



Original article

Bridging the Gap: Teachers' Challenges and Solution Strategies in Immigrant Student Education

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Abstract

The social integration and academic achievement of immigrant students significantly influence not only their individual futures but also their successful integration into the host society. It becomes essential for teachers and educational institutions to develop effective strategies for immigrant students to ensure the inclusivity and sustainability of the education system. In this context, the aim of this study is to identify the challenges faced by teachers in the education of immigrant students and to develop solution proposals for these challenges. The study employed phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods. The study group consisted of 16 teachers working in public schools located in the Esenyurt district of İstanbul. Participants were selected using criterion sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using content analysis. The findings revealed that teachers encountered difficulties related to lesson planning and implementation, language barriers, cultural differences, individual learning needs, social adaptation to the classroom and school environment, as well as communication with parents. In the research, teachers proposed solutions aimed at enhancing social cohesion, improving the language skills and academic performance of immigrant students, strengthening cooperation with families, and promoting respect for cultural diversity. Based on the research findings, a set of recommendations has been presented to enhance the educational experiences of foreign students who have migrated and to minimize the challenges encountered by teachers.

Keywords: Migration, Immigrant Student, Immigrant Student Education, Teacher

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INTRODUCTION

Migration emerges as a significant phenomenon deeply rooted in human history, leading to profound societal, economic, and political transformations. Individuals and communities tend to relocate for various reasons; this mobility sometimes results from personal choice and, at other times, from compelling factors such as war, natural disasters, or political oppression (Özkan, 2019). Historically, Türkiye has been positioned at the center of migration movements, particularly serving as a refuge for individuals migrating from different regions following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Kalaycı, 2017). In the contemporary period, political instability, wars, and economic challenges in neighboring countries have increasingly intensified migration flows towards Türkiye (Yurdakul & Tok, 2018). According to the 2024-2025 data from the Presidency of Migration Management, there are 4 425 230 foreign nationals with legal residence status in Türkiye. A significant portion of this population consists of 1 019 399 individuals of school age (5-18 years) under temporary protection (Presidency of Migration Management, 2025). These figures clearly demonstrate the growing presence of foreign students in Turkish schools. However, the often sudden and unplanned nature of these migration movements brings along various challenges within the education system, ranging from language barriers to issues of cultural adaptation.

In multicultural societies, immigrant and refugee education is shaped by two dominant perspectives- the assimilation approach, which promotes the absorption of minority cultures into the dominant one (Taylor & Toohey, 1998), and the multiculturalism approach, which values cultural diversity and encourages its contribution to societal enrichment (Moghaddam & Solliday, 1991). One of the most persistent challenges in this context is language, as linguistic barriers often hinder immigrant and refugee students' academic achievement and social integration (Şeker & Aslan, 2014). Upon arrival, these students strive to preserve their cultural identity while adapting to the dominant culture- a process of acculturation that education systems must carefully mediate (Cırık, 2008). Beyond linguistic and cultural adaptation, the educational background and attitudes of immigrant families also play a crucial role in shaping students' school experiences. The value placed on education in the country of origin significantly influences immigrant children's schooling and adjustment (Giani, 2006). Moreover, parents' educational attainment affects the importance they attribute to their children's education (Lee, 2011). In addition, the quality of education that immigrant children receive has a direct impact on their motivation, school attendance, and long-term academic persistence (Giani, 2006). Teachers play a critical role in this process; their attitudes toward students with language difficulties significantly shape these learners' sense of belonging and participation in school (Karabenick & Noda, 2004). However, despite extensive research on multicultural education, there remains a notable gap regarding how teachers themselves experience and navigate these challenges, particularly within the Turkish

educational context, where migration has reached unprecedented levels. Addressing this gap is essential for developing inclusive, evidence-based, and culturally responsive pedagogical strategies.

Given this background, the growing diversity within Turkish classrooms necessitates a deeper understanding of how teachers perceive and respond to the educational needs of migrant students. The demographic changes and challenges brought about by increasing migration movements have significantly impacted the Turkish education system, necessitating the reconsideration of both educational policies and practices. Ensuring social integration and enhancing the academic achievement of foreign students at school age not only influence the individual futures of these students but also play a crucial role in broader societal integration. Accordingly, it can be asserted that the development of effective strategies by teachers and educational institutions for migrant students is essential for the inclusiveness and sustainability of the education system. In this context, the present study aims to address the challenges encountered by teachers in the education process of foreign students who have migrated to Türkiye, as well as the proposed solutions to these challenges. The study seeks to contribute to both educational policy and practice by focusing on teachers' experiences, aiming to understand the impacts of migration on the education system and to develop effective and sustainable solutions in this field. Within this framework, the study seeks to answer the following sub-problems:

- (1) What are the challenges faced by teachers in the education of foreign students who have migrated?
- (2) What are the teachers' proposed solutions to the challenges encountered in the education of foreign students who have migrated?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Concept of Migration

Migration is broadly understood as the movement of individuals or communities seeking improved living conditions (Özer, 2004). It is often driven by factors such as natural disasters, economic hardship, or socio-political pressures, compelling people to relocate (Dönmez Kara, 2015). The International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2013) defines it as the movement of individuals or groups across international or internal borders. More comprehensively, migration encompasses geographical, social, and cultural displacement due to economic, political, ecological, or personal factors, and may be temporary or permanent in nature (Yalçın, 2004). Migration, a historically persistent phenomenon, has produced multifaceted impacts on both individuals and host communities (Ekici & Tuncel, 2016). In the contemporary context, it remains a critical global and national issue, particularly for Türkiye. Factors such as war, natural disasters, political oppression, and economic hardship continue to drive population movements, posing significant challenges- especially for developing countries (Demir, 2020).

Types of Migration

Migration is a multifaceted phenomenon with sociological, economic, cultural, psychological, and legal dimensions, producing lasting effects on both migrants and host communities. Understanding these impacts necessitates an analysis of migration's causes, processes, and the socio-cultural characteristics of destination regions (Ekici & Tuncel, 2016). As a transformative dynamic, migration influences both individual trajectories and broader societal structures. The following section presents common classifications of migration found in the literature.

Migrations According to their Continuity

According to Mutluer's (2003) classification, migration is categorized as either temporary or permanent based on its continuity. Temporary migration involves residing elsewhere for a limited period before returning and is often termed seasonal or periodic migration (Göktuna Yaylacı, 2016; Orhan & Akpınar, 2018). These movements typically occur in response to labor demands, education, health, or cultural needs (Koçak & Terzi, 2012). In contrast, permanent migration refers to individuals relocating with the intent to settle long-term or permanently, often resulting in significant socio-economic, cultural, and psychological changes (Göktuna Yaylacı, 2016; Koçak & Terzi, 2012). This distinction provides a useful framework for analysing the varying causes and impacts of migration, where temporary migration is usually driven by short-term needs, and permanent migration entails long-lasting transformations in individuals' lives.

Migrations According to the Place of Occurrence

Migration is commonly categorized by geographic scope as either internal or external (Sağlam, 2006). Internal migration involves movement within national borders, typically driven by economic, social, and political factors such as industrialization, regional disparities, and urbanization (Özer, 2004). Rural-to-urban migration intensifies population density in urban centers, placing pressure on infrastructure, housing, and social services. Additional drivers include population growth, reduced agricultural productivity, climate change, and limited living space (Çoştan, 2020). External migration refers to the relocation of individuals across national borders (Barışık, 2020). This process may be motivated by climate change, economic hardship, political instability, wars, educational opportunities, brain drain, or retirement. Furthermore, political unrest, human rights violations, ethnic discrimination, and security concerns also play a significant role in shaping external migration patterns (Tamer, 2020).

Migration According to Formation Process

Migration is also classified according to its formation processes as either forced or voluntary (Çakmak, 2018). Forced migration involves involuntary displacement due to war, natural disasters, exile, political oppression, or social conflict (Zhandilova, 2018). The IOM (2013) defines it as movement driven by threats to individuals' peace, security, and well-being. This form of migration,

often seen as a struggle for survival, occurs without individual consent and is closely associated with concepts such as refugeehood, asylum seeking, and displacement (Adıgüzel, 2018; Barışık, 2020; Çakmak, 2018). In this regard, forced migration entails being compelled to leave one's nation-state under coercion or violence (Altıntaş, 2014).

Voluntary migration involves the relocation of individuals based on personal choice, typically driven by the pursuit of better living conditions, career opportunities, education, and broader freedoms (Barışık, 2020). Key motivations include personal and professional development, access to quality education, and safer environments (Erkan & Erdoğan, 2006). Subcategories such as brain drain, investor migration, retirement, and student migration illustrate the diversity of this type. As Zhandilova (2018) notes, voluntary migration reflects a deliberate effort to improve working and living standards. While it benefits both migrants and host countries- particularly in terms of skilled labor- it may lead to talent loss in countries of origin, underscoring the importance of retention strategies, especially in developing contexts.

The Relationship Between Migration and Education

The relationship between migration and education has become a prominent social concern in the context of globalization. While migration entails the relocation of individuals and families, education serves as a key mechanism for their integration into society. Rising migration flows in recent years have underscored the need for education systems to adapt to growing social diversity (Tanrikulu, 2018). The educational experiences of migrant children influence both their personal development and the social fabric of host communities. Accordingly, policies targeting the education of migrant children benefit not only the migrants themselves but also the broader society (Gün & Yüksel, 2021). Supporting the integration of foreign-born students through inclusive education policies is thus essential for fostering social cohesion and mitigating social tensions.

Effective integration requires educational institutions to implement holistic policies that extend beyond academic outcomes to include social adaptation, supported through collaboration among teachers, families, administrators, and policymakers (Yapıcı & Yapıcı, 2003). For students frequently changing schools due to migration, this transition significantly affects both academic performance and psychosocial well-being (Takır & Özerem, 2019). Detachment from familiar cultural environments may result in emotional and behavioral issues (Sarıkaya, 2014). To mitigate these challenges, schools must adopt inclusive, solution-focused practices. In this regard, ensuring continuity in education plays a vital role in facilitating the adaptation of foreign-born students (Temur & Özalp, 2022).

Migration and education are closely connected processes that shape each other over time. Education is more than academic learning; it is a meeting point for different cultures, values, and identities. When schools create inclusive environments that respect linguistic and cultural diversity, they

help students develop empathy, resilience, and a sense of belonging. Such settings encourage understanding and cooperation among young people from different backgrounds. However, when inclusion is lacking, some students may feel excluded from both learning and social life. The real success of an education system depends on its ability to recognize every student's background, value diversity, and ensure equal participation. In this way, education reflects the challenges of migration while also offering a path toward greater unity and social harmony.

The Education of Immigrant Students in Türkiye

Globalization has intensified migration flows, shaping countries' social, economic, and educational structures. Türkiye, historically a destination for various migration movements, has recently become a refuge for individuals fleeing war, political instability, and economic hardship. Article 42 of the Turkish Constitution guarantees the right to education for all, emphasizing the necessity of inclusive educational policies that consider linguistic and cultural diversity. Accordingly, the integration of undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum-seeking children has become a priority in both national and international education agendas (Başak, 2011). As of 2022, Türkiye hosts over 5 million foreigners, a significant proportion of whom are children (UNHCR, 2022). Large-scale movements, particularly from Syria, have drawn attention to the educational access and social integration of migrant children—one of the most vulnerable groups in terms of physical, psychological, and social well-being (Sinclair, 2001). In response, Türkiye has steadily increased foreign student enrollment and continues to develop inclusive education policies (HBÖGM, 2022).

The Salamanca Statement affirms the right of every child to education and calls for inclusive systems that offer equal opportunities (Dede, 1996). Reflecting this principle, Türkiye granted foreign nationals access to public education in 2014. The Ministry of National Education has since organized in-service training to support inclusive teaching practices (MNE, 2018), while legal frameworks such as Law No. 6458 have secured the educational rights of migrant children. In addition, the PIKTES project, launched in 2016, aims to enhance both the academic and social integration of refugee students within the national education system (PIKTES, 2024).

Taken together, these developments demonstrate that Türkiye has made significant progress toward building an inclusive education system for immigrant students. However, the process of true inclusion extends far beyond the existence of laws and policies. While national frameworks ensure access and equality on paper, the real measure of inclusion lies in what happens within schools and classrooms. Teachers are at the center of this transformation, as they directly shape students' learning experiences, social adaptation, and sense of belonging. Yet, they often face daily challenges such as overcoming language barriers, adapting curricula to diverse needs, and fostering meaningful intercultural communication. The success of inclusion therefore depends not only on institutional

regulations but also on teachers' preparedness, professional support, and capacity to create empathetic and culturally sensitive learning environments.

METHOD

Research Design

In this study, phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, has been preferred. Phenomenology allows individuals to express their understanding, emotions, perspectives, and perceptions regarding a specific phenomenon or concept, and aims to understand how people experience a phenomenon (Rose et al., 1995). Phenomenological research is used to examine phenomena that are frequently encountered in daily life but are not well understood (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this context, phenomenological design has been employed in this study to deeply investigate the challenges faced by teachers in the education of foreign national students who have migrated, as well as the solutions they propose to these challenges. The phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study because it enabled a detailed exploration of teachers' lived experiences in Esenyurt- one of the districts in İstanbul with one of the highest concentrations of foreign students. Given the district's diverse cultural structure, teachers encounter a range of complex and context-dependent challenges that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures or surface-level descriptions. By focusing on individuals' subjective interpretations, the phenomenological design allowed teachers to articulate how they perceive, interpret, and emotionally respond to issues such as language barriers, cultural differences, instructional difficulties, and parent-teacher communication. This approach made it possible to reveal not only the visible challenges but also the underlying meanings teachers attribute to their daily interactions with immigrant students.

Study Group

The study's sample group was determined using the criterion sampling method, which is one of the purposive sampling techniques. This method is used to examine situations that meet specific criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Accordingly, the sample group of the study consisted of 16 teachers working at primary, secondary, and high school levels under the Ministry of National Education in the Esenyurt district of İstanbul. In line with the purpose of the research, several inclusion criteria were established to determine the study group. Teachers were included in the study if they (1) were actively teaching in a public school affiliated with the Ministry of National Education during the data collection period, (2) had at least five foreign national students in their classroom to ensure experience with culturally diverse learning environments, and (3) had a minimum three years of teaching experience in their current school to provide familiarity with the school context. These criteria ensured that the participants had sufficient experience and contextual knowledge to provide meaningful data regarding the research topic. Participants were also reached through the snowball sampling method. In this method, a reference person

related to the topic is identified, and through this person, access to other individuals is provided (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Participant information was expressed using code names to ensure confidentiality. The demographic characteristics of the participants in the study group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participants	Gender	Level of Education	Field of Study	Years of Experience
T1	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Science	8
T2	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Turkish Language	10
T3	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Religious Culture and Ethics	3
T4	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Science	10
T5	Female	Master's Degree	Classroom Teaching	10
T6	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Classroom Teaching	18
T7	Male	Master's Degree	Classroom Teaching	3
T8	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Classroom Teaching	3
T9	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Classroom Teaching	15
T10	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Classroom Teaching	3
T11	Male	Master's Degree	Turkish Language and Literature	15
T12	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Turkish Language and Literature	10
T13	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Physics	14
T14	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Religious Vocational Courses	6
T15	Male	Bachelor's Degree	Religious Vocational Courses	20
T16	Female	Bachelor's Degree	Mathematics	10

As shown in Table 1, the study group consists of 16 teachers, 8 of whom are male and 8 are female. Six of the participating teachers work at the primary school level, while 5 work at the secondary school level and 5 at the high school level. The teachers, who have different areas of expertise, have years of experience ranging from 3 to 20 years.

Data Collection

Before starting the data collection process, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences Research of Yıldız Technical University, with the approval number 2024.09, dated 30.09.2024. Research data were collected through a semi-structured interview form consisting of two sections. The first section gathered participants' personal information, while the

second focused on the challenges encountered by teachers working with foreign national students and their proposed solutions. The form was developed based on a review of relevant literature and expert feedback and finalized following necessary revisions. Interviews were conducted at pre-scheduled times in settings that allowed participants to express themselves comfortably and were audio-recorded with permission. Prior to each interview, participants were informed about the study's purpose, scope, and duration, and assured that participation was voluntary. Written consent was obtained, and participants were informed of their right to skip any questions. To ensure confidentiality, identifying information-including the names of schools- was anonymized, and pseudonyms were used in reporting.

Data Analysis

The data obtained in this study were analysed using content analysis, which is one of the qualitative research techniques. This method involves the systematic coding of data, identification and organization of themes, as well as the clear definition and interpretation of the findings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Content analysis aims to analyze social reality by extracting meanings from written or verbal materials and categorizing these meanings for detailed analysis (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001). In this study, the transcribed texts of the responses to the interview questions were carefully examined by the researchers, and similar responses were grouped under common codes and themes for analysis. During the data analysis process, direct quotes from the participants' responses were included. The findings were interpreted and reported in accordance with the scope of the study, its objectives, and sub-problems.

Validity and Reliability

Ensuring validity and reliability in scientific research is critically important for producing reliable results (Patton, 2002). In this study, a literature review was conducted to enable an in-depth investigation of the research problem, and a semi-structured interview form with open-ended questions was developed accordingly. The content validity of the interview form was ensured through evaluations made by two experts in the field. The experts examined how well each question represented the research problem, and necessary corrections/additions were made based on these evaluations (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, similar studies in literature were reviewed to verify the relevance of the questions to the research problem. The findings obtained from the interviews were presented to the participants after analysis, and the accuracy of the data was confirmed. This process was implemented to enhance the reliability of the findings. The coding process used in data analysis was carried out by researchers, and the consistency among the codes was evaluated in line with expert opinions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The interviews were conducted in an environment where the participants felt comfortable expressing themselves on the days and times they had set. After the interviews were recorded, the data were meticulously transcribed, and the accuracy was verified by the participants. All stages of the research

were documented in detail, ensuring that the study can be replicated by other researchers (Silverman, 2016).

Beyond these procedures, additional steps were taken to enhance the transparency and rigor of the coding and thematic validation process. To strengthen the reliability of the analysis, the researchers independently coded the interview transcripts during the initial phase and later compared their code lists to identify areas of agreement and divergence. Discrepancies were discussed in detail, and a consensus was reached on the final set of codes, contributing to improved inter-coder reliability. Following this, the agreed codes were systematically organized into subthemes and overarching themes through an iterative process. To validate these themes, the researchers revisited the raw data to ensure that each theme accurately represented participants' statements and that no meaningful data segments were omitted. Expert opinions were also sought during the theme development stage, and refinements were made in line with expert feedback to increase conceptual clarity and coherence. Finally, the themes were reviewed through participant confirmation (member checking), allowing participants to verify whether the interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences. This multi-step validation process substantially strengthened trustworthiness and credibility.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study, aimed at identifying the challenges faced by teachers in educating immigrant students and their proposed solutions, are presented in this section in line with the research sub-questions.

Findings Related to the Challenges Faced by Teachers in the Education of Foreign Students with a Migration Background

Under this heading, the teachers' views on the challenges they face in classrooms with foreign students are categorized under the subthemes of "lesson planning and implementation process," "language barriers," "cultural differences," "individual learning needs," "social integration into the class and school," and "relationships with parents." These themes are explained in detail below.

Lesson Planning and Implementation Process

The research revealed that teachers most frequently encounter issues related to students' low levels of readiness, time management, and differences in levels within the classroom during the lesson planning and implementation process. Some participant views on this issue are as follows:

"Normally, there is a specific time frame for the achievement, meaning you have to complete it within that class period. While it is already difficult to complete these achievements with Turkish-speaking children, we must provide more explanations for foreign students, which extends the lesson time. Unfortunately, we cannot finish the achievement within the required time." (T5)

"In the same class, the students' levels can be very different from each other. Each of them has individual learning needs, but it is not possible to attend to all of them at the same time. We can't even finish explaining the topic... To catch up with the curriculum, we are constantly forced to give homework." (T15)

According to the findings derived from the participants' views, the presence of foreign students who have arrived through migration emerges as one of the key factors that complicates teachers' management of classroom processes. Teachers face significant challenges in trying to balance the necessity of completing the curriculum within the designated time frame and the language and academic deficiencies of foreign students. Particularly due to the language barrier, as these students require more explanation and support to understand the topics, it is evident that teachers encounter problems related to the extension of lesson durations and completing the achievements within the allocated time.

Language Barriers

It has been observed that teachers with foreign students in their classrooms experience the most issues related to communication barriers, particularly concerning understanding and comprehension. In this regard, a classroom teacher expresses the communication challenges faced with foreign students as follows:

"I teach 3rd-grade students. Normally, we can have these children write by dictating what we would verbally have them write, meaning they are able to write. However, when teaching foreign students, when I say, 'Children, open your Turkish notebooks, our topic is this, write the title, and start writing,' the child does not understand anything. While the others are writing, the foreign student falls far behind and cannot keep up; I experience such problems very often." (T8)

Another classroom teacher expresses that they put in more effort compared to other teachers and that the communication difficulties have been exhausting for them, saying:

"I think we get more tired than a regular teacher, I think we make more effort. Because most of the foreign students do not speak Turkish. They also cannot get support from their families in this regard. As a result, we struggle a lot. I am a classroom teacher. For example, we write the names of words by looking at pictures, but because the children do not know the names, unfortunately, they cannot write the Turkish version underneath. So, we face this kind of problem even when teaching literacy." (T5)

In the process of coping with the challenges of encountering a new language and culture, a tendency towards withdrawal has also been observed among foreign students as one of the issues. A Turkish Language and Literature teacher working in high school shares their thoughts on this problem:

"The language deficiency in the child causes them to withdraw a bit. They struggle to speak, so they cannot communicate, and their academic performance decreases. Their complete withdrawal from communication with their friends and teachers negatively affects us. Since we have a heavy workload, it is very difficult to engage individually with these children." (T11)

At the same time, this teacher points out that communication difficulties with parents are more prevalent in the case of foreign students:

"Usually, the language problem is much deeper with the parents. Especially with mothers, the language problem is much deeper; they live in more isolated and restricted social environments." (T11)

From the teacher's statements, it can be concluded that foreign students speaking their native language at home makes it harder for them to learn Turkish, delaying their acquisition of the target language.

Cultural Differences

When the research findings are examined, it has been observed that, under the sub-theme of cultural differences, teachers most frequently face challenges regarding discrimination among students and the transmission of cultural values. A science teacher working in a middle school expresses the discrimination between students with the following words:

"What I have particularly observed is this: In grades 5 and 6, the children do not notice it much, but as they move towards grade 8, a polarization occurs on both the local and foreign sides. For example, it is very evident in the 8/A class. Sometimes, even during lessons, they can make sarcastic remarks to each other." (T1)

A mathematics teacher working in a middle school state that with the increasing number of foreign students in the classrooms, the integration among students has decreased. This situation has led to grouping, which is expressed with the following words:

"Discrimination exists on both sides, meaning neither group wants to include the other. In the past, there were usually only one or two foreign students in the classrooms, and they could integrate with the other students. However, now there are 8 to 10, and in some classrooms, even 15 foreign students. In this situation, foreign students prefer to associate with their own groups and do not integrate with Turkish students." (T16)

The cultural adaptation challenges faced by immigrant students in the educational process can cause anxiety among teachers. These anxieties stem from the barriers students encounter while learning Türkiye's cultural values and societal norms. A teacher working in a high school expressed their views on this issue as follows:

"When the student reaches the 11th and 12th grades and meets us, they have no idea about what this place is. For example, a simple instance: During ceremonies, when the National Anthem is being played, we sometimes see the students moving or talking among themselves. In fact, this is not their fault; they simply do not know the culture here." (T11)

An overall analysis of participants' views indicates that the growing number of foreign students in classrooms has led to student segregation and cultural adaptation challenges. Teachers reported increased groupings among students and reduced peer interaction. They also emphasized that foreign students' limited understanding of Turkish cultural values constitutes a major shortcoming, hindering both social integration and the overall effectiveness of the educational process.

Individual Learning Needs

In classrooms with foreign students, under this theme, it has been observed that teachers most frequently struggle with completing the curriculum, emphasize the individual support needs of these students, and highlight the difficulties encountered in implementing individual learning plans. Some teacher perspectives on this issue are as follows:

"Individual education? As you know, in such crowded classrooms, it's not very feasible. Sometimes, as a teacher, I feel guilty, thinking that I need to create a different plan for these students. But due to the crowded classrooms, the curriculum I need to complete, and the preparations for the LGS, I don't prioritize individual education." (T1)

"We have students with lower academic performance, so we try to catch the good students and work with them individually to elevate them. But I can't say that I can attend to each student individually, at least not from my perspective." (T2)

Participants noted that meeting the individual learning needs of foreign students poses considerable challenges. Overcrowded classrooms, a demanding curriculum, and language barriers limit teachers' ability to provide effective individualized support. The diversity of students' learning needs further complicates the implementation of targeted instructional strategies.

Social Integration into the Classroom and School

According to the research findings, social integration within the classroom and school emerges as one of the most critical challenges in the education of foreign students. Teachers frequently reported instances of social segregation, emphasizing that the high concentration of foreign students in some classrooms hinders peer interaction and harmonious relationships. These findings underscore the barriers to social cohesion within the educational environment. Participant T4 draws attention to this problem with the following statement:

“We have a very large number of foreign students, and we are facing problems with their integration. The legal limit was 30%, and we have exceeded that, currently surpassing it. This needs to be addressed. 30% or 20% should be distributed across different schools. If we are to integrate these children, it does not make sense to keep them all in one place.” (T4)

Another participant points out that the large number of foreign students in classrooms negatively affects their integration process, stating their thoughts as follows:

“Foreign students should be distributed evenly across the classrooms. Since they are in large groups, they do not face problems in improving their language skills or adapting here, which creates another problem.” (T12)

The issue raised by the participant with the phrase “which creates another problem” is further explained by participant T11:

“The barrier between them and the other students grows even more. They cannot socialize with each other. For example, when they go out to the yard, they continue to play football in the same groups, and in the corridors, they continue walking together in the same way. This polarization keeps increasing. The students have the mindset that ‘We can already speak the same language, and we can continue our lives here’.” (T11)

The tendency for students to form groups and their difficulty in interacting with local students is seen as a significant factor delaying social integration. Participant T7 expresses this situation as follows:

“Social integration happens a bit slowly because foreign students usually group themselves and form cliques. It is very difficult for Turkish students to enter these groups. When we cannot overcome this barrier, we face serious integration problems.” (T7)

Findings under this theme indicate that teachers face multiple challenges in facilitating the social integration of foreign students. Student groupings and social segregation were reported to hinder classroom cohesion, making classroom management and student interaction more difficult. As a result, teachers are burdened with the dual responsibility of promoting integration while maintaining a unified classroom environment.

Relationships with Parents

The findings indicate that teachers encounter significant challenges in engaging with the parents of foreign students, primarily due to language barriers and low parental involvement. Teachers emphasized that limited Turkish proficiency among parents hinders effective communication, making it difficult to support students’ school adaptation and to establish strong home–school connections. One teacher expressed the issue as follows:

“Our biggest problem is miscommunication. Most of the parents don’t know the language, even though the students do. In this case, they come with an interpreter or use Google Translate to send us messages. But it’s not the same, and honestly, I can’t understand it.” (T2)

Moreover, the lack of involvement from parents is also a significant issue. One teacher describes the situation as follows:

“Parents are generally indifferent to the school. Whenever we face an issue and invite them, they usually don’t show much interest. Even when WhatsApp groups are created, they can quickly leave. This is based on my personal experience.” (T14)

Participants also mention that foreign parents are often unwilling to integrate into the local community or learn Turkish. This situation necessitates the use of other students or teachers as translators to facilitate communication, but this does not yield the desired outcome. One participant explains this issue with the following statement:

“Some parents focus only on their work instead of trying to adapt to their environment and learn Turkish. In this case, communication is facilitated through other students or teachers acting as translators, but this is not enough.” (T4)

The findings under this theme indicate that communication problems with foreign parents hinder collaboration in the educational process and negatively affect students’ adaptation to school life. The language barrier and lack of involvement from parents make it difficult for teachers to establish effective communication, which can further increase failures in education.

Findings on Solutions to the Problems Faced by Teachers Regarding Foreign National Students

Under this heading, the findings regarding the proposed solutions to the problems experienced by teachers with foreign students in their classrooms, based on the interviews conducted. The teachers' suggestions for solving the problems related to foreign students are grouped under the following themes: "proposals to enhance their social interactions/adjustment within the school and classroom," "proposals to improve language skills," "proposals to increase academic success," "proposals to establish communication and cooperation with families," and "school activities to increase respect for cultural differences." Among these topics, it is observed that teachers most frequently express opinions under the theme "proposals to increase academic success." Under this theme, teachers suggest individual support, diversification of teaching methods, family cooperation and support, as well as the increase of social activities, courses, and support programs to enhance the academic success of foreign students. In this context, teachers primarily recommend increasing the number of courses and support programs, as well as diversifying teaching methods. The participating teachers state that the low academic success of foreign students is due to the language deficiency of the students. Therefore, they express that offering

language courses outside of regular school hours for foreign students would support their academic success. A participant expressed the following view on the matter:

"To increase academic success, language skills need to be developed. To improve language skills, courses should be organized. It is important that these courses are held regularly and consistently, and that students are encouraged to attend these courses." (T15)

A high school teacher noted that foreign students frequently experience language-related difficulties even at the secondary level, underscoring the need to develop language competencies before high school. Some participants mentioned that earlier language support courses were discontinued due to low attendance, suggesting that making such programs mandatory could enhance participation and support language development more effectively. One participant emphasizes the need to ensure the continuity of such courses and to encourage participation, expressing her opinion as follows:

"Students should learn Turkish before coming to high school. Previously, a Piktes course was offered, but it was not effective due to lack of participation. Therefore, it is necessary to open courses, and participation should be mandatory for foreign national students." (T12)

Teachers also express that due to their multifaceted responsibilities, such as completing the curriculum, addressing various student issues, and dealing with different academic subjects, language teaching cannot be as effective. In this context, they emphasize that special classes and courses where teachers work solely for this purpose are more effective. One teacher states the following:

"Previously, classes and courses similar to the Piktes program were established, specifically for these students. I believe they were effective because the teachers there were focused solely on this. It is not possible to be successful when we are trying to complete the curriculum, teach grammar topics, deal with various issues, and also teach language simultaneously." (T2)

The research findings reveal that the theme of "recommendations for improving language skills" is one of the areas in which teachers provided the most extensive feedback. Within this theme, educators proposed suggestions related to language instruction, the development and use of instructional materials, parental involvement, peer support, and the integration of technological tools. A significant number of teachers underscored the necessity for foreign national students to receive targeted language education to enhance their linguistic competencies. Selected teacher statements on this issue are presented below:

"My main recommendation is that foreign national students must receive language education before coming to school, be informed about important aspects of our culture, and be made aware of these factors before they come to school." (T3)

"I think it might be beneficial to provide foreign national students with one year of preparatory education before starting elementary school. This could be feasible because students can currently start school at different age ranges." (T16)

Another prominent area in which teachers offered substantial input is the theme of "school activities aimed at increasing respect for cultural differences." Within this framework, teachers proposed a variety of strategies, including cultural events and promotional activities, seminars and training sessions, cultural adaptation and integration programs, professional development for teachers, and in-class initiatives that foster cultural sharing and dialogue. In addition to cultural events and promotions, many educators highlighted the importance of cultural adaptation and integration programs in facilitating students' smoother adjustment to the school environment. Notably, it was emphasized that such programs designed for foreign students should extend beyond language acquisition and academic achievement to also encompass the transmission of the host country's cultural values. In this context, one teacher emphasizes that the cultural adaptation process should not be limited to language acquisition alone, highlighting that cultural transmission is essential for societal integration.

"Teaching them our culture and history is not as bad as they might think. Many countries do this, not to marginalize, but to integrate. Every country does this to increase the well-being of society and maintain harmony. European countries do this as well, not to marginalize, but to integrate. It is necessary for societal order." (T11)

At this point, some teachers argue that cultural adaptation should be mutual, and that it should not be limited to foreign students adapting to the host society. They emphasize that cultural diversity should be viewed as a richness, and that this diversity should be supported through mutual understanding between students:

"We need to make activities and projects related to different cultures while emphasizing their importance and making students feel it. Such activities would also be very beneficial in introducing their cultural values to the people here, especially to those with prejudices." (T1)

Among the suggestions made by teachers, organizing events where students can introduce their own cultures is also highlighted. It is mentioned that events where different cultures can come together are important both for students to express themselves and to help them adapt to school. The perspective of one participant on this matter is as follows:

"We had organized a bazaar before, and it was very useful. Foreign students introduced their foods, and some even displayed their traditional clothing and tools. All students participated, and they had the opportunity to see different cultural activities." (T5)

A general evaluation of participant responses suggests that the most frequently proposed solutions for addressing challenges in the education of foreign students include enhanced language support and

initiatives promoting cultural adaptation. In this context, the development of effective school-based practices and the fostering of inclusive learning environments are seen as critical for improving educational outcomes.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION and SUGGESTIONS

This study, which seeks to identify the challenges encountered by teachers in the education of migrant foreign students and to propose solutions to these challenges, revealed that the most frequently reported difficulties fall within the areas of lesson planning and implementation, language barriers, cultural differences, individual learning needs, social integration into the school and classroom environment, and parent-teacher communication.

The study concludes that foreign students often exhibit low levels of readiness in the lesson planning and implementation process. As defined by Lahey (1978, as cited in Özgan & Tekin, 2011), readiness entails the maturity and prior experience necessary to perform learning tasks aimed at specific goals. Insufficient readiness slows the learning process and creates disparities within classrooms. Since teachers typically plan lessons based on the average class level, such disparities pose significant challenges, especially in managing instructional time- a factor identified by Çermik (2006) as essential for achieving educational outcomes. Furthermore, low motivation, limited participation, and behavioral issues such as inattention and lack of discipline negatively impact classroom communication and instructional flow.

The findings highlight the language barrier as one of the most significant challenges teachers face in classrooms with foreign students. Due to increasing migration to Türkiye, the number of students with varying levels of Turkish proficiency has grown (Ak, 2020). While some possess adequate language skills, others struggle with basic comprehension, resulting in disparities in academic performance. Difficulties are particularly evident in reading, writing, and understanding abstract concepts such as idioms (Büyükkiz et al., 2019; Polat, 2019). Writing, identified as one of the most delayed skills in second language acquisition (Şimşek, 2020), remains a critical area of concern. Teachers often need to dedicate extra time to language instruction, which can disrupt the overall flow of classroom teaching.

The study reveals that cultural differences are frequently cited by teachers as a major challenge. These differences often lead to student conflicts, resulting in alienation, incompatibility, and reduced academic performance (Doerr, 2004). Such conflicts disrupt classroom harmony and diminish student engagement. Teachers also report experiencing issues related to discrimination, which is identified by Toprakçı (2017) as a key source of school-based conflict, negatively impacting students' motivation and achievement. In this context, Zhao (2002) emphasizes the role of intercultural sensitivity in fostering interaction and adaptation. A lack of such sensitivity impedes mutual understanding and weakens the

learning environment. Additionally, the absence of structured cultural integration programs makes it difficult for teachers to convey the host country's values to culturally diverse student groups.

The growing number of refugee students from countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan has increased classroom diversity and intensified individual differences (Güneş, 2022). Teachers report that foreign students often require more individualized support than their peers, which complicates the delivery of differentiated instruction. Varying academic proficiency levels slow down the teaching process, making it difficult to complete the curriculum on time- especially in overcrowded classrooms. Despite recognizing the importance of individualized support, teachers highlight the lack of adequate support programs as a major limitation. Moreover, existing instructional materials, designed for native Turkish speakers, are often unsuitable for foreign students due to linguistic and cultural mismatches (Durhat, 2021). These factors hinder the effective implementation of individualized learning plans and pose significant barriers to inclusive and responsive classroom practices.

Another key issue identified is the difficulty foreign students face in achieving social integration within schools and classrooms. The findings suggest that these students often struggle to develop a sense of belonging, defined by Cueto et al. (2010) as the degree of connection with teachers and peers. This lack of belonging negatively affects their participation in educational activities and compliance with school norms. Limited social skills further hinder effective communication and adaptation (Samancı & Uçan, 2017). In classrooms with a high concentration of foreign students, teachers report greater difficulty in addressing individual needs and maintaining instructional effectiveness. Additionally, incidents of bullying and violence undermine students' sense of safety and exacerbate social exclusion. The study highlights patterns of social segregation, where foreign students become isolated, aligning with Boal's (2005) definition of segregation as the majority's avoidance of marginalized groups, resulting in alienation and weakened peer collaboration. When interpreted through cultural context, these findings suggest that social integration difficulties may be rooted in the lack of shared cultural references, differing norms regarding peer interaction, and variations in expressions of respect, friendship, or conflict. For example, immigrant students may exhibit culturally shaped behaviors that teachers interpret negatively within the dominant school culture. This misinterpretation reinforces social distancing and accelerates self-segregation. Thus, the study's findings highlight not only interpersonal conflicts but also systemic cultural dissonances that schools may be insufficiently prepared to address.

The findings reveal that teachers face significant challenges in establishing effective communication with the parents of foreign students. Language barriers, cultural differences, and limited communication channels hinder parental engagement, negatively affecting the monitoring and support of students' academic progress. Parental disengagement is also a major concern; consistent with Kandemir and Aydın (2020), many parents exhibit low involvement, increasing teachers' workload and limiting their capacity to foster an effective learning environment. As Ünlü and Yıldız (2024) note,

successful adaptation of foreign families to the host society is crucial for long-term social cohesion. However, integrating parents into the school community remains problematic. Moreover, mismatches between parental expectations and school policies further complicate the educational process and may negatively influence student outcomes. In addition to these factors, cross-cultural differences in parental roles and school expectations considerably shape family–school communication. In many immigrant families, cultural norms may position the school as the exclusive authority on education, leading parents to adopt a more passive role- not due to disinterest but due to differing cultural models of parental involvement. This divergence highlights the necessity of interpreting parental engagement within its cultural context rather than framing it solely as inadequate participation.

The study identified five key areas in which teachers proposed solutions to address challenges in the education of immigrant students: enhancing social integration, improving language skills, increasing academic achievement, strengthening family collaboration, and promoting respect for cultural diversity. Suggested strategies included individualized support, diversified instructional methods, family engagement, social activities, expanded support programs, and peer mentoring. Individualized support was particularly emphasized for its impact on language development and academic success. Consistent with Demir and Gürol (2015), diversified teaching approaches were seen to encourage active participation and enrich the learning experience. Teachers also highlighted the role of strong family–school communication in supporting academic progress. Social activities were recommended to improve students’ social skills and ease their adaptation to the school environment. Additionally, supplementary language and academic support courses were deemed necessary to address learning gaps. Peer mentoring, as supported by Yava and Sütçü Çiçek (2016), was noted as an effective means of promoting adaptation through peer interaction and guidance.

The findings show that teachers proposed various strategies to improve immigrant students’ language skills, including structured language programs, the use of suitable instructional materials, parental involvement, peer support, and integration of technological tools. Effective language instruction was frequently associated with individualized approaches and supplementary courses. As Durhat and Ökten (2021) point out, limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge often hinder immigrant students’ reading comprehension. Teachers emphasized the need for interactive, student-centered materials and wider access to language learning resources. Parental involvement was also regarded as essential, with suggestions to implement programs that motivate and inform families. Peer collaboration through group work was identified as a valuable method for enhancing communication skills. Furthermore, the use of digital tools- such as language learning apps and online platforms- was considered a significant asset, and increased access to these resources was recommended to support language acquisition.

The study highlights the critical role of schools in fostering social integration and promoting respect for cultural diversity. In interpersonal relationships, a lack of respect or acceptance may lead to defensiveness and strained communication (Ewijk, 2011). Teachers proposed several school-based strategies to enhance cultural awareness, including cultural events, seminars, adaptation programs, teacher training, and classroom-based dialogue. Regular cultural activities- such as festivals and exhibitions- were seen as effective in recognizing and celebrating cultural differences, thereby supporting immigrant students' integration. Understanding diverse cultural elements is essential for adaptation and academic success (Darby, 1995). Teachers viewed such initiatives as promoting empathy, intercultural interaction, and a positive school climate. Structured cultural adaptation programs were also emphasized, with Eğinli (2011) noting that learning the host society's norms facilitates adjustment. According to Çöplü (2019), successful integration programs should involve all school stakeholders. Additionally, teacher training in areas such as classroom management, cultural sensitivity, and refugee mental health was identified as essential for improving inclusivity (Rousseau et al., 2005). Teachers also stressed the value of storytelling, collaborative projects, and group discussions in promoting empathy and mutual understanding among students.

In conclusion, the study identifies the language barrier and the absence of structured cultural adaptation programs as the primary challenges teachers face in educating foreign students. Language deficiencies hinder comprehension, reduce readiness, widen achievement gaps, and complicate both lesson planning and classroom management. These difficulties also limit communication with peers and teachers, contributing to social isolation, demotivation, and behavioral problems. The lack of preparatory language instruction- particularly at the primary and middle school levels- further impairs literacy and verbal communication. Additionally, the absence of grade repetition policies exacerbates academic and linguistic gaps over time. To address these challenges, the study emphasizes the need for early and systematic language education, individualized support mechanisms, culturally responsive materials, and curricular flexibility. Strengthening language and integration programs and providing pedagogical support to teachers are essential. Without systemic interventions, these challenges are likely to persist and become embedded within the education system.

Despite the meaningful insights obtained, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted with a relatively small sample of 16 teachers from a single district in İstanbul, selected through criterion and snowball sampling methods. While phenomenological studies prioritize depth over generalizability, the sample's size and geographical limitation may restrict the broader applicability of the findings. Second, data were collected exclusively through semi-structured interviews, which rely on participants' self-reports and may be influenced by personal biases or social desirability. Third, the study reflects only teachers' perspectives; the experiences of students, parents, and school administrators were not included, limiting the ability to

capture the phenomenon from multiple angles. These limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings and planning future research.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the educational experiences of immigrant students and to mitigate the challenges encountered by teachers in multicultural classroom settings:

- Foreign students should receive basic Turkish language instruction before school enrollment to support integration and improve academic success.
- Cultural adaptation programs should be offered prior to formal education to facilitate foreign students' adjustment to school and social norms.
- Adaptation classes providing intensive language and cultural education should be established for primary-level foreign students before their integration into mainstream classrooms.
- Teachers should receive in-service training to improve communication with immigrant students, manage classroom diversity, and increase cultural awareness.
- Instructional materials should be developed to support foreign students' language acquisition, and curricula should be adapted to address their specific learning needs.
- Individualized education plans and targeted support programs should be implemented for students with language and academic deficiencies.

Additional Declaration

This research was produced from the non-thesis master's project study prepared by the first author under the supervision of the second author.

Author Contributions

In this study, the contribution of the authors was equal; both authors contributed equally to the development of the research idea, data analysis, writing and proofreading stages.

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No artificial intelligence support was received in any part of this study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the publication of this study.

Ethics Approval

The study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee for Social and Human Sciences Research of Yıldız Technical University on September 30, 2024 (Approval No: 2024.09).

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