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## Teacher Education Reimagined: A Letter to Teacher Educators on Preparing Teachers to Educate Refugee Students

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### Abstract

Turkey is currently home to the world's largest refugee population, with more than 3.7 million Syrians and around 322,000 refugees and asylum-seekers of other nationalities under international protection. Situated in a theory of teacher education for social justice, the current study aims to illustrate the lessons and insights that teacher educators, who are critically engaged in preparing teachers to teach immigrant and refugee students, offer in reimagining preservice teacher education to prepare prospective teachers to teach *all* students, including refugee children. The study employed phenomenological research to investigate the perspectives and the lived experiences of 18 teacher educators who were purposefully selected through criterion, maximum variation, and snowball sampling strategies. The data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with the participants. The findings revealed three key issues for a socially just teacher education system: “who should teach: teacher educator identities”, “teacher education curriculum and pedagogy”, and “contexts, structures, and collaborators in teacher education”. As a letter to educational stakeholders in general and to teacher educators specifically, the present study issues a call to action to revisit our roles and rethink the education of massive numbers of refugee students in Turkey and around the globe to advocate for and enact social justice in and through teacher education.

**Keywords:** Refugees, Social justice education, Teacher education, Preservice teacher education, Teacher educators

### Introduction

The United Nations Refugee Agency [UNHCR] (2020) reports that 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2020. Among them, approximately 26.4 million are particularly refugees, half of whom are children. In addition to the forcibly displaced refugee populations, almost a million children were also born as refugees from 2018 to 2020 (UNHCR, 2021a). Given these numbers, the global refugee population has more than doubled especially in the past decade. Furthermore, as the most recent Russia-Ukraine crisis has created one of the biggest refugee crises with 6.3 million refugees having been forced to flee Ukraine, we are again globally reminded that the number of people forcibly displaced around the world has been continuing to grow at an alarming rate (UNHCR, 2022b).

Particularly, over 25% of the refugee population in the world are part of the 10-year Syrian crisis, which has been the world's largest refugee crisis in decades as nearly 6.6 million Syrians have been forced to flee their homes since 2011, seeking safety as refugees in the neighboring countries such as Turkey, or displaced inside Syria (UNHCR, 2021b). Within this context, Turkey has indeed a special place as it currently accommodates the world's largest refugee population with more than 3.7 million Syrians under temporary protection and around 322,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, predominantly from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran under international protection (UNHCR, 2022a). In addition, Turkey hosts thousands of citizens of other countries, such as Pakistan, Moldova, Palestine, Myanmar, and Georgia, as irregular migrants (Presidency of Migration Management, 2022). Making up the largest refugee population in the country, the presence of Syrians in Turkey was initially considered “temporary”. Although historically, Turkey's refugee regime only included the settlement of Turkish-origin refugees, the protracted nature of the war in Syria remarkably changed the immigration policies in Turkey (Çelik & İçduygu, 2018), and in 2014, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection granted Syrians a legal status under temporary protection (Directorate General of Migration Management [DGMM], 2014).

While Syrian children initially attended temporary education centers where they were taught by Syrian teachers based on Syrian national curriculum and received education in the Arabic language, public schools have become

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accessible to refugees since 2014. Thus, the number of Syrian students in public schools has increased dramatically. Furthermore, efforts to integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish society increased significantly with the implementation of the EU-Turkey Refugee Agreement in 2016, which was implemented to end irregular migration from Turkey to the EU in exchange for 3 billion euros in EU aid and the assertion of visa liberation for Turkish citizens (European Council, 2016). Hence, starting in August 2016, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) launched the Inclusive Education Initiative in collaboration with UNICEF and mandated the integration of Syrian children in the public schooling system. Consequently, 1.27 million Syrian refugees in Turkey are currently children and nearly 140,000 children are refugees and asylum seekers of other nationalities. Specifically, with the start of the 2021-2022 school year, the number of refugee students enrolled in formal education in public schools reached 854,839 in pre-K-12 education in eighty-one provinces across Turkey (UNICEF, 2022).

Given that a significant number of refugees (almost one-third of them) are school-aged (5–18), supporting them to have access to quality education remains a major challenge for host countries, including Turkey (Gümüş, Kurnaz, Eşici, & Gümüş, 2020). The most critical challenge especially pertains to addressing the urgent question of how to prepare and recruit teachers who can respond to the educational needs of refugee students and educate *all* children. To illustrate, UNHCR (2021a) highlights that enrolling 300,000 additional students requires recruiting nearly 10,000 additional teachers each year. As a result, as classrooms become more socio-culturally diverse, particularly with the inclusion of refugee students, we are all called upon to examine and re-imagine teacher education policies and practices in order to address the urgent question of how to prepare future teachers who can meet the educational needs of *all* children in Turkey and beyond.

### **The Professional Needs of Teachers in Turkey in the Context of Refugee Students**

The dramatic influx of refugee students into Turkish schools has accelerated empirical research and scholarship on refugee students' education in Turkish public schools. While a significant portion of this research examined the problems and barriers faced by refugee students and their families, a recent body of literature has also reflected a particular interest in the experiences of teachers of refugee students, illuminating teachers' professional development needs to educate refugee students. In a review of 52 journal articles published in Turkey between 2015 through 2019, the most common challenges for teachers were found to be their lack of ability to communicate with refugee students and their parents, as well as their lack of collaboration with refugee parents due to perceived language barriers, lack of access to relevant instructional materials, lack of knowledge and skills to meet the psychological needs of students resulting from multiple issues such as war, migration, and economic difficulties, and deficit-based conceptions of immigrants and refugees (Goodwin, McDevitt, Lee, & Akin-Sabuncu, in press). In addition, the study reported that teachers could not build on what students bring to school with them as they could not adjust the curriculum according to the needs of immigrant and refugee students, they did not have the autonomy to employ alternative assessment and evaluation techniques in a high-stake testing climate, and did not consider those students' culture as strengths in schooling (Goodwin et al., in press).

A more recent body of research illuminating teachers' experiences and professional needs has also been evolving. For example, Demir-Başaran (2021) focused on the class and school-wide experiences of teachers working with Syrian refugee students and found that teachers did not find themselves competent to provide refugee students with quality inclusive education although affection for children was the main source of their professional motivation. The challenges teachers encountered specifically centered on curriculum, learning-teaching process, instructional tools, and assessment. Atalay, Kilic, Anilan, Anilan, and Anagun (2022) investigated the problems faced particularly by primary teachers who teach Syrian students. The results of the study highlighted that the primary barrier for teachers to educating refugee students was related to the language difference between themselves and refugee students. It was reported that the perceived language barrier was also critical, leading to immense emotional pressure on teachers.

In their study, Karsli-Calamak and Kilinc (2021) examined the early childhood teachers' experiences to educate Syrian refugee students within the context of inclusive education by drawing on Fraser's three-dimensional social justice framework. The study found that teachers' practices included both inclusion-oriented and exclusion-oriented actions concerning the redistribution, recognition, and representation dimensions of Fraser's social justice framework, which offered a window into inclusive education for imagining new ways of supporting refugee students and their teachers. Kotluk and Aydin (2021) used culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy as a theoretical lens to examine the challenges teachers faced while trying to implement the principles of this pedagogy. The findings of the study showed that teachers had low expectations of academic achievement from refugee students and designed the teaching-learning process exclusively by considering the perspectives of students from the mainstream culture. In addition, teachers' attempts to develop the cultural competencies and raise the socio-political consciousness of the Syrian students were limited mainly due to lack of knowledge and

skills resulting from insufficient teacher preparation. Among the other sources of teachers' perceived challenges to teach refugee students, as Ereş (2016) underscores, is the lack of educational policy and long-term planning for the successful integration of refugee students into the Turkish education system as the study reported that teachers were not prepared to educate immigrant and refugee students from diverse backgrounds. Adopting culturally responsive pedagogy to investigate teachers' experiences and practices related to the education of refugee students in their classrooms, Soylu, Kaysılı, and Sever (2020) further concluded that teachers, indeed, had more of a deficit-based approach to the existence of refugees in the country as well as to their inclusion in the Turkish education system; and therefore, largely focused on systematic problems, rather than rethinking the individual approaches that they could implement.

As pointed out by these studies, teachers in Turkey have been confronted with multifaceted challenges that stress the complexity of working with refugee students and their families. Although teacher education researchers have demonstrated their commitment to investigating the issues that refugee children and their teachers face, the voices of teacher educators are remarkably missing from their endeavors. Currently, there is silence on the perspectives and experiences of teacher educators regarding the preparation of teachers who can teach all students including refugee children. This silence may lead to the perpetuation of deficit-based portrayals, characterizing refugee students as others, deprived, and deficient (Baak, 2019; Goodwin et al., in press; Hummelstedt, Holm, Sahlström, & Zilliacus, 2021; Lee, Akin-Sabuncu, Goodwin, & McDevitt, 2021). In this context, this research is among the first studies which explore teacher educators' perspectives on preparing future teachers in the context of refugee education from a theoretical standpoint. Specifically, grounded in Cochran-Smith's (2010) theory of teacher education for social justice, the present study aims to illustrate the lessons and insights that teacher educators, who are critically engaged in preparing teachers to teach immigrant and refugee students, provide for teacher education and teacher educators to produce transformative and collaborative pedagogies. Accordingly, the current study offers a letter to teacher educators in Turkey and beyond calling for an action to break the silence of teacher education on educating refugee students by highlighting how teacher education can and should be reimaged to create equitable and socially just schooling around the world.

### **Theoretical Framework: Teacher Education for Social Justice**

To conceptualize the perspectives of teacher educators and provide insights into the preparation of teachers who can meet the educational needs of refugee students, this study draws on Cochran-Smith's theory of teacher education for social justice (Cochran-Smith, 2010) which aims to "challenge the educational status quo and be transformative" to "support teaching and learning practices that foster justice" (p. 458). The overarching goal of the theory of teacher education for social justice is to "promote students' learning and enhancing their life chances" (p. 461); however, applying these ideas to teacher education is a complex issue given that social justice is a widespread but vague concept (Chang et al., 2019; Cochran-Smith, 2020; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Despite the large variation in how the term "social justice" is used in teacher education, a central idea for a socially just teacher education is that it implicitly or explicitly draws on a distributive notion of justice in an effort to improve students' learning and advance their life chances by challenging the inequities of school and society (Cochran-Smith, 1995, 1999, 2010). This perspective acknowledges that there are significant disparities in the distribution of educational opportunities and the educational outcomes between minority students and their counterparts. Accordingly, it positions teachers as those who "can and should be both educators and advocates who are committed to the democratic ideal and to diminishing existing inequities in school and society by helping to redistribute educational opportunities" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p. 350). Building on these, the main intention of socially just preservice teacher education is to provide future teachers with the social, intellectual, and organizational contexts that prepare them to teach for social justice in K-12 educational settings, as opposed to "just good teaching" (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009, p. 373). This particularly requires intertwining a theory of justice, a theory of teaching and learning practice, and a theory of teacher preparation. Based on those three knowledge bases, the central question in a theory of teacher education for social justice is: "How can we conceptualize teacher preparation intended to prepare teachers to engage in practice that enhances justice?" (Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 458).

This question particularly relates to empowering minoritized and marginalized students of different backgrounds, classes, cultures, gender, ability, and race, by questioning what counts as knowledge and who decides what knowledge counts, whose interests are served through education, and whose perspectives are represented (Cochran-Smith, 2020; Cochran-Smith, Gleeson, & Mitchell, 2010). To that end, three key ideas are essentially at the heart of a theory of justice for teacher education, integrated with one another: equity of learning opportunity, respect for social groups, and acknowledging and dealing with tensions. First, equity of learning opportunity relates to challenging the mainstream classroom and societal practices, policies, beliefs, and assumptions that

perpetuate inequities towards promoting equity of educational opportunities and outcomes for *all* students, including refugee students. Second, respect for social groups highlights the critical role of recognizing all social/racial/cultural groups, including refugee populations, by actively working against the institutionalized obstacles of schooling and society that aggravate these groups' oppression. It also requires one to actively work for the effective use of the ways of knowing of marginalized individuals. Lastly, a theory of teacher education for social justice also concerns acknowledging and dealing with tensions and contradictions resulting from competing agendas about the nature of justice and responding to them in concrete ways (Cochran-Smith, 2010). Based on these ideas, Cochran-Smith (2010) suggests that teacher education must be theorized with respect to four key issues: (1) who should teach, (2) teacher education curriculum and pedagogy, (3) contexts, structures, and collaborators in teaching, and (4) outcomes.

First, the issue of which teachers are recruited is of critical importance for diversifying the teaching force with respect to cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds and recruiting teachers whose beliefs, values, and experiences are aligned with social justice goals. Second, a teacher education curriculum that enhances justice needs to provide teacher candidates with the opportunity to learn about the subject matter, pedagogy, culture, language, the contexts of schooling, and the purposes of education, but it also must recognize what is left out in the curriculum along the lines of race, class, culture, and language backgrounds. Third, how and from/with whom teacher candidates learn and the contexts and structures surrounding learning is another issue that is central to any theory of teacher education. From the perspective of social justice, the purpose of partnerships with schools is not that teacher candidates try to learn the good practices of expert teachers, but it is rather to provide prospective teachers with the opportunity to work with experienced mentors and collaborate with parents, families, and community groups in inquiry communities, from whom they can learn about teaching that fosters equity and social justice. Lastly, concerning the educational outcomes, teacher education that enhances social justice rejects standardized tests as the only measure of students' academic success or the effectiveness of teacher education programs. Rather, with the goal of challenging inequities, it seeks to ensure that *all* students have enriched opportunities to learn, are prepared to participate in a democratic society, are committed to social justice goals, and retain as social justice educators in their careers Cochran-Smith (2010).

Accordingly, this study builds upon Cochran-Smith's theory of teacher education for social justice and interrogates these key issues to illustrate the ways in which teacher educators, who are engaged in preparing teachers who can teach immigrant and refugee students, suggest for teacher education to produce transformative and collaborative pedagogies. To explore how teacher education can be re-envisioned to prepare future teachers who can enact teacher education for social justice for refugee (and immigrant) students, the study specifically asks the following question: Using social justice as a lens, what insights do teacher educators offer on reimagining preservice teacher education for preparing prospective teachers to teach refugee students?

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The study used phenomenological research as it seeks to portray the common or shared experiences in the lived experiences of several individuals regarding the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). While phenomenological studies assume that the same phenomenon can be experienced and interpreted in multiple ways by different individuals (Merriam, 2014), they also acknowledge that there is a common essence in the perceptions and shared experiences of several individuals (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 1990). Accordingly, the present study employed phenomenological research to investigate teacher educators' perspectives and lived experiences about preparing prospective teachers to teach refugee students by uncovering the commonalities or the shared essence in their lived experiences.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study included 18 teacher educators who were selected purposefully through criterion, maximum variation, and snowball sampling strategies (Patton, 1990). First, the use of criterion sampling helped ensure that the teacher educators chosen were those whose research interests and experiences centered on preparing teachers to teach immigrant and refugee students. Thus, employing criterion sampling, the study included the participants who were likely to be information-rich concerning the preparation of teachers to educate refugee students (Patton, 1990). The study also utilized maximum variation sampling as the participants were selected by considering their titles, fields of study, and the institutions/universities (public vs. private) they work at. This sampling method contributed to the richness of the results as representing a variation based on these variables offered a deeper insight into the experiences of teacher educators who have different backgrounds and

thereby, might have different experiences regarding the preparation of prospective teachers to teach refugee students. Lastly, by utilizing snowball sampling in the participant selection process, each participant was asked to recommend other potential teacher educators who would be information-rich regarding the issue and contribute to the enrichment of the findings. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Participant	Gender	University	Title	Personal background as an immigrant
Mine	Female	Public	Assistant Professor	Yes
Zehra	Female	Private	Associate Professor	No
Ece	Female	Public	Assistant Professor	Yes
Serdar	Male	Public	Professor	No
Orhan	Male	Public	Associate Professor	No
Ali	Male	Public	Associate Professor	Yes
Feray	Female	Public	Assistant Professor	Yes
Tamer	Male	Public	Associate Professor	No
Pelin	Female	Public	Professor	No
Emel	Female	Public	Assistant Professor	No
Baran	Male	Public	Associate Professor	Yes
Salih	Male	Public	Professor	No
Mehmet	Male	Private	Assistant Professor	Yes
Suna	Female	Private	Assistant Professor	No
Oya	Female	Private	Assistant Professor	No
Aysel	Female	Public	Associate Professor	Yes
Beril	Female	Public	Assistant Professor	No
Tuna	Male	Public	Assistant Professor	No

### Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

The data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with the teacher educators as interviews are the main data collection tools in phenomenological research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Interviews are particularly suggested in phenomenological research since they yield rich descriptive information about individuals' perspectives and experiences on the phenomenon of interest from their own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and help elicit the deeper meanings attached to them (Patton, 1990). To this end, a semi-structured self-developed interview schedule was used, which consisted of both demographical and open-ended questions. The demographical questions included participants' gender, ethnicity, the languages they speak, their research areas or interests, and academic/teacher education background such as their education degrees, title, field of study, the university they currently work at, and their teaching experience. In addition to the demographical questions, the interview schedule consisted of six main open-ended questions that are supported with probes and prompts (e.g., What are some understandings, principles, or goals you have for your student teachers in relation to educating refugee students? Can you give an example of how you teach these understanding/principles/goals? What challenges/affordances do you have in preparing teachers to teach refugee students?). The data were collected over six months, from July to December 2021. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, each individual

interview was conducted online and took 45-55 minutes. Based on the participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data were analyzed by content analysis, which entailed an inductive (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 1990) open coding approach (Maxwell, 2013). In addition, a deductive approach was followed based on the key tenets of Cochran-Smith's theory of teacher education for social justice. To that end, the data were first aggregated into smaller codes by reading the transcripts word by word and assigning certain labels to them (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which were then used to derive larger categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Lastly, the categories were collapsed into the tenets of the theoretical framework that the study drew upon. The data analysis was performed using NVivo 10. First, the researcher coded a set of three transcripts and created an initial code list, which was then revised and refined with the suggestions of two experts who also contributed to the coding of the same transcripts. This process afforded the consistency of the codes and categories derived by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In reporting the findings, sample quotations were selected in participants' own words to illustrate the findings. The anonymity of the participants was established using pseudonyms.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, different strategies were used based on the recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Marshall and Rossman (2011). In particular, the opinions of two experts were taken on the interview schedule and a pilot study was conducted with three teacher educators before the main data collection, both of which contributed to the credibility of the study. Moreover, in-depth interviews allowed for a deeper dialogue between the participants and the researcher. As explained in the data analysis, establishing intercoder reliability helped ensure a consensus between the researcher and the two independent coders. Furthermore, referential adequacy was established by presenting sample quotations from the participants. To enhance transferability, purposeful sampling strategies were used. Additionally, a thick description of the overall research process was provided by presenting a detailed account of all the processes related to the selection of the research design and participants, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Our personal and professional experiences with refugee students necessarily mediate our interpretations of the data. Accordingly, the researcher's diverse and firsthand professional experiences with immigrant and refugee students as a teacher educator in Turkey and as a postdoctoral researcher and a visiting associate professor in the United States have led her believe that refugee students have several assets and strengths that teachers could draw upon not only in pre-K-12 education, but also in teacher education to promote liberating pedagogies and practices, that is frequently neglected by existing research. Therefore, along with her scholarly interests and research on teacher education, teaching for social justice, and immigrant and refugee education, the researcher's positionality as a social justice-oriented educator played a significant role in this study in developing a desire for supporting refugee children and their teachers by examining the insights that teacher educators, who are critically engaged in preparing teachers to teach refugee students, could provide into teacher education research, policy, and practice.

### **Findings**

The findings of the study are organized around the three key issues addressed in Cochran-Smith's (2010) theory of teacher education for social justice: "who should teach", "teacher education curriculum and pedagogy", and "contexts, structures, and collaborators". While the participants mainly discussed these three key issues to prepare teachers who can educate refugee students, they did not address the "outcomes" tenet of socially just preservice teacher education. Therefore, to provide an in-depth examination of teacher educators' responses, the present study focuses on the first three issues that are central to a socially just teacher education system. It is also important to note that the participants' articulations focused on teacher educator identities, instead of teachers, concerning the first tenet of "who should teach". Hence, the first tenet of the theory of teacher education for social justice has been re-conceptualized in this study to portray and shed light into the identities of teacher educators. The study illustrates examples of the prevalent themes to contextualize the findings.

#### **Who Should Teach: Teacher Educator Identities**

According to the findings of the study, the participants highlighted that teacher educators have a critical responsibility to ensure that prospective teachers are provided with the opportunities and tools necessary to educate all students and foster social justice education. In the context of refugee education, they elaborated that teacher educators' orientations toward developing and enhancing a socially just teacher education system are

significantly influenced by their beliefs, attitudes, and dispositions regarding refugee populations, as well as their culture and prior experiences with those communities. To illustrate, Zehra said:

*...The neighborhood where I grew up was populated with internal and external migrants. I grew up in an environment where people from all ethnic backgrounds and different socioeconomic levels lived together peacefully. Even though those social groups lived in harmony, the inequities and the disadvantages that certain groups faced were a phenomenon that I observed and remembered from my childhood, which bothered me even when I was a little child.*

Like Zehra, all participants shared their personal stories and backgrounds to explain how the specific context they were born into or lived in for a significant time allowed them to develop positive attitudes, empathy, and understanding towards disadvantaged minority groups. In addition, some participants connected to their own identities as a minority in the country's larger socio-political context, especially with respect to their ethnicity and mother tongue. For instance, Tamer expressed:

*I'm from Erzurum [a city in the Eastern Anatolia region]. Perhaps because I am of minority background alongside my ethnicity and mother tongue, and also since I am cognizant of the fact that I was part of a minority culture that was assimilated into the dominant culture, I'm more sensitive about developing equitable educational opportunities for all students regardless of their nationality, ethnic or linguistic backgrounds, or socio-economic status. As a teacher educator and human, my goal is to spread and flourish values of tolerance, democracy, and social justice in and through education.*

Thus, participants, like Tamer, explained how the experience of belonging to a minority group raised their awareness of the marginalized student populations and helped them develop critical consciousness about the issues of oppression and the urgent need for achieving equity and social justice in and through education. Furthermore, specifically concerning the education of refugee students, some participants made connections to their immigrant backgrounds themselves due to family ties. To illustrate, Feray said:

*...When I was very young, we lived in Germany during my early childhood years. It probably has a strong influence on me. ...My primary school experiences as an immigrant child in Germany and my family's experiences abroad shaped my worldview and enabled me to develop a scholarly interest in the issues of educational equity and social justice education for all students but especially for immigrant and refugee students... Being an immigrant child in Germany has always been a big part of my identity and probably has a significant effect on my research interests.*

As seen in Feray's explanation, the participants who had immigrant backgrounds (although they were not in a refugee situation) have first-hand experience of what it means to be a "guest" outside the national border. Thus, those participants especially reflected on their past educational experiences and emphasized how it feels to be "invisible" in the curriculum. In addition to personal and family backgrounds, many participants also talked about their experiences of living across national borders due to educational or professional backgrounds and addressed its impact on their professional identity as a teacher educator. For example, Salih explained:

*I completed my undergraduate education in a large public university in Ankara [capital city of Turkey]. Because the university I studied at was home to many students who came from different cities and held different worldviews, such cultural diversity greatly impacted my personal and professional identity. ...Then, I went to the U.S. to pursue my master's and doctoral education. As I was exposed to even greater ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity in the U.S. over the time I spent there and took several courses related to equity, diversity, and multicultural education, my educational and professional experiences became more diversified and enriched, and consequently led to the development of my current professional identity today that interweaves the issues of equity, diversity, and social justice education, with a special focus on immigrant and refugee education in the most recent years.*

Hence, as a person with an immigrant background and/or due to educational/professional reasons, the participating teacher educators, like Salih, acknowledged that their lived experiences in a different country significantly influenced their views, research interests, and beliefs about the role of education. As a result, this strongly connected them to researching and educating teachers to teach immigrant and refugee students with a commitment to ending inequalities and addressing the needs of marginalized students due to systemic inequalities. These findings demonstrate that teacher educators constructed the issue of preparing teachers to teach culturally and linguistically diverse refugee students by considering and connecting personal experiences and knowledge. Reflection and the resulting awareness of one's practices, perspectives, and background can impact teacher



educators' understandings of their sense of self and help them consider how they co-exist with others across educational contexts. This awareness may ultimately push teacher educators to reconsider their roles and revitalize their approaches to teaching prospective teachers (Cochran-Smith, 2010).

### Teacher Education Curriculum and Pedagogy

The findings showed that the participants often examined the teacher education curriculum, pedagogy, and policies for overt and hidden messages that include or exclude the preparation of teachers to teach students with minority backgrounds, such as refugee children. Accordingly, they criticized that issues around equity, social justice, and minority groups, including refugee students, are deemphasized in the teacher education curriculum. Thus, all participants called for reflective, transformative, and progressive approaches and pedagogies that challenge technical efficiency models and encourage prospective teachers as agents of change who are committed to providing high-quality education for all students, including refugee students, alongside social justice values. To that end, rather than examining traditional texts, the participants, for example, reconsidered the purpose of their classes and aimed to engage teacher candidates in larger socio-political issues, such as education of refugee children, that extended beyond developing technical knowledge and skills of teaching to developing their socio-political awareness. For instance, Emel expressed:

*My primary goal is to help them [teacher candidates] understand how existing inequalities are perpetuated through education and schooling. The school conveys certain messages to students every day about where they are in the social hierarchy. ... Thus, I aim to help future teachers question the role of education, develop a critical awareness of the immigrant and refugee students whom they might have in their future classrooms, and develop empathy, tolerance, respect, and understanding for those students.*

In transforming the teacher education curriculum, the participants, like Emel, reconsidered the goals and principles of their classes and, above all, worked to ensure that the curriculum developed the critical thinking skills of future teachers. In so doing, they further aimed to enact the curriculum in ways that did not reflect deficit-based thinking or biases against refugee students or reinforce systems of domination against those populations, but rather challenged oppressive social, political, and economical structures and empowered a socially just and inclusive education for *all*. On the other hand, the participants criticized the very centralized structure of teacher education curricula and the lack of appropriate courses related to refugee education; and therefore, called for new courses that address the issues of refugee education, immigrant education, multicultural education, and social justice education to prepare teachers who are equipped with essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, and asset-based mindsets to teach immigrant and refugee students. To illustrate, Serdar articulated:

*One of the biggest problems in Turkey is that teacher education curricula are highly centralized and controlled by the Council of Higher Education (CHE). As a result, there is almost no course in the program where we can include topics around diversity, migration, immigration, and refugee education. Our teacher education programs are merely focused on developing teacher candidates' knowledge and skills to effectively use teaching methods and strategies or assessment techniques. We spend a lot of time on such technical aspects of teaching. My intention is not to say that these are not important; however, first of all, we must work to help teacher candidates gain a broader vision and awareness about the purpose of education, which means that we must urgently revitalize our teacher education curricula and offer courses where we can have intended critical discussions about immigrant and refugee students and change the lives of those oppressed populations.*

By highlighting the crucial need for teacher education programs to include courses that can create dialogue and open space for discussing the multifaceted aspects of immigrant and refugee education, Serdar, like other participants, further believed that if teacher education can first achieve raising student teachers' awareness about immigrant and refugee students, the prospective teachers can then find their own way to choose the appropriate teaching methods and materials and develop their assessment tools to design and implement individualized education tailored to the needs of immigrant and refugee children. Thus, on the path towards developing a teacher education system that fosters social justice, the participants essentially highlighted the need for a social justice mission, philosophy, and mindset development in teacher education programs, which is to be infused consistently into several components of the program such as the conceptual frameworks, program descriptions, course content, and course syllabi.

In addition to an explicit social justice mission and related curriculum content, the participants mentioned that there was also a need for liberating, emancipating, engaging, and empowering pedagogies in teacher education

programs to raise teachers for social justice. Accordingly, the participants drew on their own practices and suggested integrating current events, news, case studies, videos, educational movies, drama, art and poetry, guest speakers, field trips, and community service projects into teacher education programs as powerful tools and pedagogies to create space for critical reflection and exploration of alternative ways of thinking and counternarratives. They articulated that such pedagogies encouraged student teachers' engagement in broader socio-political issues and helped them recognize the systemic injustices surrounding refugee students. For instance, Aysel said:

*...First and foremost, they [teacher candidates] need to be able to question the social, economic, political, and educational inequities that refugee students face every day. This is not as easy as teaching a technical skill, like teaching a grammatical rule, on which our teacher education programs mostly focus. Rather, they need to develop critical mindsets to be able to analyze the power relations among different social groups including refugee students as the oppressed vs. their oppressors. ...So, to help them [teacher candidates] raise critical consciousness about and develop advocacy for the education of those [refugee] students, I often use case studies, videos, and educational movies to make prospective teachers think about refugee communities and their children. I also aim to connect those discussions to their [teacher candidates'] identities and past experiences to encourage them reflect on those events ...So, to help them start enacting change and ultimately transform their future classes, I usually ask teacher candidates to develop such lesson plans in which they need to consider appropriate pedagogies and materials to meet the needs of refugee students.*

Hence, as seen in Aysel's explanation, teacher educators criticized the highly technocratic nature of teacher education that draws on old approaches and focuses only on developing skill sets, and rather suggested to use pedagogies that are conducive to foster a transformative teacher identity blended with critical thinking and reflection, activism, and advocacy for social justice.

### **Context, Structures, and Collaborators in Teacher Education**

Teacher education focused on social justice is not an isolated entity or it does not exist in a vacuum. It requires "a coherent and intellectual approach to the preparation of future teachers" (Cochran-Smith, 2010, p. 447), one that situates education and schooling within broader socio-political and historical contexts instead of focusing simply on a repertoire of instructional methods and activities. Accordingly, the participating teacher educators emphasized the importance of taking an inquiry stance into the problems related to the immediate context of schools and the larger social, political, and cultural issues in society. To that end, they suggested that teacher education institutions should develop partnerships in communities that are committed to social justice where teacher educators, prospective teachers, experienced mentor teachers, parents, and families can work in collaboration to co-construct knowledge and raise critical questions about educational issues and dilemmas. This, in return, would help teacher candidates reconsider and challenge their assumptions and beliefs about teaching, learning, students, curriculum, assessment, and existing schooling practices that perpetuate educational inequities surrounding the education of refugee students. Embedded in this perspective, the participants underscored the importance of collective efforts over the individual efforts and stated that such partnerships, contexts, and community immersion provide a unique space and opportunity for all parties to take collective responsibility and action towards the larger issues related to social justice, equity, and social change, as well as to adopt social justice identities. For example, Suna mentioned:

*...In community service practices course, I intentionally chose schools where the number of refugee students is high. By collaborating with their mentor teachers, teacher candidates developed projects to foster the education of refugee students in those schools particularly. So, I think developing partnerships with schools and places where teacher candidates can engage in the education of immigrant and refugee students is highly critical if we, as teacher educators, want to prepare them for the realities and changing demographics of schools. In these environments, teacher candidates get authentic opportunities to engage in critical conversations, observe and reflect on the educational inequities, and collaborate with key actors to learn how to respond to the educational needs of those students, which we do not provide in campus environments as teacher education has always been, and indeed, is becoming more theoretical in the past years.*

Therefore, like Suna, teacher educators sought to find alternative ways, such as implementing community-based inquiry projects, community service projects, and field placements, to provide teacher candidates with particular local contexts as they believed that social justice education and equity cannot be fully achieved outside of such contexts, which also reflected a common criticism against the structure and content of teacher education in Turkey

that prioritizes theory over practice. In this regard, the participants further stated that putting equity and social justice at the center of teacher education means that prospective teachers should learn to work with diverse students, and develop appropriate practices tailored to particular needs, contexts, cultures, and histories of refugee students, which essentially requires an inquiry-based process that is linked to constructing local knowledge and partnerships to address the larger educational issues, as opposed to focusing only on the technical aspects and decontextualized facts and principles of teaching in the university settings.

In addition to developing partnerships with schools and local communities, the participants also highlighted the importance of developing collaboration with other teacher educators. To that end, especially stressing the social, political, and economic issues in the current climate of the country and the climate surrounding teacher education, they specifically suggested that teacher educators should collaborate to develop research partnerships that address the needs of refugee students as well as their parents and teachers through an in-depth longitudinal exploration and empower them by means of transformative interventional studies. To illustrate, Oya and Serdar explained:

*Instead of conducting research on those communities and students individually, I think we need to design interdisciplinary interventional studies by collaborating with our colleagues in different fields. To that end, we also need to shift from concentrating on the problems of those students or teachers alone to see the strengths that immigrant and refugee students bring to the classroom. ...So, one of the best ways to empower those students and their teachers is to develop long term research partnerships with them, in which we can design and enact practices that would support them. ...This is important because although universities seem liberal from outside, especially education faculties have a very conservative structure and mindset reflecting the general context of the country. Thus, such partnerships among teacher educators might be critical to create an inclusive organizational climate and commitment to social justice education at the institutional level. (Oya)*

*...Universities must be pioneers. That is, rather than blaming the Ministry of National Education or the Council of Higher Education, we must first reflect on ourselves and take the responsibility to develop and advocate for necessary teacher education policies and practices to prepare teachers who can work with immigrant and refugee students. Beyond anyone or any institution, this is firstly our job. We must work together to produce knowledge, philosophy, and practice that can foster those students' education. Yet, we are far from there as we either keep ignoring those realities due to socio-political or individual reasons, or only do low-impact research that is usually for our own professional benefit and mostly done individually. (Serdar)*

As seen in Oya's and Serdar's explanations that are also coupled with criticisms against the current mainstream atmosphere of teacher education, the participants further mentioned that this joint effort and research collaboration might consequently be useful to challenge and reform the mainstream organizational culture of the teacher education institutions to substantiate their impact and contribution to improving the educational outcomes of immigrant and refugee students in K-12 settings.

## **Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

Over the last decades, concerns related to preparing quality teachers have been heightened nationally and globally. Particularly, there has been a myriad of perspectives about how teacher quality should be characterized including what knowledge, skills, and dispositions teachers should have as each perspective reflects larger political agendas and assumptions regarding the purposes of education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). In the midst of all this intensified attention to quality teacher preparation, one major criticism is that debates around teacher quality and teacher education solely focus on science-based solutions to educational problems and only promote a technical view of teaching and a teacher training model that neglect and do not serve the needs of minoritized students (Cochran-Smith, 2020) such as refugee students. Thus, this study explored the perspectives of teacher educators, who are critically engaged in preparing future teachers to teach immigrant and refugee students, and found chief lessons and insights for a socially just teacher education that are related to (a) teacher educator identities, (b) teacher education curriculum and pedagogy, and (c) the context, structures, and collaborators in teacher education.

First, the findings suggest that teacher educators have a critical role in preparing preservice teachers to recognize and challenge educational inequalities that refugee students face resulting from various economic, social, cultural, and political factors. In this regard, the participating teacher educators especially made several connections to their personal and educational/professional backgrounds, identities, and experiences in working to support the education of immigrant and refugee students. Thus, the findings of this study contribute to the broader research on teacher educator identity and professional development, as well as the recruitment of teacher educators to

urgently address the issue of preparing future teachers who can work effectively with immigrant and refugee students. In order to learn to teach in an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse society with tremendous numbers of refugee students, teacher candidates and teacher educators should have enriched opportunities to examine the relationships between language, culture, and power in education. This investigation inevitably starts with one's own history and cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds as a human being and as an educator to realize the assumptions and generalizations we make about other children, such as refugee children, whom we perceive as different (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Within this framework, given that teacher educators are at the core of teacher education and have a strong impact on the professional development of prospective teachers (Izadinia, 2014; Loughran, 2006), the study, therefore, draws on the impact of teacher educators' personal backgrounds and educational/professional experiences on their mindsets, pedagogies, and practices and primarily offers insights into attracting and supporting teacher educators who are critically minded, committed to equity and social justice education, and advocates for the education of *all* students, including refugee children, through transformative and liberatory pedagogies, practices, and research. To that end, the study also offers implications for diversifying the teacher educator profile in terms of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds and recruiting teacher educators whose beliefs, motivations, experiences, and values are congruent with social justice goals. Moreover, the study highlights the need for teacher educator preparation as teachers of teachers and supporting their continual professional development for social justice to raise future teachers who can respond to the educational needs of immigrant and refugee children especially considering that there is no curriculum for the preparation of teacher educators (Dinkelmann, Margolis, & Sikkenga, 2006) and they must prepare prospective teachers for classrooms teacher educators themselves may not have experienced.

Second, teacher education for social justice re-envisioning teacher education as transformative and collaborative to dismantle the inequities that minoritized refugee students experience in education and schooling. Accordingly, rather than a traditional theory of practice that prioritizes subject matter knowledge and teaching skills in preservice teacher education, the findings of the study suggest that a theory of practice congruent with social justice holds that teachers should be prepared through transformative curriculum and pedagogies that enable them to analyze and interpret what is happening in schools and classrooms with special attention to be devoted to the education of refugee students so as to recognize whose interests are served vs. whose voices are not heard. That is, from the perspective of social justice, teaching does not simply concern practical issues such as how, when, and where teachers do things, but it rather blends knowledge, interpretive frameworks, teaching methods and skills, and advocacy. Thus, rather than focusing primarily on credentialing purposes and sequence of courses, Cochran-Smith (2010) suggests that teacher education curriculum that advances social justice must include opportunities for candidates to learn about "subject matter, pedagogy, culture, language, the social and cultural contexts of schooling, and the purposes of education" (p. 459) to become conscious of who is left out or nurtured in the curriculum and what is implicitly or explicitly determined as the norm in discourses related to students, parents, pedagogies, and experiences. Therefore, in addition to what strategies and methods teachers use, teaching for social justice also involves what teachers believe, what they recognize as the purposes of education, how they understand their work and its larger connections to the educational issues, how they work against inequities, how they set expectations for various learners, and how they build the curriculum upon the knowledge and experiences of marginalized students (Enterline, Cochran-Smith, Ludlow, & Mitescu, 2008) including refugee children.

Within this context, the findings of the study clearly suggest that teacher education curriculum and pedagogies should be designed in ways (e.g., integrating case studies, videos and educational movies, critical reflection, and storytelling) (Korthagen, 2016) that provide a critical space for *all* educational stakeholders, including teacher educators, teacher candidates, families, communities, and policymakers. This would foster dialogue, critical reflection, and collaboration among all by means of a collective and organized effort to dismantle the inequities surrounding the education of refugee students. To that end, third, the study especially highlights the need for teacher education to develop critical partnerships with schools and local communities where student teachers can have authentic opportunities and engage in critical field practices (Chubbuck & Zembylas; Korthagen, 2016), especially focusing on refugee children, to advocate and enact social justice education through critically observing and taking an action against the issues and barriers that refugee students encounter. Another critical insight that deserves highlighting is that teacher education programs, above all, must be designed around social justice principles based on a clear and coherent social justice mission, goal, and philosophy that deliberately foster social justice education as opposed to add-on efforts and fragmented structure of programs (McDonald & Zeichner, 2009). As pointed out by the participants, only then, teacher education can extend beyond abstract conceptualizations of social justice and start enacting a social justice education through consistent tools, pedagogies, and practices (e.g., field practices, employed pedagogies) that would collectively make a difference in the lives of refugee children.

Lastly, the findings of the present study highlight teacher education research as a fundamental instrument for socially just teacher education. Specifically, the findings suggest that researching the education of refugee students requires collaboration among teacher educators in creating more spaces for discussions on refugee students and designing and reimagining research to embrace refugee students and create socially just schooling for all students. To that end, more research should be framed within a social justice framework, especially through longitudinal and more comprehensive studies in local, national, and global contexts.

Ultimately, based on the findings from the published scholarship, the collective experiences of the participating teacher educators provide insights into and guide much-needed transformative directions toward justice in teacher education. As a letter to all educational stakeholders in general and teacher educators specifically, the present study issues a call to action to revisit our roles and rethink the education of massive numbers of refugee students in Turkey and around the globe to advocate for and enact social justice in and through teacher education. Lastly, even though this research is one of the first studies conducted with teacher educators within the teacher education context of Turkey, the limitations of the study should be considered while interpreting the results. As the current study only relies on the interviews conducted with the participating teacher educators, it is recommended that future research should also include observations of teacher educators' practices to portray what plays out in the actual implementation of teacher education programs particularly pertaining to the preparation of teachers to educate refugee students and foster social justice education. In addition, to triangulate the interview data, further research might also include document analysis to examine teacher education curricula, course descriptions, and course syllabi in detail. In so doing, further research focusing on the experiences of the teacher educators who have been teaching refugee students (preservice teachers) in teacher education programs is also recommended to explore their unique experiences and to more fully portray the prevailing teacher education policies and practices concerning the education of refugee students through the lens of social justice education.

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### Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was declared with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Ethical Approval

Ethical permission (28.03.2021-2021/03) was obtained from TED University for this research.

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