

# Views on the Challenges Faced by School Administrators in The Education Process of Foreign National Students

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this research is to examine the views of school administrators regarding the challenges faced by foreign national students in the education process at the primary school level. The research was conducted in the qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design. The study group of the research consists of 20 school administrators working in state schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education in the central district of Kırşehir. The data of the research were obtained through a semi-structured interview form. In this context, the questions in the semi-structured interview form prepared by the researchers were directed to the school administrators. The obtained data were analyzed through content analysis. As a result of the research, administrators expressed that they encounter problems related to communication, student-related issues, parent-related issues, and cultural differences in the education process of foreign national students.

**KEYWORDS:** Education, education process, foreign student, school administrator

## I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, it is known that people have migrated to different geographical areas for various reasons from their home countries. Migration plays a significant role in influencing societies politically, economically, and socio-culturally (Ünal, 2014; Apak, 2014). When looking at mass migrations globally, it is observed that the most significant portion of migrations is formed by individuals pursuing economic goals. Following this, refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons contribute to migration trends. According to the United Nations [UN] data from 2015, the global number of refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons exceeded 60 million (Deniz and Yıldız, 2016). In the literature, various definitions of the concept of migration can be found. Çakır (2011) defines migration as "the entirety of processes where individuals or groups change their place in time and space due to demographic, geographic, economic, and political reasons, turning into action, and continuing its effects after the action ends." According to the Turkish Language Association, migration is explained as "the act of individuals or communities moving from one country to another, from one settlement to another, due to economic, social, or political reasons; relocation, migration, or exile" (TDK, 2016).

Globalization has been assumed to force societies into migration due to factors such as wars, economic problems, political and social pressures. Especially in recent years, millions of people have been compelled to migrate, particularly in the Middle East, due to ongoing wars. It is known that those who migrate to other countries often have to live as refugees or asylum seekers. Mass migration events due to compelling reasons result in various segments of society suffering to some extent. The most significant challenges for children of school age in such forced migration situations are related to education, healthcare, shelter, clean water, and nutrition. Education is of particular importance as it enhances the capacity and quality of benefiting from other services. Generally, the academic performance of migrant students is lower than that of non-migrant students in the countries they have migrated to. Language barriers, non-participation in early childhood education, grade repetition, teachers' lack of preparedness for multicultural education, and migrants' resistance to problem-solving are identified as problem areas related to the education of migrants (OECD, 2015).

Turkey, due to its strategic and geographical location, has been a country that has received migrants for many years. However, individuals coming through migration have brought along various problems (Saritaş, Şahin, and Çatalbaş, 2016). Keeping individuals with different characteristics together in a school environment and treating them equally can sometimes become challenging. Therefore, it is considered natural to experience problems in educational institutions where the individual is the essential element (İçöz, 2019). To ensure the continuity of the education process, it is necessary to identify the problems in schools where foreign national students receive education and determine what needs to be done as a result of these problems. The responsibility of identifying these problems primarily falls on the administrators and teachers responsible for the functioning of the education process. To sustain the education process smoothly, it is crucial to identify the source of the problems and prevent the recurrence of the same issues. Additionally, administrators and teachers need to collaborate during this process (Yapıcı and Yapıcı, 2003). Some studies in this regard have shown problems such as housing, employment, and adapting to society. Besides, the majority of migrants have been children in need of education, making education one of the most significant issues (Yavuz and Mızrak, 2016). Another problem is the cultural difference between their own culture and the culture of the country they migrated to, leading to some challenges in cultural adaptation (Kirmayer et al., 2011). In another study, the most mentioned problem was expressed as a language and communication issue (Şimşir and Dilmaç, 2018). Research indicates that both migrants and migrant/refugee students face various challenges. When examining the literature, there seems to be a limited number of studies focusing on the problems experienced by school principals with foreign students in their schools. In this context, it can be argued that it is necessary to identify the educational problems of students living and studying in Kırşehir province and examine the reasons for these problems for both students and educational institutions. Additionally, considering the results obtained, the research is crucial in terms of helping students in need during the process and addressing the children's rights issue. This research aims to identify the problems experienced by school administrators in educational institutions with children of migrant families who continue their education. The research question within this framework is, "What are the views of school administrators on the problems encountered by foreign national students in the education process?"

## II. METHOD

### 2.1 Research Design

The phenomenology (phenomenological) design was employed in the study. Phenomena exist in various forms through events, concepts, perceptions, situations, and experiences in our daily surroundings. Phenomenology selects individuals or groups experiencing the phenomenon as the data source (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). The essence of phenomenology lies in individual experiences. Perception, experience, and events are based on participants' interpretations and meanings (Baş and Akturan, 2008). In the research, the phenomenological design was chosen as it is suitable for investigating the experiences of school administrators.

### 2.2 Data Collection Tools

The easiest way to learn how people perceive the world and their own lives is by talking to them. Gathering information about other individuals can be achieved through conversation. People's emotions, thoughts, attitudes, values, beliefs, and experiences can be learned. In phenomenological research design, interviewing is the primary data collection tool. Interview is a communication process based on the researcher asking questions and receiving responses from the interviewee about the researched topic. The person being interviewed and providing information related to the research is referred to as the interviewee or participant. Through interviews, the experiences of others are attempted to be explained based on their impressions, feelings, and thoughts (Sali, 2012). The data for the research were collected through a semi-structured interview form. The interview questions were determined by the researchers based on a literature review, and opinions from two (2) experts in the field were obtained regarding the questions. The form, developed as a pilot study, was applied to two school administrators to test the clarity and understandability of the instructions and items. In the research, the experiences of the participants regarding the examined topic were attempted to be conveyed. Interviews can be recorded with the participant's permission. Individual interviews involve an interviewer and a participant, where the interview takes place between them, and information is exchanged (Cemaloğlu, 2014). The data collection tool consists of demographic information and a semi-structured interview form.

### 2.3 Participants

The research was conducted in 2023 in the central district of Kırşehir province, specifically in state schools. The participants of the study were determined using the purposive sampling method, specifically the criterion sampling technique. The fundamental idea behind this sampling method is to study all cases that meet a predetermined set of criteria. The criteria mentioned here can be developed by the researcher or a pre-prepared criteria list can be used (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). To determine the study group in line with the purpose of the research using the criterion sampling method, firstly, schools in Kırşehir province with the highest number of foreign national students were identified. Another criterion used in determining the participants of the research is that the school administrators to be interviewed must have worked in schools with foreign national students for at least four years. In accordance with these criteria, 20 school administrators were included as participants in the research. Demographic information about the participants is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participant Demographic Information

<b>Independent variables</b>		<b>f</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Women	1
	Men	19
<b>Service Year</b>	1-9	1
	10-19	7
	20-29	11
	30 and above	1
<b>Education Level</b>	Graduate	13
	Post Graduate	7
	Director	8

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<b>Managerial Duty</b>	Assistant Director	12
<b>Total</b>		<b>20</b>

#### **2.4 Collection of Data**

Before the interviews, participants were provided with information about the subject and purpose of the research. School administrators were informed that the interviews would be recorded, and the recordings would only be listened to by the researchers. It was emphasized that the research results would not be used for non-scientific purposes, and their personal information would be kept confidential in the research, using code names for them. In collecting data through interviews with school administrators, meetings with principals took place in the principal's office, while meetings with vice principals were conducted in the vice principal's own office. Semi-structured interview questions were posed to the participants, and their answers were recorded using an audio recording device. The meetings were conducted face-to-face, lasting approximately 25-30 minutes each. During the interviews, only the interviewer and participant were present. The most desired aspect for the interviewer was to be able to view the subject from the participant's perspective (Özen and Yalçın, 2015).

#### **2.5 Statistical Analysis**

The data obtained from the interviews with school administrators were converted into text in a computer environment for the analysis. The main theme of the research was taken from the texts based on the questions determined at the beginning of the research. To facilitate data analysis, codes were created and listed to form a code list. The coded texts were reviewed by a subject expert, and necessary corrections were made. Data analysis was conducted using the content analysis method. Content analysis aims to bring together similar data under specific concepts and organize them in a way that the reader can understand, in order to explain the collected data. One of the techniques used in content analysis is coding. Coding involves naming sections that form a meaningful whole with descriptive words or groups of words by the researcher (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016). The answers containing the opinions of the administrators were conveyed without modification, and each written opinion of the administrators was numbered as M1, M2... for principals and MY1, MY2... for vice principals.

#### **2.6 Validity and Reliability**

In qualitative data analysis, ensuring credibility and consistency is possible through achieving consensus among coders. Consensus among coders involves coding the obtained data by two or more researchers and checking the consistency between these codings (Creswell, 2017). In the research, the data obtained from the interviews were coded by researchers and a subject expert at different times, and the codings were compared. By using the formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), the reliability of the research was found to be 85%. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), having a consensus percentage above 70% indicates the reliability of the research. Thus, it is possible to say that a reliable result was obtained from the data analysis. To ensure validity in the research, detailed description is employed, including direct quotations from participants' opinions. Detailed description involves providing sufficient information about the content, reorganizing the raw data based on emerging concepts and themes, presenting it to the reader without adding interpretations, and remaining as faithful as possible to the nature of the data. Direct quotations are frequently used by researchers for this purpose (Guba and Lincoln, 1982).

#### **2.7 Role of Researchers**

In the research, the data obtained from interviews with school administrators were presented by using code names, and direct quotations were provided to reflect their opinions. Researchers did not take on a participant role, and the data obtained from the interviews were explained to mirror the natural environment as much as possible. Throughout the research process, ethical standards were adhered to, and school administrators

were informed before each interview. The results of the research were presented by conveying the obtained data in an unbiased manner, ensuring the creation of an objective study.

### III. FINDINGS

The findings related to the research problem, "What are the opinions of school administrators regarding the challenges faced in the educational process of foreign national students?" are presented. The themes emerging from the content analysis of the data obtained from participants' responses to this question are detailed in Figure 1.

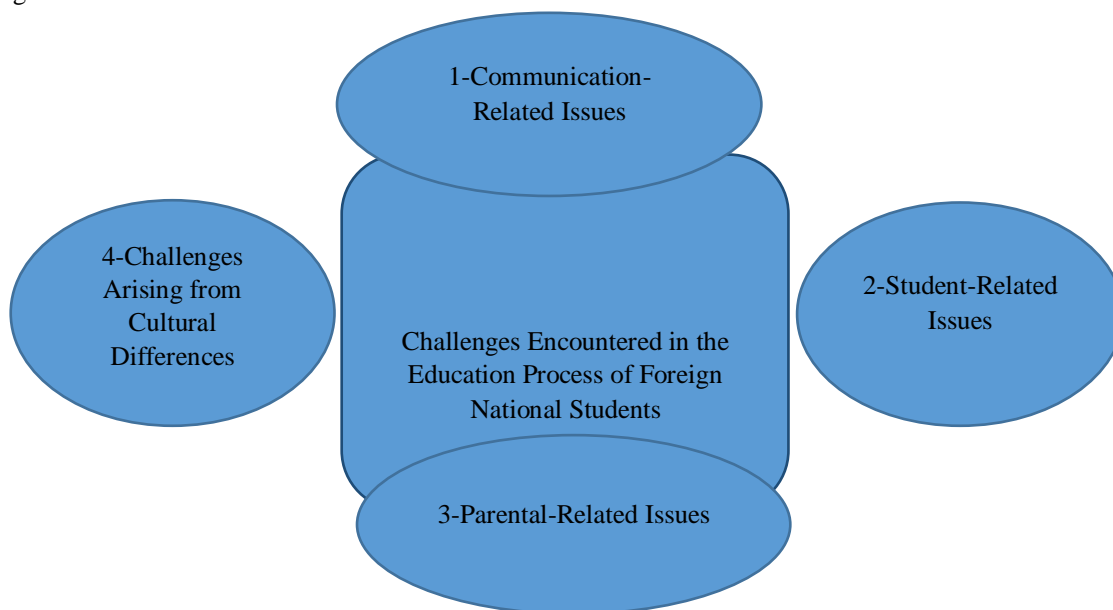


Figure 1. Challenges Encountered in the Education Process of Foreign National Students

As seen in Figure 1, the challenges faced by administrators in the education process of foreign national students are presented under four sub-themes: communication-related issues, parental-related issues, student-related issues, and challenges arising from cultural differences, all falling under the main theme of challenges encountered in the education process of foreign national students.

#### 3.1 Findings on Communication-Related Problems Encountered in the Education Process of Foreign National Students

Research participants emphasized communication-related issues as one of the most significant challenges foreign national students face in the education process. Managers expressed that many foreign students and parents do not speak Turkish, making communication difficult and hindering mutual understanding. Some opinions shared by the managers are listed below:

M2: *We always fail to communicate; we cannot understand each other. They speak a different language, and I speak another.*

M7: *They come to enroll in the school but live in another neighborhood. Since they do not know where or how to register, we spend hours explaining. If they knew the language, we would establish communication quickly, but unfortunately, we waste a lot of time.*

MY3: *When there is any problem with the student at school, I struggle to reach the family. Even if I reach them, I have to find an interpreter to explain the problem to the family. Unfortunately, I cannot communicate.*

MY1: *A parent wants to enroll their child in school but cannot explain which grade level they are in, and we also struggle to explain the class they should attend. We just can't seem to agree.*

MY5: Almost half of them don't speak Turkish. I don't know how we'll communicate.

M8: *Explaining school rules is very challenging; we cannot seem to understand each other. They nod and say 'okay' to everything, but, in reality, they do not understand what I am saying.*

### **3.2 Findings on Student-Related Issues Encountered in the Education Process of Foreign National Students**

The administrators participating in the research expressed that they primarily encounter behavior issues, adaptation problems, fear of academic failure, concerns about the future, and absenteeism issues among student-related problems. Some of the opinions shared by the administrators on this matter are listed below:

MY10: *Students believe they don't belong here and that they cannot succeed, which affects them psychologically.*

MY2: *When unable to establish proper communication with peers, the child becomes aggressive and struggles to adapt to the class.*

M6: *Despite desiring academic success, the student consistently perceives themselves as inadequate and prefers to remain in the background, isolating themselves.*

MY4: *Students do not take absenteeism seriously. They believe it doesn't matter whether they attend or not, resulting in falling behind in classes and feeling alienated from friends and the class environment.*

M5: *They see Turkey as a transitional point; therefore, they do not prioritize school because they are focused on the education they will receive in the country they plan to go and plan their future accordingly.*

MY11: *Most of the games they play tend to be violent, and even in jest, they engage in violent jokes. This leads to their exclusion by other peers.*

MY12: *They struggle to express themselves at school or outside of school, leading to maladjustment and isolation.*

### **3.3 Findings on Parental-Related Issues Encountered in the Education Process of Foreign National Students**

The participating administrators identified various parental-related problems, with the most common ones being related to address changes, changes in contact numbers, school-parent collaboration, and issues related to material procurement. Below are some of the views expressed by the administrators on this matter:

M3: *Unfortunately, we cannot reach the parent we want to meet to discuss the child's school situation or visit the home environment. They keep changing their phone number constantly.*

MY1: *We send letters home about absenteeism, but they don't reach the intended address because they have moved elsewhere. They don't inform us about it either.*

M4: *The parent doesn't come to school, often using work as an excuse, or says, 'Why should I come? My child is already studying.'*

MY9: *Some parents attend from meeting to meeting, or they only come to school to get the student certificate.*

M2: *In urgent situations, we try to call the parent, but the phone number is not in use. The child forgets to write down the new phone number and bring it, and it becomes too late.*

MY7: *Teachers ask students for materials, but some parents refuse to get them, saying they are unnecessary.*

M1: *The parent doesn't want to send the child to school, telling them to go work at the market. When you call, they say they will send them to school later. They don't help us with the child's education.*

MY8: *The parent, who is expected to support the child at home, is not helpful at all. They may not know Turkish, but they could be more dedicated to following the child's lessons.*

### **3.4 Findings Regarding Problems Arising from Cultural Differences in the Education Process of Foreign National Students**

Research participating administrators have identified several issues related to cultural differences, including excessive use of spicy food, gender discrimination between boys and girls, speaking loudly, and problems related to dressing habits. Below are some opinions expressed by the administrators on this matter:

MY7: *During home visits, we sometimes ask the child in the house which class or school they attend, and they say, "My father doesn't send me to school.*

M4: *We ask the parents how many children they have, and they only mention the number of boys. They don't mention the girls, saying they will get married and leave.*

M6: *When trying to talk to the child or parent, they respond with such a loud voice that it makes us uncomfortable with the tone.*

MY5: *When touring the classrooms or in the corridors, the children's conversations are completely in the form of shouting, speaking incredibly loudly. Sometimes we think they are fighting.*

M8: *During lunch breaks or recess, the corridors are filled with an excessive aroma of spices. They always add spices to their meals.*

MY12: *Although the children try to comply with the school dress code, parents often dress their children in the traditional clothes of their home country. When asked why, they say it's important to them.*

#### **IV. CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Foreign National Students' Communication-Related Issues in the Educational Process; the majority of the participating administrators have expressed encountering communication-related problems with parents and students. The lack of interest from parents towards their students during the educational process, violence towards classmates, and undesired behaviors are thought to be rooted in language and communication issues. The inability to communicate negative incidents during registration or within the school, failure to reach the family in situations where informing them is crucial, and the incomplete adoption of school rules are considered significant problems due to communication gaps. In this context, the studies of Saritaş, Şahin, and Çatalbaş (2016) revealed that administrators face dilemmas in ensuring student equivalences, with older children being placed in lower grades by equivalence committees causing issues. Levent and Çayak (2017) identified equivalence problems in the education of Syrian students in schools in Pendik and Zeytinburnu districts of Istanbul. Additionally, Solak and Çelik (2018) highlighted that language issues are the primary and most significant problem faced by refugee students in schools. These studies support the findings of our research.

Student-Generated Issues in the Educational Process for Foreign National Students; the participating administrators stated that they encounter issues such as behavioral problems, adaptation problems, fear of academic failure, future anxiety, and absenteeism in students. Kaştan and Bozan (2016) found that immigrant students have high rates of absenteeism, while Buz (2008) revealed that 90% of foreign students think they will not stay permanently in Turkey and, therefore, do not prioritize their education, leading to absenteeism. Taşar (2019) discovered that Syrian university students cannot express themselves fully to peers, officials, and professors. Ağcadağ-Çelik (2019) found that Syrian students tend to be violent, even in their games, displaying physically harmful behaviors. In the study by Şimşir and Dilmaç (2018), teachers mentioned foreign students' problems with fights and violence. In the study by Bulut, Kanat-Soysal, and Gülçiçek (2018), the most significant problems in the formal education of Syrian students were reported to occur during their adaptation process to school. All these results show parallel similarities with our study.

Parent-Generated Issues in the Educational Process for Foreign National Students; the participating administrators mentioned frequently encountering problems related to changes in addresses and phone numbers, school-family cooperation, and material supply for students. It is observed that families with low income levels cannot support their children's educational process. Nar (2008) found that families could not help students with their lessons due to not knowing Turkish. Güngör and Şenel (2018) observed that foreign student parents do not come to school, do not care for their children, and do not help them with their lessons. In the study by Saritaş et al. (2016), communication problems were reported with parents of foreign national students, stating that parents do not care about their children's lessons, do not follow up on homework, and face difficulties in providing educational materials due to economic reasons. Additionally, Topsakal, Merey, and Keçe (2013) mentioned that

children are forced to work during school hours due to financial difficulties and the lack of awareness in families. These results parallel the findings of our study.

Issues Arising from Cultural Differences in the Educational Process for Foreign National Students; the participating administrators stated that they encounter problems related to dietary habits, gender-based discrimination, speaking loudly, and clothing-related issues. Levent and Çayak (2017) revealed that Syrian students face difficulties in adapting to Turkish society due to differences in language, culture, and lifestyle. Taştan and Çelik (2017) found that children forced to migrate from countries experiencing war face problems due to cultural differences, not knowing bureaucratic processes and procedures. These results are in parallel with the findings of our study. According to the results of our research, the following recommendations are deemed appropriate.

#### **Practitioner-Oriented Recommendations:**

- 1-) Foreign national families experience communication difficulties during school enrollment. Measures should be taken to provide guidance activities to direct newly arrived families to schools and assist them during the enrollment process.
- 2-) Programs should be organized to inform foreign national families about our customs, traditions, and practices as part of an assimilation training when they arrive in our country.
- 3-) Job opportunities should be provided to foreign national families to enable them to stand on their own feet.
- 4-) Attention should be paid to age-peer level when placing foreign national students in classes.

#### **Researcher-Oriented Recommendations:**

- 1-) This study was conducted in a qualitative research format. Quantitative research methods could be included in future studies to reach a broader participant group.
- 2-) When selecting schools for research, those with a high concentration of foreign national students were preferred. Schools with few or no foreign national students could also be included in the research to allow for comparisons between different types of schools.
- 3-) Additionally, conducting interviews with foreign national parents to explore their views and expectations regarding the Turkish education system, and conducting research on the problems foreign national students face in school life, could be suggested for future research.

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