

# How Do Asylum Seeker Students Make Sense of Social Studies?\*

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** In the development and adaptation of asylum- seeker students in Türkiye, the social studies course stands out. This research aims to reveal the views of asylum- seeker students in Türkiye about the social studies course.

**Method:** Qualitative research approach was adopted in the study. The data were obtained through the interview technique. Ten asylum- seeker students who have spent the last three years in Türkiye participated in this research.

**Findings:** As a result of the research, asylum- seeker students stated that the social studies course is an easy, fun and useful course that deals with real life, provides the ability to produce solutions to the problems encountered during life, develops the perception of time and space in history and geography, and allows them to socialize by talking and sharing things. They enjoy the topics related to migration and human rights in the social studies course, but have difficulty in understanding history topics. In the social studies course, the students learn vital and current issues, rights and citizenship issues, and recognizes Türkiye and Atatürk. Regarding the content of the social studies course, the students wanted the course give more space to the subject of migration, and to include subjects that touch on the culture, history and geography of their own countries. They also wanted more practice in the social studies course.

**Implications:** As a result of the research the social studies course can be made concrete and taught with visual materials, and this course can be enriched with more active, collaborative and inclusive classroom activities can be recommended.

## Keywords

migration, asylum- seeker, students, social studies, elementary education.

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## Introduction

Migration, which is defined as any kind of relocation that makes a meaningful difference in people's lives (Erder, 1986; Fawcett, 1985), is increasing on an international scale today. International migrations, which are realized for a wide variety of reasons, are generally made from developing countries to developed countries for business purposes (Schmid, 1992). In this context, it is seen that a significant majority of migrations in the world are actually aimed at meeting the labor force needs of the West (Hayter, 2000). According to the 2024 International Migration Report prepared by the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2024), there are 281 million international migrants worldwide and this rate is increasing every year. Türkiye is the second country most affected by international migration (BBC News, 2024).

Unlike migration to developed countries around the world, migration to Türkiye is mostly driven by the need to escape from war and seek asylum in a safe country. In particular, there have been various waves of migration to Türkiye from countries with civil unrest such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. After the Arab Spring, the civil unrest in Syria led to the largest wave of migration. As of the end of 2024, 3.112.683 Syrians refugees and 12.549 Afghans refugees and 91,373, Afghans asylum-seekers and 89.397 Iranians asylum-seekers were living in Türkiye under temporary protection (The UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR], 2024).

As a humanitarian act, the phenomenon of migration, which causes differentiation in the social structure (Sirkeci & Cohen, 2015), can create new needs for both those who migrate and those who live in the countries of migration. As a result of migration, all sociological institutions in a society such as family, economy and politics are affected. One of the sociological institutions that undergo restructuring after migration is the educational institution. Asylum-seeker students and refugee who come to a different educational institution as a result of migration need an educational environment that provides sociocultural adaptation (Öztürk et al., 2017).

In the education process of refugee and migrant children, teaching approaches such as multicultural education and inclusive education are adopted. In Türkiye, the Ministry of National Education has adopted an inclusive education approach for the education process of these students. Inclusive education is an educational approach that aims to educate students with different qualitative and quantitative characteristics in the same educational environment (Amaç et al., 2025). According to inclusive education, every individual can learn and succeed. To achieve this, learning environments must be tailored to the individual (Rose & Howley, 2007). Multicultural education models aimed at promoting socialization are also based on the cultural representation of individuals from different cultures in the teaching and learning processes. Accordingly, different cultures participate in the education process together, and their access to education and the support they receive are geared towards ensuring their cultural adaptation (Düzen et al., 2025).

Various sociocultural opportunities were provided to refugee and asylum-seeker students nationals who migrated to Türkiye. As a result, various arrangements have been made in many areas, especially in education (Erdem, 2017). These regulations include establishing temporary education centers, ensuring their inclusion in all formal education, allowing schools opened by Syrians, conducting vocational training courses and projects, providing language trainings specially designed for all age groups, and providing opportunities in higher education (Duruel,

2016, Erdoğan, 2018). In addition, arrangements have been made in the curricula of courses in schools to meet the needs of asylum-seeker students

Within the scope of the right to education of international migrant children under temporary protection in Türkiye, the social studies course in primary education stands out in the socialization and integration of these children. The social studies course is one of the first courses that comes to mind in the context of sociocultural adaptation and producing basic solutions to the problems encountered after migration. In this context, the social studies course has an important role and responsibility. Social studies is an important course that adopts sociocultural adaptation as a basic principle (Kaya & Öner, 2017). In addition, social studies is an important course in solving various sociocultural and psychological problems (Ersoy & Seyidoğlu, 2020; Karaman & Bulut, 2018) that prevent the socialization of asylum-seeker and refugee students (Maksum et al., 2021). Social studies is concerned with individuals' understanding of social realities and the efficient execution of the socialization process. In this context, social processes such as migration, sociocultural adaptation, socialization, and the education of different cultures together fall within the teaching area of social studies (Sönmez, 1999). National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS, 2023) has approved a new definition of social studies: "Social studies is the study of individuals, communities, systems, and their interactions across time and place that prepares students for local, national, and global civic life." At the same time, the NCSS has explained the purpose of social studies as follows (NCSS, 2023):

Using an inquiry-based approach, social studies helps students examine vast human experiences through the generation of questions, collection and analysis of evidence from credible sources, consideration of multiple perspectives, and the application of social studies knowledge and disciplinary skills. As a result of examining the past, participating in the present, and learning how to shape the future, social studies prepares learners for a lifelong practice of civil discourse and civic engagement in their communities. Social studies centers knowledge of human rights and local, national, and global responsibilities so that learners can work together to create a just world in which they want to live.

In social studies teaching, the information obtained from interdisciplinary studies in ensuring socialization constitutes the content of social studies (Odia, 2014). Social studies is an interdisciplinary field encompassing numerous subjects such as history, geography, economics, sociology, culture, management, law, citizenship, human rights, social justice, and current issues (NCSS, 2023). The topic of refugees and migrants is a current issue within the scope of social studies. Therefore, social studies plays an important role in understanding and analyzing the reality of migration in all its dimensions. In this context, this course is effective in the construction of the social structure after migration and migration. In other words, social studies contributes to solving the problems created by the new social reality brought about by migration. Thus, one of the most important functions of social studies in social structures receiving migration is to ensure sociocultural adaptation and to understand the changes in the reality of life and to design new desired life realities. In this respect, social studies teachers should be able to design teaching and learning environments that include the individual, developmental and sociocultural differences of all their students, including refugee students (Seyidoğlu, 2024).

The Social Studies Curriculum developed by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in Türkiye in 2024 also addresses the phenomenon of migration and migrant education. In grades 4, 5, 6 and 7 of the social studies course, a learning area called "Living Together" was developed. For example, in the 6th grade social studies curriculum, the learning outcome coded SB.6.1.3. of the learning outcomes and process components is determined as "To be able to negotiate solutions to problems encountered in social life". The teaching-learning process of this outcome is explained as follows (MoNE, 2024a, p.1):

The teacher makes a short presentation on the definition and types of social problems and asks students to give examples from daily life about social problems. Based on the examples given, students examine social problems such as disasters, environmental pollution, migration, epidemics, waste. As a result of the examinations, a fishbone is created for the causes of social problems in our country.

In the 2024 Social Studies Curriculum common text, "virtue-action-value" tables were developed. Under the title of hospitality action of the value of love in the program, the sub-action "Behaves hospitably to citizens of other countries such as tourists, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers" was included. Thus, the phenomenon of migration was included under various headings in the program (MoNE, 2024b, p. 86).

There are many studies on refugee students living in Türkiye. When the studies conducted within the scope of social studies course are examined, it is seen that various theoretical and applied studies have been conducted on social studies course and migration and immigration problems. The studies differ in terms of socialization problems, educational problems, and perceptions. For example, Topkaya and Akdağ (2016) examined the views of prospective social studies teachers on asylum seekers. Yıldırım (2020) examined inclusive education for asylum seekers in social studies course. As a result of the research, it was seen that various activities involving the cultures of asylum seekers were included in the social studies course. Özdemir (2020), in his study on the cultural adaptation of asylum seekers with social studies teachers, found that teachers defined the concept of cultural adaptation as acceptance, respect for differences, compliance with social rules, commitment to national values and culture transfer. Kızıl and Dönmez (2017) examined the problems in social studies education provided to refugees in Türkiye. As a result of the research, it was stated that they were exposed to negative ideological education about Türkiye and the Turkish nation in Syria and that this situation should be taken into consideration while providing education to asylum seekers by the state in Türkiye. In a study conducted by Kuş and Önger (2020) with social studies teachers, it was revealed that problems such as policies and programs implemented, language and cultural differences, and the students' lack of adequate education negatively affected the behavior of refugee and asylum-seeker students. When these studies in the literature are examined, the problems of asylum seekers and the problems experienced after migration are mostly revealed in the context of social studies course.

At the same time, the problems experienced from the perspectives of teachers and students were emphasized. In studies conducted abroad, the issue of social studies education that can be carried out to provide refugee and asylum-seeker students with global education has been studied. Global education studies were carried out together with social studies activity studies with students from different individual, developmental and sociocultural environments. In the research, practices that require careful attention to sensitive issues such as acquiring knowledge, creating community and home connections, interpersonal communication and intercultural dialogue, supporting and expanding language teaching were carried out. The study concluded

that refugee students are a unique student population that provides a rich educational diversity in the social studies classroom, and that although refugee and asylum-seeker students face multiple barriers to success in school, teachers can use a variety of practices to capitalize on student backgrounds and create inclusive classrooms where all students can meaningfully engage in learning (Quaynor & Hamilton, 2012).

In Türkiye, there are only two studies conducted directly with students about refugee and asylum-seeker students' perceptions of the social studies course. One of them, Seçgin and Erten Özalp (2020) did not identify the problems experienced by asylum-seeking students in the social studies course from the perspective of teachers and students. Accordingly, it was stated that teachers were very indifferent to the social studies course of asylum-seeking students. Teachers also stated that they thought that this was because they did not know Turkish well. Asylum-seeking students, on the other hand, stated that they did not like the subjects related to Turkish history and geography; that they had difficulty in understanding the social studies course and that they were not successful in this course. The other study, Yaman et al., (2023) examined the contribution of social studies course in the integration of asylum-seeking students into the society according to student views. As a result of the research, it is seen that the social studies course is effective in helping asylum-seeking students acquire the Turkish way of life and Turkish culture. Although these studies provide some results about student views, it is useful to expand the research with different participants in many different schools.

In this study, it is aimed to reveal what asylum-seeker students living in Türkiye think about the social studies course, what they learn in the social studies course, the acquisitions of the social studies course and how the acquisitions are used in daily life. At the same time, it was aimed to determine the subjects that these students liked the most in the social studies course and the subjects they found unnecessary, to reveal which subjects they had difficulty in learning and the reasons for this, and to reveal which subjects they thought should not be included in the social studies course. In addition to contributing to the literature with the data obtained in this study, it is aimed to contribute to the production of policies for social studies education. This study will also reveal the expectations of these students from social studies education and their familiarity with the course.

In this direction, it will also contribute to the design of the social studies course education process in line with the interests and needs of refugee and asylum-seeker students.

In this context, the aim of this researcher is to reveal the views of asylum-seeker students in Türkiye about the social studies course. In line with this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

Asylum-seeker students in Türkiye,

1. What are their definitions of the social studies course?
2. What are their acquisitions in the social studies course?
3. What are their views on the content of the social studies course?
4. What are the difficulties they experience in the social studies course?
5. What are their suggestions for the social studies course?

## Method

### *Research Design*

A qualitative research approach was adopted in the study. In qualitative research, an approach that requires a perspective on the events from the perspective of the participants in the research is adopted (Glesne, 2016; Güler et al., 2015; Jensen, 2013; Potter, 2013). In qualitative research, data collection techniques such as observation, interview and document analysis are used (Dowling, 2012; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this study, qualitative research was used since it was aimed to reveal the views and perceptions of the refugee and asylum-seeker students participating in the study about the social studies course in detail in their own words.

### *Participants*

Criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling types, was used to determine the participants in the study. Criterion sampling is a type of sampling in which participants are determined within the framework of certain criteria (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this study, first of all, secondary schools in the city center where immigrant children receive intensive education were determined. The study group consisted of 10 asylum-seeker students. These voluntary students were selected among 6th and 7th grade students who came from different countries, and spent the last three years in Türkiye. Information about the participants is given in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Demographic characteristics of the students participating in the study*

Code name	Classroom	Age	Length of stay in Türkiye	Countries
Farkhunda	6	12	4	Afghanistan
Behram	6	13	7	Iran
Kasım	6	12	3	Tataristan
Ahmad	6	12	6	Syria
Nadir	6	14	5	Afghanistan
Omar	6	12	4	Syria
Abduljabbar	7	14	4	Iraq
Fatıma	7	13	3	Iraq
Ferid	7	13	6	Syria
İyman	7	13	7	Egypt

The students who participated in the study have been living in Türkiye for at least 3 years, on average 5 years, and are familiar with Türkiye. They have been studying at their schools for at least two or three years. Their ages range between 12 and 14. There are students from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt, Iran and Tatarstan. Parents' occupations are usually military, police, tradesmen and farmers. The education level of the parents is mostly primary school and high school.



### ***Data Collection***

The research data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interview is a type of interview in which certain questions are prepared beforehand but new questions can be asked to the participants when necessary (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). A semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was used in the interview. The interview form was developed by the researcher. Two social studies education experts who work with refugees were consulted during the development of this form. A preliminary interview was conducted with a student. After necessary adjustments, the form was implemented.

Interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis. Before the research, the participants were informed about the research and their participant rights were explained. Their signatures were obtained for the participant consent form. In addition, permission was obtained from their parents. The semi-structured interviews conducted in line with this permission were recorded with a voice recorder. Interviews with the participants were conducted face-to-face. Interviews were conducted in Turkish since the students speak Turkish.

Due to the limited language proficiency of the participants in the interviews, the students' level of self-expression limited the depth of the data. Explanations were provided during the interviews to verify meaning and support the students' level of understanding. During the data analysis process, attention was paid to language-related shifts in meaning, and such instances were discussed and interpreted among the researchers.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data obtained as a result of the research were analyzed through content analysis. In content analysis, it is adopted to proceed from the part to the whole. Content analysis involves more in-depth data analysis and conceptualization (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The audio recordings obtained were transcribed in computer environment and made ready for analysis. Categories were obtained from coding and themes were obtained from categories. In line with these themes, the findings obtained from the data were interpreted and conclusions were reached. Content analysis was conducted by two researchers.

Credibility should be ensured in qualitative research. In qualitative research approach, credibility is understood as the accuracy of the data obtained, reflecting and confirming what the participants actually said in the analysis (Güler et al., 2015). Various measures were taken by the researchers to ensure trustworthiness in the research. In this context, direct quotations were made from the participants. The findings obtained as a result of the research were shared with the participants and their opinions were taken. It was seen that the findings of the research formed meaningful results and were consistent within themselves. Furthermore, to ensure transferability in the research, the findings outlined by Miles et al., (2014) have been made applicable to other contexts, participant groups, or cases sharing fundamental similarities with the original research setting.

## Findings

In the study, the opinions of asylum-seeker students about the social studies course are given under the titles of perceptions, acquisitions, content, difficulties and suggestions in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Asylum-seeker Students' Views on Social Studies Course*

Perceptions	Social studies course is fun and useful. Social studies course is conversational Social studies course is easier than other lessons.
Acquisitions	Turkish culture and social norms. Turkish history and geography etc Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his characteristics Citizenship and human rights Daily life knowledge Current events Communication skills
Content	Topics of interest Human rights, Migration Topics of no interest Turkish history and geography
Difficulties	Basic Challenges Abstract concepts Coping with challenges Ask a friend Online learning
Suggestions	Add new topics related to migration and their own country and culture More practical and visual lessons

### *Perceptions about Social Studies*

Under this theme, the students' perceptions of the social studies course were revealed. In this context, the students made perceptions about the content of the course and comparisons with other courses. In these interpretations, the students described the social studies course as a good, useful, easy and fun course. In addition, the students said that the social studies course is a course that is based on narration and that it is a course that allows the students to talk in class and to talk about a subject and to talk about it. Examples of the students' opinions are as follows:

I think it is a very useful and good lesson. I have a lot of fun in class. (Nadir, Grade 6).

I think it is useful because without social studies we would not have learned some things. It is better because it is a lecture-based course. I have difficulty in mathematics, but in social studies we talk and the lesson goes well. What I like the most is that we talk, we tell our problems. We share things. (Fatıma, Grade 7)

Social studies is easier than other subjects. The lesson is fun. (Behram, Grade 6).



### ***Acquisitions from the Social Studies***

Under this theme, the students explained what they learned in the social studies course, what they gained from the social studies course and how they used what they learned in the social studies course. The students said that they learned about history, rights and duties related to citizenship, their own rights and responsibilities, and geographical issues in the social studies course and that they learned information about these issues. Examples of the students' opinions are as follows:

I learn about my rights and responsibilities in the country I live in. What this country wants from me. I have to obey the laws. I learn about laws in this lesson. (Ahmad, 6th grade)

We learn about the history of Türkiye and developments in the world. We learned about migrations and we migrated because it is an important issue for us. (Kasım, 6th grade)

I learned where Tehran is located and that Iran and Türkiye are neighbors. (Behram, 6th grade)

It is very important to communicate better with people. We get to know ourselves in the social studies course. We realize information about our family and our environment. (Ferid, Grade 7)

In their responses about what they gained from the social studies course, students said that they recognized Türkiye and Atatürk. Students explained their views as follows:

Countries, cities, social distance, history, maps, I learn about Atatürk. I learn about ancient history, I learn about what they used to do and how they lived. I learn about life and customs in Türkiye. I learn about Atatürk's contributions to Türkiye. He made Türkiye is a strong country. I also learn about the beauties of Türkiye. (Fatıma, 7th grade)

He tells us about Türkiye. Therefore, we get to know the cities. For example, I learned the city we live in and its districts very closely. (Omar, Grade 6)

We learn the rules of rights. We learn the rules of life outside. Thanks to social studies, we see what we need to learn in everyday life. This is very useful for us. (Kasım, 6th grade)

In this section, which includes the opinions of asylum-seeker students about the social studies course, the students think that the social studies course is a course that tells about life and deals with the events encountered in daily life to prepare for life. However, the majority of the students also thought that social studies was a course that dealt with citizenship issues that addressed our rights and responsibilities and included history and geography. Examples of these students' views are as follows:

We learn about the things we have experienced in life and historical things. Sometimes in life we need to apply somewhere or do something. We have problems in this regard. Social studies tells us these things we need to do as a citizen. (İyman, Grade 7)

I learn about communication, I learn about equality, I learn about history, for example Ottoman history, I learn about our rights and rules, I learn where my country is on the map. (Farkhunda, Grade 6)

In their responses about what they gained from the social studies course, students said that they learned about current issues encountered in life. In addition, students stated that they learned to establish positive relationships with their friends and social environment, to communicate and not to be prejudiced. Students explained their views as follows:

I traveled with my friends. We got to know each other. We had a dialog with new friends. Now they are not prejudiced against me and I am not prejudiced against them. (Behram, Grade 6).

Not being prejudiced, speaking in I language, I recognized the countries, I learned about maps, I learned the rules, I learned very important things about communication. Now we communicate with each other with love and respect. We can get along. (Farkhunda, Grade 6)

For example, I learned how we can behave, the laws, for example, how I can do that. We learn about our history, the life of our ancestors. (İyman, Grade 7)

Students stated that they applied what they learned in the social studies course in daily life, helped their families in their daily lives, and developed ways of behaving in accordance with the rules required by social life with what they learned in the course. They explained how they used what they learned in the social studies course as follows:

When I go out, when I go to the bazaar or the market, I use what I learned in the social studies course when I talk to people. I help my family because they do not know much Turkish because they came here at an advanced age. This makes it easier for me to live in Türkiye. (Abduljabbar, Grade 7)

I use it at home, I use it in the environment. I help my mother communicate with others. (Kasım, Grade 7)

### ***Social Studies Course Content***

In order to reveal the students' evaluation of the social studies course, they were asked about the topics they liked, the topics they found unnecessary and the topics they found difficult. The topics that the students liked the most in the social studies course were the topics that addressed the conditions they were in due to their immigration status and the topics that interested them. Some examples of the students' opinions are as follows:

I liked the subjects where we have rights. I liked the subject of population. I liked the Ottoman state. (Kasım, 6th grade)

Old Mosques Maps, topics related to agriculture, what grows where. Weather, I like these. (Fatıma, 7th grade)

The new topic we learned is being respectful to other cultures. Because at first I didn't know Turkish and people were prejudiced against us, so I liked this topic. (Farkhunda, Grade 6)

All of the students stated that there were no topics they found unnecessary in the social studies course. Only Abduljabbar said, "There are no topics that I find unnecessary. However, sometimes there is too much detail in Ottoman history, population, and European history". However, they said that there were too many abstract concepts in social studies and that they had difficulty in learning them. For example, Fatıma from Grade 7 said, "The subjects I have difficulty with are communication and human relations in the first unit, travel in Turkish history in the second unit, population in our country in the third unit, and bridges between countries in the last unit." Farkhunda (Grade 6) said the following about why she had difficulties in Journey to History and Human Geography of our country: "The Ottoman history periods were a bit difficult because I don't know much about the history of Türkiye because I am from another country. I did not understand some words. For example, I did not fully understand the words human geography, plain, plateau, valley." (Farkhunda, 6th grade).

### ***Difficulties Experienced in Social Studies***

Regarding the difficulties the students experienced in the social studies course, the students stated that they had difficulties due to not speaking Turkish well, especially in historical subjects, and that they could not understand some abstract concepts in the social studies course. The opinions of the students about the difficulties they encountered in the social studies course are as follows:

I don't understand some words in class, such as entrepreneurship, consumer, continuity. Again, I have an understanding for the Arabic ones. But some words are heavy for me. Maybe I can understand them by comparing them. I can speak and write Turkish, but there are still many words I do not understand, especially in the social studies course. (Nadir, Grade 6)

Some words are difficult when I don't know them, but I understand better when they are Arabic words. Some words are also in our language, especially when there are similar words in history subjects. (Fatima, Grade 7)

Regarding the difficulties they experienced in the social studies course and the solutions they brought to these difficulties, some students said that they "could not think of anything" and that they could not produce any solutions. Some students stated that they asked their friends and some students stated that they learned what they could not learn at school, especially with the support of the internet.

When the teacher explains some subjects, I don't know the meaning of some words. This is difficult for me. I learn by asking the teacher and my friends. (Abduljabbar, Grade 7).

For example, in the unit on Anatolia, the new homeland, I did research on Google to find out what raiding, conquest and expedition meant. There were various information about the new homeland of the Turks and I read them. (Ahmad, Grade 6).

### ***Suggestions for the Social Studies Course***

When the students were asked how they wanted the social studies course to be and asked for their suggestions, they made suggestions regarding the content of the course and the learning-teaching process. Regarding the content of the social studies course, the students wanted it to introduce the countries more and to give more space to the subject of migration. Regarding the learning and teaching process of the social studies course, they wanted it to be more travel-observation, to have more applications and to bring solutions to the problems that people experience. Examples of the students' opinions are as follows:

There should be more information about people who migrate and come to other countries. We want to tell about the poverty and lack we experienced as immigrants. (Nadir, 6th grade).

It should describe the difficulties that people face. For example, poverty. It should teach us how to overcome these problems. (Aduljabbar, 7th grade)

I would like to see more coverage of Iran in bridges between countries. This will help my Turkish friends get to know me better. There is also the issue of migration. People go through a lot when they migrate. They only wrote about it on one page in the lecture. We skipped it immediately. But there should have been more. There are very few topics on migration. We need to understand what people go through with migration. (Behram, 6th grade)

I would like to learn about the benefits of countries and what is inside countries. (Fatima, Grade 7)

I would like to go on more field trips (Kasım, Grade 6)

### **Discussion**

In this study, in which the perceptions of asylum-seeker students about the social studies course were tried to be determined, important results were reached. First of all, as a result of the research, it was determined that the students had positive opinions about the social studies course and recognized the aims and characteristics of the social studies course. In this context,

they stated that the social studies course is a participatory, easy, fun and useful course that deals with real life, helps students develop the ability to produce solutions to problems encountered during life, improves their perception of time and space, history and geography, and allows students to socialize by talking and sharing things. In the literature, studies on asylum-seeker and refugee students and social studies education have yielded different results. While some studies have shown that these students like and benefit from social studies, some studies have shown that they are uninterested and unsuccessful in social studies. For example, some studies have found that asylum-seeking students find the social studies course useful and fun (Üstündağ-Şener & Başkan, 2021), and that students have positive attitudes towards the social studies course (Akman & Ekinci, 2021; Keçeci, 2019). On the contrary, there are also studies that show that asylum-seeking students are generally uninterested and unsuccessful in social studies (Çelik, 2019; Erten Özalp, 2019; Kızıl & Dönmez, 2017). Reaching such different results in the studies may be due to factors such as the efficiency of the social studies course, teacher influence, students' lack of Turkish language problems, etc.

The other result of the study is the students stated that they learned about Türkiye and Atatürk, the history and geography of Türkiye, communication and rules in social life, and their rights and responsibilities as citizens. This result of the study is similar to the results of many studies on asylum-seeker and refugee students and social studies education. In Özdemir's (2020) study, according to social studies teachers, this course contributed to asylum-seeking students' respect and tolerance, loyalty to the homeland, recognition of different cultures, and empathy. In addition, although it was observed that Syrian students' perception of citizenship, democratic attitudes and values were lower than Turkish students (Özbilek, 2022). Bozkaya (2010) found that citizenship education and social studies courses contributed to immigrant students to know their rights and responsibilities, respect the rules, respect the rights of others, feel responsibility and have a sense of patriotism. In the same study, it was concluded that the social studies course had a significant effect on the formation of Syrian students' perceptions of citizenship. Uysal (2022), in his meta-synthesis study on social studies and immigrant students, concluded that the social studies course was "adaptive and strengthening the bond of citizenship" for these students, and that Syrian students were able to recognize Turkish culture and history, learn about their own country, and reach citizenship-related acquisitions. Similarly, Baloğlu et al., (2019) concluded that this course is necessary for refugee students to learn Türkiye's history and geography, social life and culture, citizenship responsibilities and social rules. In addition, Yaman, Aktaş and Kara (2023) concluded that the social studies course contributes to asylum-seeking students' learning and use of the Turkish language, learning Turkish lifestyle and behavior patterns, Turkish culture, and integration into Turkish society. In another study, students stated that they learned Turkish culture through the social studies course by saying "I learn the history, geography and culture of the country I live in" (Seçgin & Erten Özalp, 2020). In Şanlı's (2019) study, teachers emphasized that the Social Studies course is important for refugee students in terms of getting to know Turkish social life and culture and contributes to raising them as individuals with healthy identity development who know and adopt Türkiye's history, geography and culture. In some studies, it has been determined that courses such as history, geography and citizenship facilitate the integration of these students into society (Natanson, 2006, cited in Yaman et al., 2023). However, in some studies, it was determined that the social studies course had no effect on the adaptation of asylum seekers to Türkiye (Zayimoğlu-Öztürk, 2021) and the social studies course content was found to be insufficient

for the integration of asylum seekers (Zayimoğlu-Öztürk, 2018). In his meta-analysis study, Uysal (2022) revealed that social studies contributed to the integration process in classes where there was no or minimal language problem, while Aktaş (2023) stated that asylum-seeker students could not adapt to the class within the framework of culture and citizenship themes, especially due to the language problem, and that they were below the general in terms of cognitive and affective aspects, could not socialize and participate.

According to another result of the study, asylum-seeker students stated that they "apply the acquisitions of the social studies course and how they use them in daily life at home, in the bazaar, in the market and in all areas of life". In addition, the students explained that they also help their family members. This result shows that students are able to participate in social life and use the acquisitions of the social studies course in their daily lives. Similarly, Uysal (2022) stated that the social studies course provided these students with life skills and that the content of the social studies course had a positive effect on their preparation for life. The results of this research also coincide with the results of some studies that social studies is effective in solving the problems students face in their daily lives (Natanson, 2006, cited in Yaman et al., 2023). In addition, as a result of the research, asylum-seeking students stated that they also learned current issues in social studies course. This result of the study is similar to the result of Bozkaya (2021b) that the approach of teaching current issues expressed in the social studies curriculum is effective in ensuring the social adaptation of immigrant students.

In the results of the research, the students stated that they liked the topics such as migration, human rights, etc., the most in the social studies course, which touched on the conditions they were in due to their immigration status. This result of the research is supported by similar research results. For example, Seçgin and Erten Özalp (2020) concluded that asylum-seeking students participated more in the social studies course democracy, human rights, Nevruz holiday and religious holidays, UNICEF, UN and migration. In the same study, the topics in which asylum-seeking students participated the least were explained as symbols of independence, maps, scales, early civilizations, Ottoman Empire, Revolutionary History and Selçuk History. In addition, it was perceived that these students generally disliked the subjects related to Turkish history and geography and had difficulty in understanding the social studies course. In another study, social studies teachers stated that asylum-seeking students behaved more carefully and willingly in subjects related to their own countries (Erten Özalp, 2019). Kızıl and Dönmez (2017) emphasized in their study that the topics that asylum-seeking students dislike in the social studies course differ according to their countries of nationality. For example, it is seen that asylum-seeking students from Iran do not particularly like the subjects about secularism, revolutions and innovations, while asylum-seeking students from Syria do not particularly like the Ottoman and Revolution History subjects. According to the results of the research conducted by the Science Education Culture Research Center (2015), the reasons for Syrian refugee students' prejudiced view of Turkish history stem from the information about Türkiye included in the Syrian national education program. This information includes the fact that part of the territory of the Republic of Türkiye is called "Arab Homeland", that Türkiye has usurped these lands, that the Asi River is between Syrian inland waters, that the Ottoman Empire was a colonialist power, that Hatay is a city of Syria and that it was invaded by Türkiye (cited in Kızıl & Dönmez, 2017; Erten Özalp, 2019). Similarly, Aktaş (2023) stated in his study that these students had difficulty in understanding the themes in the Social Studies course such as elements of Turkish history, democratic government, national holidays, Turkish family



structure, and Turkish culture because these students from various countries such as Syria, Iraq, and Libya experienced conflict in their inner worlds because they evaluated these themes with their own social environment and cultural perspectives.

According to the results of the research, asylum-seeker students have difficulty in learning historical topics in social studies course. Students stated that they had difficulty in learning dates and wars in history subjects. These research findings are also supported by different research results (Seçgin & Erten Özalp, 2020; Polat, 2012). However, according to the results of the research, these students have difficulty in understanding abstract concepts in the social studies course, especially because they do not know enough language. Especially asylum-seeker students who know little Turkish have difficulty in understanding the social studies course because they do not understand the terms and concepts in social studies. The fact that these students do not speak Turkish causes them not to understand some abstract concepts in the social studies course and not to express themselves. There are other research results that support this conclusion. In one study, social studies teachers stated that asylum-seeking students have difficulty in learning because they do not understand the concepts of history and geography in the social studies course (Erten Özalp, 2019). Seçgin and Erten Özalp (2020) stated that social studies teachers said that asylum-seeker students are successful and interested in the social studies course when their language skills are good, but when they do not know Turkish at a sufficient level, they have difficulties in understanding and expressing the subjects, which affects their interest, participation and success in the course (Seçgin & Erten Özalp, 2020). Üstündağ-Şener and Başkan (2021) found that these students have difficulty in perceiving concepts that have no equivalent in daily life. Alpaslan (2019) found that these students had problems such as not being able to understand the lesson, not being able to focus on the lesson, and not participating in the lesson. Çelik (2019) reported that social studies teachers experienced problems with immigrant students such as language problems, lack of interest and failure in the lesson, finding the national issues in the content of the course distant, staying between Arab culture and Turkish culture and not being able to adapt.

As another result of the research, students wanted more practical, visual, excursion, etc. activities. In social studies education with refugee students, the learning and teaching process should be more inclusive, visual, communicative and practical. These requests of these students are also seen in different research results. For example, Yıldırım (2020) showed that asylum-seeking students do not participate much in reading, writing or speaking activities in the lessons, but prefer to participate in lessons where concrete and visual materials are used. Sel et al.,(2024) concluded that the differentiated instruction approach applied in the social studies course improved students' social adaptation processes.

As a result of this study, students expressed that they would like to see more topics related to immigration and the culture, history and geography of their own countries in the social studies course. In Zayimoğlu Öztürk's (2018) study, it is similar to the result that teachers suggested adding new topics related to refugees, including migration, refugee rights and freedoms, and elements of refugees' own cultures to the social studies curriculum. Şanlı (2019), on the other hand, suggested that in this course, in addition to providing Turkish language education in solving the problems of language and cultural differences of asylum-seeker students, activities and activities introducing culture outside and inside the school should be emphasized.



According to the results of this research, which aims to reveal the thoughts of asylum-seeker students about social studies education, suggestions can be given for practice and future research.

#### Recommendations for practices

- Issues and problems related to individuals who have experienced migration can be included more in the social studies course.
- Abstract concepts in the social studies course can be concretized and taught with visual materials.
- Social studies courses can be enriched with more active, interactive, collaborative and inclusive in-class and out-of-school activities.

#### Recommendations for research

- Detailed studies can be conducted to determine the subjects they have difficulty in each unit of the social studies course.
- Experimental studies using various teaching methods and strategies can be conducted to improve asylum-seeker students' learning of concepts in social studies.
- Similar future studies could be improved by using visual data collection methods.

#### Recommendations for policymakers

- The social studies curriculum could include more topics related to migration and migration-related issues.

## **Declarations**

### ***Ethics Statements***

This study was conducted in ethical standards such as ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, parent research permission form.

### ***Declarations Conflict of Interest***

The author declares no conflict of interest for this study.

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## **Appendix A: Data Collection Questions**

### ***Interview Questions:***

1. What do you think about the social studies course?
2. What do you learn in the social studies course?
3. What did the social studies course bring you?
4. How do you use what you learned in the social studies course?
5. What do you think about the topics you like in the social studies course?
6. What are the topics you have difficulty understanding in the social studies course?
7. What are the difficulties you experience in social studies? How did you solve these difficulties?
8. How would you like the social studies course to be? What else would you like to learn?