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Examining the Perspectives of Special Education Pre-Service Teachers on the Education of Syrian Students with Special Needs Under Temporary Protection Status

Abstract

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of special education pre-service teachers on the education of Syrian students with special needs under temporary protection status in Turkey. A qualitative descriptive research model was employed. Participants were 14 fourth-grade students from two universities in a province in Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Region. These candidates had completed Teaching Practice I-II courses and had experience with Syrian students with special needs in their practicum classrooms. Criterion sampling was used to select participants. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher and analyzed through content analysis. The study identified themes such as language and communication, family involvement, support and guidance needs, cultural differences, and undergraduate education. The most significant barrier to the participation of Syrian students with special needs and their families in the educational process was found to be language differences. The study also highlighted a substantial need for courses on the education of Syrian students with special needs within the undergraduate curriculum for special education pre-service teachers. The findings were discussed in relation to relevant literature.

Key words: Refugee, temporary protection status, Syrian, special education, pre-service special education teachers.

Introduction

Migration refers to the movement of people from one geographical location to another, a phenomenon that has existed since prehistoric times and has continued throughout human history (Karataş & Ayyıldız, 2021). This process, which creates social actors (e.g., reasons for migration, individuals migrating and places of migration) includes a dynamic that can trigger social and political mobility (Demir, 2023). Although the term migrant is not clearly defined in law, it generally refers to individuals who, for various reasons, leave their usual place of residence either temporarily or permanently, within a country or across international borders (International Organization for Migration, 2024). Despite the extensive distinctions in the literature on migration types, the most common division is between voluntary and forced migration (Piguet, 2018). Forced migration, caused by either natural or human-made factors, involves a coercive element, including threats to life and livelihood (European Commission, 2024). Analytically and terminologically, forced migration differs from voluntary migration. It encompasses various legal or political categories of individuals compelled to leave their homes and seek refuge. Although popular usage tends to label all these individuals as 'refugees,' legally, refugees constitute a much narrower category. Most forced migrants leave their countries for reasons not explicitly recognized by international refugee law, with many becoming internally displaced within their own countries (Castles, 2006).

The Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in 2010, triggered the civil war in Syria, leading to the mass migration of millions of Syrians, particularly to neighboring countries such as Turkey (Canyurt, 2018). Currently, more than three million Syrians live in Turkey under temporary protection (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024). Syrian individuals face various challenges in Turkey across numerous domains, including employment, marginalization, adaptation, language and communication barriers, housing difficulties, psychosocial issues, and psychological challenges (Ceylan et al., 2017; Erciyes & Anati, 2021; Eyiñç, 2015; Koç et al., 2015; Morali, 2018; Yaman, 2017). One of the most critical areas of difficulty is education. The influx of Syrian migrants since 2011 has significantly impacted the Turkish education system. Driven by humanitarian reasons and without international pressure, Turkey has integrated school-aged Syrians into its education system and opened schools for their use. However, despite these humanitarian efforts, the process has faced numerous challenges (Taşçı & Oktay, 2022). Syrian students have encountered difficulties related to language and communication, adapting to the

education system, and accessing education due to economic reasons. Another barrier in Syrian education is the Turkish education system's lack of preparedness for the sudden influx of refugees caused by the Syrian civil war (Kocaoğlu & Güner-Yıldız, 2023). Additional challenges include language and alphabet differences, insufficient physical infrastructure, difficulties in accessing qualified human resources, challenges in collecting reliable and registered data, and the dynamic and continuously evolving nature of the process in both quantitative and qualitative aspects. These factors create significant barriers to the educational process for Syrian refugees and complicate integration efforts (Duruel, 2016).

The education of Syrian children in Turkey faces multiple challenges beyond language barriers. Major issues include ensuring the continued education of girls and overcoming Syrian families' reluctance to send their children to school. Addressing these challenges requires adopting policies that embrace diversity, enriching the curriculum, and supporting the cultural diversity of the Syrian community (Tanrikulu, 2017). Education is a fundamental need for Syrian children, but it cannot be effective without integrated psychosocial support. Providing assistance in areas such as social adaptation, guidance, and psychological support will help their integration into both the education system and social life. Activities promoting cultural and social values, organized among Syrian and Turkish students and teachers, will strengthen relationships within the educational environment and everyday life. Teachers, who play a key role in this process, should be specially trained to carry out social integration activities, communicate effectively, and organize group activities (Kılıç & Özkor, 2019). According to the International Organization for Migration (2024), there are approximately one million school-aged Syrian children in Turkey. The Presidency of Migration Management statistics reports that over 1.5 million Syrian children under the age of 18 live in Turkey. Given the large number of school-aged children, educational adjustments and individualizations are vital for their integration into society. Schools play a significant role in providing a sense of security to refugee children and maximizing their learning potential. This approach requires a focus on human rights and social inclusion, involving collaboration among government entities, school administrations, teachers, social workers, students, parents, and the broader community. Such collaboration is crucial for creating a supportive and interactive learning environment for refugee students and their families, which is essential for achieving social inclusion (Thomas, 2016).

Teachers are essential in creating inclusive learning environments for Syrian students. Various studies in Turkey have examined their education and identified several significant findings (Aykırı, 2017; Kardeş & Akman, 2018; Topkaya & Akdağ, 2016). According to Kardeş and Akman (2018), teachers often feel unprepared to educate refugee children and lack specific strategies for these students. Moreover, researchers highlight the importance of Turkish language education and preschool participation in addressing the adaptation challenges faced by Syrian children.

Refugees in a different country face many challenges, and those with special needs encounter additional difficulties. According to Polack et al. (2021), about 24.7% of Syrian refugees in Turkey have special needs. Karadağ and Çalışgan (2021) report that 41% of Syrian participants applied for disability reports, with 19% receiving reports for intellectual disabilities. Given the high rate of disabilities among refugees (Polack et al., 2021) and that nearly half of the Syrian population in Turkey is under 18 and of school age (Presidency of Migration Management, 2024), it is clear that there is a relative lack of research on Syrian individuals with special needs, and our understanding of this area is limited (Williamson & Çetin, 2019). According to a systematic literature review (Bayraklı, 2024), data on Syrian individuals with special needs are limited, there are serious limitations in the access of individuals with special needs to education, and non-governmental organizations that prioritize special needs and refugees should be strengthened.

Research on the education of individuals with special needs in Turkey is relatively limited. A review of the literature reveals studies examining teachers' perspectives on the language acquisition of Syrian students with special needs (Sarıtış et al., 2023) and educational diagnostic processes (Ünay et al., 2021). Special education teachers play a crucial role in providing services to Syrian individuals with special needs. In one of the few studies examining the perspectives of special education teachers on the education of Syrian individuals, it was found that language, communication, and cultural differences present significant barriers in the educational process (Demir, 2024a). Moreover, examining the views of special education school administrators regarding the education of Syrian students with special needs, Demir (2024b) reported various limitations in teacher training and noted that various stakeholders in education might hold biases against the cultural differences of Syrian students with special needs. In this context, the views of special education teachers are essential for developing inclusive educational environments and policies. Special education teacher training programs are critical in this regard. It is crucial to

design undergraduate curricula, course content, and observation/practice courses in special education to inclusively address the needs of refugees with special needs. The insights of special education teacher candidates on the education of Syrian students with special needs can guide the development and planning of inclusive practices. This study aims to examine the views of special education teacher candidates on the education of Syrian students with special needs.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research model to explore the perspectives of special education teacher candidates regarding the education of Syrian individuals with special needs under temporary protection. The qualitative descriptive research model represents a novel approach that emphasizes providing a comprehensive summary of events (Ayton, 2023). Within the framework of this study, this model was utilized to deeply examine the perspectives of teacher candidates. The interview technique was employed as the primary data collection method within the scope of this model.

Participants

Participants were fourth-year students of special education departments from two universities in a city located in the Southeastern Anatolia region. The selection process included the criterion sampling method, which involves choosing participants based on predefined criteria relevant to the research goals (Patton, 2014). The criteria used were a) participants must be fourth-year students, b) they must have successfully completed the Teaching Practice I course, c) they must have finished the school applications required for the Teaching Practice II course, and d) they must have spent at least one semester in classrooms with special needs Syrian students as part of their teaching practice.

Table 1

Demographic information

	Gender	Taking courses on refugees	Participation in seminars on refugees	Department	Grade
P1	Female	No	No	Special Education	4th
P2	Male	No	No	Special Education	4th
P3	Male	No	No	Special Education	4th
P4	Male	No	No	Special Education	4th
P5	Female	No	No	Special Education	4th
P6	Male	No	No	Special Education	4th
P7	Female	No	Yes	Special Education	4th
P8	Female	No	No	Special Education	4th
P9	Male	No	No	Special Education	4th
P10	Female	No	No	Special Education	4th
P11	Female	No	No	Special Education	4th
P12	Female	No	No	Special Education	4th
P13	Female	No	Yes	Special Education	4th
P14	Female	No	No	Special Education	4th

Data collection tools

For this study, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview form based on the literature review and then sent it to six faculty members (three from the field of special education and three from the field of psychological counseling and guidance) for feedback. Then, the researcher made the necessary revisions and finalized the questions. The form was then revised for linguistic validity by two teachers specializing in Turkish Education, and further adjustments were made based on their feedback. The preliminary application of the study was conducted with three special education teacher candidates, and the final adjustments regarding the clarity, comprehensibility, and sequence of the questions were made based on the feedback received, thereby finalizing the form.

Data collection

Data collection interviews were conducted both in person and online, based on the participants' preferences. In-person interviews took place in an empty classroom at the participants' schools, while online interviews were conducted via Zoom®. Audio/video recordings were made for both types of interviews.

Data analysis

Before data analysis, the researcher transcribed the interviews. These transcribed interviews underwent content analysis, a systematic method for analyzing recorded texts, which focuses on the conveyed information. The objective is to unveil the layers of meaning, identify themes and concepts, and reveal underlying contexts (Yıldırım, 2015).

Inter-coder reliability

Inter-coder reliability was assessed using the percentage agreement method, achieving 91.54%, exceeding the 80% threshold. A special education expert collaborated in coding to ensure consistency. This approach enhanced data analysis objectivity and research validity.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical approval was obtained from the Gaziantep University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee before the study commenced.

Results

The content analysis identified six themes reflecting special education teacher candidates' perspectives on educating Syrian individuals with special needs, including language and communication, family involvement, support and guidance needs, cultural differences, and undergraduate education, while participant anonymity was maintained using codes such as P1, P2, P3... for teacher candidates and S1, S2, S3... for students.

Language and Communication

All fourteen participants in the study addressed the theme of language and communication. See table 2 below for the categories and codes associated with the language and communication theme.

Table 2

Categories and codes related to the theme of language and communication

Theme	Categories	Codes
Language and communication	Difficulty between teachers and Syrian students with special needs	Difficulty in Teaching
		Difficulty in assessment
		Difficulty in basic communication skills
	Difficulty Between teachers and Syrian parents	Difficulty in parent teacher meetings
		Difficulty in communication tools such as telephone
Difficulty Between Syrian students and their peers	Exclusion Groupings	
Solutions	Teachers' Basic Arabic Learning Translator support	

Below are examples of statements from pre-service teachers regarding the language and communication theme:

Teacher-Syrian Individuals with Special Needs

P3: *The only thing written in the child's file is intellectual disability. Due to the language barrier, the child can't understand instructions or participate in lessons at all. It's as if the child isn't present. I attribute this to the lack of Turkish language skills. The situation is similar for S2. There is memorized speech? For example, there are some memorized words that he heard and learnt from his environment. It is not appropriate according to the context*

P6: *Syrians mostly rely on Arabic due to their lack of Turkish proficiency. Communication is limited, making it challenging to provide them with adequate education. Despite our efforts, we struggle to establish effective communication and interaction.*

P10: *Adapting to a new language, especially from Arabic to Turkish, is very difficult for these children. It's a significant challenge for both the child and the teacher.*

Teacher- Families of Syrian Individuals with Special Needs

P1: *We have no communication with parents due to language differences. What they say is hardly understood.*

P14: *They don't answer their phones, and even if they do, we cannot understand each other due to language differences.*

Syrian Individuals with Special Needs-Their Peers

P3: *Sir, the biggest difficulty is that children cannot express themselves. That's why, they are always very shy. For example, they mingle among themselves. For example, in our class, two Syrians have mingled among themselves. Even if we try to integrate them, our children always mingle among themselves. They don't feel like they belong there.*

P6: *Their language barrier affects their interaction with peers. We face difficulties in encouraging interaction among them.*

P13: *Collaborative work is challenging as neither side is willing to collaborate fully.*

Out of the 14 teacher candidates interviewed, 13 emphasized the importance of basic Arabic knowledge to facilitate communication with individuals with special needs. However, one candidate suggested prioritizing translator services over Arabic language learning.

P6: *We need to know how to say hello, how are you? when working with these children. Saying "Let's come and do these" or "How was your day?" For example, we learned the basics of saying hello, how are you? a little late, sir, and it was insufficient.*

P8: *Child didn't know how to say "How are you? I'm fine." We managed to teach just that in a month. So, we can't give instructions. When we say, "Let's go to eat," they don't understand. They don't understand at all, sir. They need to learn enough Arabic to understand phrases like "Let's go to eat." If we say it in Arabic while also saying it in Turkish, establishing that connection, teaching basic Arabic, maybe then we can do something.*

P9: *In our school, we have an Arabic translator, but it's not effective, sir. Even if it's basic, if we could speak a bit, the process would be much easier.*

P11: *Learning Arabic isn't necessary for teachers; their workload is already heavy, and besides, the child should learn Turkish themselves. A translator is necessary, though.*

Family involvement

See table 3 for the categories and codes related to family involvement.

Table 3

Categories and codes related to the theme of family involvement

Theme	Categories	Codes
Family Involvement	School visits	Not attending parent-teacher meetings Failure to respond to teacher invitation
	Accessibility through communication tools	Failure to answer phone calls not responding to messaging apps
	Participation in class work	Failure to provide financial support for materials, etc. Non-attendance of families at classroom activities they are invited to
	Conflicts between families and teachers	Conflicts regarding self-care skills Conflicts regarding deficiencies in homework etc.

Below are sample expressions from teacher candidates regarding family involvement:

P2: *It seems like there's hardly any family involvement. The students are brought to school using government transportation. They arrive and depart with it, and I haven't encountered the families at all.*

P3: *There's a lack of attendance at school. No response to messages. Rarely any follow-ups. For instance, no participation in acquiring materials. It appears they're completely disengaged.*

P6: *I've never witnessed them engaging with their families. The families never visit the school. For example, each week, we document the assignments in our notebooks and communicate this to their families. However, we never receive any feedback from the families of Syrian students.*

P9: *We're required to conduct case evaluations during our internship. Stories about cases and such. We attempt to reach out to families for this purpose. The family of S3 live in Syria. They don't respond to phone calls. There's no communication whatsoever.*

Participants occasionally mentioned conflicts between teachers and families.

P3: *The student had an eating disorder. And, for example, the students couldn't put everything they found on the ground in their mouths. Teachers wanted to talk about this issue. His sister suddenly got furious. How can you say that? I wash and send him to school every morning. I feed him every morning, and such, she says. But, teacher, that's definitely not true. The student puts plaster on him every morning. For the sister of S4, as I said, she is also very aggressive. Why, are you treating us like this just because we are Syrian?*

P13: *Our teacher reached out to the family due to incomplete homework. I didn't catch what the family said, but they argued over the phone.*

Support and guidance needs

Table 4 presents the categories related to the need for support and guidance.

Table 4

Categories and codes related to the theme of support and guidance

Theme	Categories	Codes
Support and guidance	School Administration	Approach to students Communication with students
	Mentor Teachers	Approach to students Communication with students Teaching methods and techniques
	Guidance Counselor	Communication with students Interventions in students' problem behaviours

Below are examples of statements from pre-service teachers regarding the support and guidance theme:

P1: *I have neither seen nor heard about the school administration. I don't know anything about them. However, T2 always tells us that we will encounter Syrian students and that we have to educate them as well. They emphasize that we cannot push them to the corner of the classroom and that they have the right to education and training.*

P8: *I did not receive any form of assistance, but it would have been advantageous to possess strategies for fostering interaction. I struggled with effective communication methods.*

P10: *Institutional support from school administrations is largely absent. In all honesty, it is not even a consideration.*

P14: *A Syrian student exhibited behavioral challenges during the internship. Seeking support, I approached the guidance counselor, who offered only vague advice before dismissing my concerns.*

Cultural Differences

The analysis of cultural differences proved to be the most intricate aspect of this research. Extensive efforts were devoted to discerning the viewpoints related to cultural differences. This study examined cultural differences within two frameworks: cultural distance and diversity. Table 5 presents the categories and codes related to cultural differences.

Table 5

Categories and codes related to the theme of cultural differences

Theme	Categories	Codes
Cultural differences	Cultural distance	Non-participation in classroom activities Reaction to language differences Parenting styles of Syrian parents
	Cultural diversity	Multicultural education Teaching process Studies on other children learning about Syrian children's culture

Below are examples of statements from pre-service teachers regarding the cultural differences theme:

Cultural distance

P1: *For instance, things that seem normal to them appear strange to us. And when they display them, they immediately face discrimination. We never accept another culture.*

P3: *Two of our students are Syrian. P6 is an active student. Yet, there is a prejudice against him because he is Syrian. I believe they should integrate with us, rather than the other way around.*

P6: *Our teacher expresses sentiments like, "What's going on? They've sent us Syrians." They're immediately excluded because they don't speak Turkish. They're children, after all. If an educator behaves this way, it sets a bad example for others. That's why, even though we may not like it or prefer it, we're educators. Let's act consciously accordingly. When I was passing in the corridor, I heard my teacher saying that we should teach Turkish, but we are trying to learn Arabic because of them. If they don't know Turkish, they shouldn't come to school or be sent*

P10: *Syrian children often aren't as calm or subdued as others. It seems they're not as heavily disciplined, perhaps due to differences in societal norms. They tend to be more energetic, even a bit hyperactive. Unfortunately, these behaviors can sometimes be misunderstood, leading to them being labeled as "naughty" or "bad." It is stated that they have limitations in their self-care skills due to their cultural background.*

P14: *For instance, it's as if speaking Arabic in class is prohibited. The child already struggles to express themselves, and it's even more challenging in Turkish. During breaks, the*

children were speaking Arabic; the teacher got angry and yelled at them to speak Turkish. The thing is, teacher, the child doesn't know Turkish.

Cultural diversity

P4: When a student wanted to convey something, they initially did so in their own language because it was easier for them. It was perceived positively and not criticized.

P6: For example, our teacher used to greet them in Arabic in the mornings. They gradually transitioned them to Turkish. Currently, in the classroom rules I've established, there's English written in Braille, Turkish, and Arabic for visually impaired individuals.

P8: For instance, when teaching about seasons, the materials used are universal. The visual representation stays consistent across languages. This can be a way to diversify. There was a picture illustrating autumn. Language wasn't essential for understanding.

P10: In a music class, if a Turkish song is played, and the child can sing Turkish songs during the activity, then an Arabic song should also be included. The children should sing them together. If Syrian children can adapt to Turkish songs, then Turkish children can adapt to Syrian children's Arabic songs.

Undergraduate education

Table 6 presents the categories and codes related to undergraduate education.

Table 6

Categories and codes related to the theme of undergraduate education

Theme	Categories	Codes
Undergraduate education	Curriculum	Need for courses related to refugee students Inclusion of Turkish language teaching courses for foreigners
	Course content	

Below are examples of statements from pre-service teachers regarding the undergraduate education theme:

P1: We should be taught how to give education to a foreign student from the beginning to the end, since they exist, since they will not leave, since these people are part of education.

P2: Teachers have difficulty in teaching Turkish to these children and we also have difficulty. We can be taught how to teach Turkish to these children at university.

P9: There is no course on refugees in our curriculum. But it would be good if there was, especially in terms of language.

Discussion

The global refugee population has been steadily increasing in recent years, with refugee children constituting more than half of the refugee population. The needs of refugee children are complex; many have experienced traumatic events, had their education interrupted, and must also adapt to a new culture (Thomas, 2016). The education services provided by the country they migrate to play a significant role in the integration of refugee children (Radhouane, 2023). Implementing inclusive practices that value diverse identities and oppose injustice is essential for integrating immigrant students into the school system. It's important to note that there is no singular “refugee student profile,” as these students come from various cultural, pedagogical, and familial backgrounds (Radhouane, 2023). Intersectionality recognizes that individuals may belong to multiple disadvantaged groups simultaneously, creating complex systems of disadvantage. To analyze these systems of disadvantage, it's essential to consider the intersection of various categories (Bešić, 2020). Refugees with special needs find themselves at the crossroads of both their refugee status and their unique requirements. Special education teachers play a critical role and bear significant responsibilities in integrating these students into the school system and broader society. Within the school context, these responsibilities include assessing special needs, adapting the curriculum, and designing instruction (Lamar-Dukes & Dukes, 2005). Given the importance of these roles, the views of special education teachers on the education of Syrian students with special needs in Turkey might be connected to the quality of educational services they offer. Education researchers are increasingly focusing on understanding the beliefs and perspectives that influence pre-service teachers' decision-making processes, particularly regarding teaching strategies and classroom practices. Educational institutions recognize the need to better understand students' perceptions of diversity and enable the design of programs that effectively prepare teacher candidates for diverse educational settings (Leavy, 2005). This study aims to examine the perspectives of special education teacher candidates on the education of Syrian students with special needs. By doing so, it seeks to provide a foundation for future intervention programs and contribute to both the academic literature and practical applications.

In the study, the primary theme concerning the views of special education pre-service teachers on the education of Syrian students with special needs was language and communication. It was the most emphasized theme in the research. Pre-service teachers felt significant stress due to their inability to effectively demonstrate critical communication skills during the teaching

process. A notable finding of the study was the widespread desire among teacher candidates to learn basic Arabic, the native language of Syrian students, particularly to provide basic instructions. The literature highlights that the language barrier is one of the most fundamental challenges in the educational lives of refugee children (Aydın & Kaya, 2012; McBrien, 2005; Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020). Interviews revealed that these students face significant language-related difficulties during their educational processes, as noted by teachers (Aykırı, 2017; Kardeş & Akman, 2018), pre-service teachers (Topkaya & Akdağ, 2016), and school administrators (Levent & Çayak, 2017). The language issues faced by Syrian students with special needs, who are doubly disadvantaged, as well as their teachers and families, pose significant challenges in designing the educational services provided to these students. In this context, it is critically important to take preventive measures in the language area, launch a Turkish language teaching campaign, and carry out this process on a scientific basis. Having special education in-service and pre-service teachers who know at least basic Arabic could facilitate the Turkish language teaching process and the overall educational experiences of Syrian students with special needs.

The second theme was family involvement. Family involvement can be defined as a shared and collaboratively built responsibility. It includes not only the actions, practices, and attitudes of parents, caregivers, and teachers, and the participation of children in schools, but also the expectations of the schools, the social support they offer, the partnerships they create, and their interactions with families (Weiss et al., 2009). Interpreting the limitations of the families of Syrian students with special needs regarding family involvement through this lens may provide a more accurate approach. Participants in the study strongly emphasized the limitations faced by these families in terms of family involvement. However, it would be more suitable to view this limitation as a mutual interaction issue rather than a one-sided problem. The study highlighted that language barriers are a significant and restrictive factor for the families. Language challenges can be seen as an obstacle preventing families from effectively engaging with the school system. Supporting this finding, previous studies in Turkey have shown that the families of Syrian students encounter significant limitations in family involvement (Aykırı, 2017; Kardeş & Akman, 2018). To overcome the limitations in family involvement highlighted in this research, it is critically important to implement inclusive family involvement practices in schools (Georgis et al., 2014). These practices do not only place the responsibility on the families but also share it with teachers, school administrators, and the school system. Inclusive family involvement is particularly valuable

because it includes taking preventive measures to facilitate engagement when Syrian parents face language-related challenges in the school system.

The third theme was the support and guidance needs. Participants require assistance and guidance in various areas. They, in particular, highlighted their needs for support from both teachers and school administrators. Another significant area where participants felt they needed support was in language and communication. Besides, many participants frequently noted their struggles to effectively communicate with students. It's essential to recognize that adaptation is necessary not only for refugee children but also for schools, teachers, and students. Understanding how to best prepare teachers to address the needs of refugee children and how to establish schools that can effectively meet these needs is critically important (Hamilton, 2003). Therefore, creating a system where special education teacher candidates and other teacher candidates can receive the necessary support and guidance is of paramount importance. These supports are of critical importance in the context of ensuring multicultural social justice (McCall & Vang, 2012)

The fourth theme was the cultural differences. This theme was addressed in the contexts of cultural distance and cultural diversity. Cultural distance plays a crucial role in the integration process of refugees (Karluk, 2022). Research on cultural distance indicates that this concept involves differences in cultural values, norms, and practices. Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a widely used framework for measuring cultural distance. This theory examines various dimensions of cultural values to identify similarities and differences between societies. Key dimensions such as individualism versus collectivism and power distance are essential for understanding cultural distance (see Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001). When individuals enter a society with cultural traits different from their own, the socio-cultural adaptation process can become more complex and challenging due to these significant cultural differences. When the cultural differences involve unfamiliar norms, values, and behavior patterns, the process of adjusting and adapting to a new society can be quite difficult. Therefore, both psychological and social adaptation will require more effort and time in such transitions (Batır & Okur, 2016). In this study, participants' statements regarding cultural issues have been interpreted within the framework of cultural distance. For example, a teacher insisting on speaking Turkish instead of Arabic due to language differences can be seen as an element of cultural distance. The reluctance of some teachers to have special needs Syrian students in their classrooms could be due to a lack of adequate support and guidance, as well as factors related to cultural distance like language

barriers. Expressions related to cultural differences suggest that intercultural communication anxiety is another influencing factor. Individuals with high levels of this anxiety feel uncertain when interacting with people from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, which increases their anxiety and negatively affects their socio-cultural adaptation. Managing and reducing anxiety levels in intercultural interactions is crucial for effective communication and adaptation (Bozkaya & Aydın, 2011). Based on these theoretical foundations and the study's findings, it is vital to design early interventions to reduce cultural distance and intercultural communication anxiety. Implementing these measures at a community level is crucial to prevent potential xenophobic attitudes in the future. The theme of cultural differences was explored within the context of cultural diversity. Cultural diversity refers to variations in gender, ethnicity, race, culture, nationality, religion, political orientation, and perspectives (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). A related concept is cultural sensitivity, which is crucial for culturally responsive teaching that impacts student participation and achievement (Abacioglu, 2020). The study highlighted instances of cultural sensitivity. For example, some teacher candidates relied on translation programs to communicate due to not knowing Arabic. Another notable finding was that, with one exception, all participants emphasized the need for teachers working with special needs Syrian students to have basic Arabic language skills. These instances demonstrate the critical role of cultural sensitivity.

The final theme identified was undergraduate education. Participants emphasized that receiving training specifically related to refugee students during their undergraduate studies could significantly ease the process of working with Syrian students with special needs. Upon reviewing special education curricula, it becomes apparent that there are very few course options addressing the education of refugees. Offering such courses would better equip pre-service teachers for their future teaching careers. Another crucial point was the lack of courses on teaching Turkish to non-native speakers. While it may not be the direct responsibility of special education teachers, one of their indirect roles involves teaching Turkish to Syrian students with special needs. However, teachers who have not received training in this area face considerable challenges in effectively performing this task. Although the current curriculum includes courses on teaching Turkish, these do not focus on teaching Turkish to children whose native language is Arabic. Introducing a course on teaching Turkish to foreigners at the undergraduate level would greatly contribute to integration, even if it does not entirely eliminate language barriers. As Büyükkiz and Çangal

(2016) pointed out, learning the language of the host country is crucial for the social integration of migrants, and language acquisition is a key means of overcoming cultural differences. In this study, it was observed that in-service special education teachers reported a lack of sufficient theoretical and practical training regarding refugee students in their undergraduate education. Kovinthan-Levi's (2019) study within the Canadian context similarly identified such limitations among in-service teachers. The identification of limitations in teacher training programs for the education of refugee children across different cultures indicates that this issue is transcultural in nature.

This study presents a summary of the key views of special education pre-service teachers on the education of Syrian students with special needs. Addressing language difficulties is highlighted as a fundamental aspect of this research. Additionally, the importance of cultural diversity and sensitivity is emphasized. Recommendations include the implementation of multicultural special education environments and the adoption of culturally responsive teaching approaches to facilitate the integration of Syrian individuals with special needs into both society and the education system. Early interventions focusing on language and cultural responsiveness can act as a preventive measure against integration-related issues, promoting social harmony and well-being.

This study's limitations include a small participant pool, reliance on a single interview method, and a focus on one province, potentially limiting the diversity and generalizability of findings.

This study explored the perspectives of special education pre-service teachers on Syrian students with special needs, employing a qualitative descriptive methodology. Future research could examine school adaptation, language challenges, or intervention studies, utilizing focus groups, quantitative methods, or new scales, while expanding to different regions for broader insights.

This study highlights key challenges faced by pre-service special education teachers in educating Syrian students with special needs, emphasizing the importance of addressing language barriers, cultural differences, family involvement, and inadequate professional support. Recommendations include revising undergraduate curricula to include courses on teaching Turkish to foreigners and refugee education, developing in-service training programs, promoting family collaboration through ministry-university projects, and implementing multicultural practices to enhance integration and educational quality.

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