Respect for Differences (Education)**

Countries are increasingly becoming societies where different cultures and individuals of different races who speak different languages try to live together. Countries form social associations due to various reasons, especially the economy and this situation requires individuals with different languages and cultures to live with tolerance towards each other. Individuals with different characteristics should be taught to meet in a common culture and to respect the differences in order to live together in cohesion. A common culture should be created for individuals with different characteristics to live together in cohesion and these individuals should be taught the necessity to respect differences. It can be assumed that culture is important at this point and that a common culture that all individuals can share in multicultural societies should be developed.

Prejudice and discrimination can be considered as obstacles to the peaceful life of individuals with different characteristics. Individuals classify other individuals according to their appearance, gender, ethnicity and religious beliefs sometimes exclude individuals they do not feel close to them. Similarly, children mimic their parents' behavior. It can be said that children develop negative behaviors towards other individuals who are different from them. Mass media can also be shown as another igniter of these behaviors developed by adults and children against other individuals. The representation of the races or individuals targeted in television, internet or radio programs in a different way than they may be, may cause children to be prejudiced against these communities and develop negative behaviors. In order to prevent all these problems, it appears that it is necessary to teach respect education to the differences in schools. With this education, it must be intended that children should first get to know themselves and then the other individuals they live with. In addition to individual differences, differences in family and community cultures should also be taught to children. In this way, children of the

next generation can avoid being prejudiced against other individuals or societies.

The selection of the teaching environment, the determination and use of teaching materials are very important in the implementation of the respect to differences education. The educational environment should be an environment in which children can reveal their positive identities and develop empathy for differences (Topçubaşı 2016, 35). Teaching environments should be prepared for children to discover both their personal characteristics and the personal characteristics of other children (Derman-Sparks and The A.B.C. Task Force 1998, 87). Teachers need to have a high level of awareness in the respect to differences education. Negative behaviors of students from different cultures in the same classroom and school are immediately prevented by teachers. Thus, the distinction between children will be prevented.

Education environments where the respect to differences education will be applied should have the following characteristics (KEDV 2006, 30):

- Educational environments designed to the respect to differences education should have features that are appropriate to the developmental characteristics of children, safe, multi-purpose, developing and supporting creativity and problem-solving skills.
- The institutions that will provide the respect to differences education should take into account the differences of all kinds of individuals and organize the educational environments for children in need of special education. For example, education environments should be an environment that children with disabilities can easily benefit from.

The respect to differences education should provide an educational environment and program that teaches children the different cultures they live together. The materials and books to be used in the courses should be selected to show the differences in the social environment of the child. The presence of picture boards that reflect various cultures within the school and in the classroom can create awareness among children. It can be evaluated that children will be created awareness against different culture by researching a culture that

is different from their own culture and presenting the discovered culture to other students in the classroom.

### **The importance of common values in social cohesion**

We stated that it is important to ensure the social cohesion of societies from different cultures so that they can live together. In order to achieve social cohesion, it is necessary to establish a common culture together with common values.

Value is an important concept that an individual acquires during his/her life which affects the formation of his/her behaviors (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun 2011, 44). It can be said that value is the regulating factor for showing the desired behaviors in the relationship of the individual with his/her environment (Kluckhohn 1951, 392). In this context, value plays an important role in ensuring the individual's cohesion to the society in which he lives. Hitlin and Piliavin expressed the concept of value as the beliefs obtained by analyzing the events experienced by individuals (Hitlin and Piliavin 2004, 382). According to the explanations, it can be said that the values learned are effective on the behaviors of individuals. It can be stated that values occur and are learned as a result of the interactions and communication of individuals in society (Dewey 1939, 22).

The structures of societies are changing due to migrations. Individuals with different historical and social backgrounds form a new society and have to live together. Individuals in this new society need to learn and apply common values in order to live in cohesion. Social values can be learned at anytime and anywhere in life, but it is clear that schools have great responsibilities in teaching common values.

### **Teaching common values: Education of Values**

In education, the reflection of the values accepted in society is seen as education of values. Moral, social, political, cultural and ethical values should be evaluated as common values and these values should be

gained to individuals through education (Cheng, Lee and Lo 2006, 287). Education of values should not be considered in the sense of teaching individuals different beliefs, cultures and habits. It can be expressed as education of values that in addition to their own beliefs and values, students learn the needs of the society and learn to be tolerant towards other individuals. In education of values, it is emphasized the necessity of gaining material and moral values to individuals in order to create common consciousness in society. Education of values is a type of education that maintains its existence continuously because it provides individual and social development. Education of values can be examined under two headings as citizenship and moral education.

### Citizenship Education

The individual needs to go through a specific education to ensure his/her cohesion to society which he lives in, rules and organizations in society. This education is provided to the individual through citizenship education. The issue that stands out in citizenship education is the harmonization of the relationship between the individual and the state. Citizenship education should include issues such as justice, patriotism, democracy and equality since the individual has responsibilities to the state and the state to the individual (Kirschenbaum 1995, 775).

In order to create common values in society, it is important to include citizenship courses in the curriculum. With this course, students can be taught their responsibilities towards other individuals in society and the state. With this education, it can be seen that individuals will gain awareness of being fair and trusting each other.

### Moral Education

Morality is a concept used in all societies. Every society has its own moral values. Moral values play an important role in the individual's cohesion to society.

Moral education is a process that starts in the family and continues in school. Moral education aims

to teach individuals the moral values of society and develop appropriate behaviors with these values (*ibidem*). Moral education emerges as a necessity of social life and social values gain importance in this education rather than individual values. In this context, curricula should take into account the moral values of society.

It can be said that the behaviors of all employees, especially teachers, are effective in the moral education of the students. Moral education should not be considered as a lesson. This education should be seen as consistent in the behavior of teachers and other employees, and fairness in reward and punishment practices. Thus, it can be said that students who identify these behaviors and practices will develop their moral development positively.

Education of values aims to match the thoughts, behaviors and desires of individuals with the society in which they live. Common values that will ensure social cohesion should be taught systematically to individuals. Schools are responsible for conveying the values of the society to which they belong to students. The primary responsibility for the transfer task is the teachers. Teachers try to create common values in students by explaining the values of the society and the expectations of the society from them. Common values should be tried to be introduced to students not only formally in schools but also informally outside the school. It can be thought that the proverbs, historical events, cultural introductions, poems written by the poets of the society may be effective in teaching the common values. Participation of students in social, artistic and sports activities together can be considered to be effective in developing common values.

Values affect individuals' personalities, behaviors and ways of thinking. Therefore, education of values should not be a program that informs. Applying the value that the student has learned during his/her life should be the aim of the values education.

### Conclusion

In order to ensure social cohesion, it is necessary to convey the detailed information about what happened in Syria to the citizens of the migrated countries and to show empathy to understand the situation of the



immigrants. It is estimated that Syrian migrants tend to stay in the country they are migrating, and they will not want to return to their countries even if the war ends in Syria (Sirkeci 2017, 33). Therefore, it is necessary to develop measures related to the cohesion of Syrian immigrants.

It is understood that services such as education, health and employment are important for the realizing of social cohesion process rapidly and it should be ensured that immigrant-minority communities can benefit from these services. There are various demands from Turkey of Syrian immigrants. Increasing the educational opportunities offered to them and the access of all immigrant children to education are among these demands.

According to research carried out in Turkey and other countries, it is seen that the social cohesion of the Syrian immigrants in the countries they live in is not at the desired level. In order to ensure the social cohesion of immigrants to the new society they have joined, policies need to be developed to help them fuse in both cultures. It is accepted that education is an important factor for achieving social cohesion and it can be said that migrants must participate in the education system of the country where they live. The educational environment and programs should be prepared in a way that does not ignore the religious and ethnic identity of immigrants. In particular, it can be thought that the arrangements that will enable the participation of young Syrian immigrants in cultural, artistic and sports activities in the country being migrated may be effective in ensuring social cohesion.

It is seen that immigrants do not communicate much with the local people because they do not know or can't learn the language of the country being migrated. On the other hand, immigrants who try to communicate with the local people have problems because they do not know the language of the country being migrated. Due to the language problem, it is seen that immigrants try not to communicate with local people in order to avoid problems. It can be said that the interaction of immigrants with decreased communication with local people may be affected negatively. Thus, the weakening or failure of the social cohesion process can be mentioned.

Schools are the best places to socialize. In addition, schools can be regarded as environments where individuals are taught common values and different cultures. For this reason, schools have great responsibilities in ensuring the social cohesion of immigrants or minorities and attaining common values. Education should be considered as the most important factor in ensuring social cohesion and education policies for immigrants should be developed and implemented rapidly.

Researches show that one of the most important problems faced by Syrian migrants is the problems faced by Syrian children in accessing education. UNICEF datas indicate that many of the Syrians children cannot go to school in Turkey. The report prepared by AFAD, it appears that the education level of Syrian refugees who migrated to Turkey in general are at low levels.<sup>4</sup> In interviews with Syrian immigrant parents, it is understood that for social cohesion, Syrian immigrant parents are aware of that their children should study in Turkish schools. Even if there are some problems in education services, it is known by Syrian refugees that education is important in the cohesion process and they do not want their children to be excluded from the education system.

All individuals in the society should be taught the material and moral values that connect individuals each other in the society and provide a peaceful society. It can be assumed that teaching these values is the responsibility of education. Individuals from different cultures who go through the same education process will have the opportunity to get to know each other closely and gain common values. It can be said that individuals gathered around common values will live in cohesion and tolerance to each other.

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