

At Distance

Representation of The Migrants in Turkish Textbooks

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Representation of The Migrants in Turkish Textbooks Zafer Çelik

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Zafer Çelik

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About the Author

Zafer Çelik received his BA degree in 2000, Ms degree 2002 from METU Sociology, and his Phd in Sociology from Hacettepe University in 2012. During his doctoral studies, he was a visiting researcher at Chemnitz University of Technology and Humboldt University of Berlin. Çelik worked as a teacher in public schools for a while. Afterwards, he worked as a head of department at Board of Education, Ministry of National Education. Since 2013, he has been working as a faculty member at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Department of Sociology. His research interests are sociology of education, education policies, comparative education, higher education, migrants and refugees education.

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Foreword

At the beginning of March 2020, Mehmet Köse from the Migration Research Foundation called me to express the foundation's desire for a study on how migration and migrants are presented in public school textbooks. I agreed that such a study would be very insightful and I shared my thoughts on how to conduct a study analyzing textbooks. However, the face-to-face meeting that we had planned did not happen, since we had scheduled it for the second week of March 2020, when the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) began spreading rapidly across Turkey. The quickly implemented social distancing measures nationwide, coupled with uncertainties about the COVID-19 pandemic, led us to postpone our plans for this work. By April, it was clear that it would take time to turn back to our normal flow; thus, Mehmet Köse and I agreed to pursue the "Migration and Migrants in School Textbooks" project using digital platforms. We carried out all the work for this study online, such as discussing the project proposal, forming the research

team, conducting trainings, and holding weekly meetings to analyze and discuss the textbooks under analysis.

After cross-checking the data received from the research team in November 2020, we had gathered around 600 pages of data. Before we started to analyze the data, we assumed that we could write the report in two months. However, it quickly became clear as we dove into the data that it would take much longer. During the analysis, we also realized that this work was much more than a report. I was planning to complete the analysis and to deliver the first draft of the book by April 2021. Unfortunately, a variety of factors including the continued COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, online classes, loss of motivation, etc. repeatedly caused me to postpone the submission date. I could only submit the first draft of the text at the end of October 2021. After receiving the reviews and recommendations, I made the final edits to the text and finally the book was ready. This book was published in Turkish in January 2022. Many people have contributed to the preparation process of this book.

Mehmet Köse is the crucial name in the emergence of this book since he came up with the idea of this project. He closely followed the project throughout its lifecycle and constantly offered support to move the process along. Frankly, this study and book would not have been possible without Mehmet Köse's support. I should also mention our project assistant, Ayşenur Aygöl. Ayşenur successfully managed the organizational processes during the difficult COVID-19 pandemic period by coordinating the research team and organizing online meetings. She took an active part in examining the textbooks, and the two of us completed cross-checks together to validate the data analysis. This book has emerged with Ayşenur's diligent work. I wholeheartedly thank our research team who screened the books during this process: Elifnur Köprülü, Beyza Varol, Furkan Akcan,

Murat Yarımay, Kateryna Pernata, Nuran Helvalı, Betül Şahin, and Sümeyra Tahta.

I also would like to thank Bekir S. Gür, who I consulted from time to time during the analysis of the data and writing of the book, for his guidance, ideas, and contributions. Additional gratitude is due to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yusuf Alpaydın, Mesut Arslan, and Sümeyye Ayyüce Şahin, who read different drafts of the book and conveyed their opinions and suggestions. Moreover, I want to thank Hatice Soylemez, for her very critical reading of the English version of this book.

Of course I thank my wife Betül who made significant contributions to the creation of this book through reading the text meticulously, making comprehensive criticisms and providing insightful suggestions. Also, I would like to mention my daughter Nevra Zeynep for her patience, who kept saying, “You are always on the computer, you are always working.”

This book aims to reduce anti-migrant attitudes and behaviors in social and educational environments, and to help migrants to be warmly accepted by the Turkish society. If it makes even a small contribution to change the approach towards migration and migrants in education curricula and textbooks; if it has even the slightest contribution to the development of positive attitudes and behaviors of teachers regarding the education of migrant children; or if it helps the development of knowledge and skills during teachers’ pre-service and in-service training processes, this study will reach its purpose.

I dedicate this book to migrant children who have been forced to leave their home against their will, who faced thousands of hardships on their way through difficult journeys, who lost their access to education under difficult conditions, and who were left without education entirely.

Introduction

Migration is an unavoidable part of the Turkish society today, as it has been in both the distant and recent past. There have been many great migration waves in Turkish history: migration waves that started with the Migration of Tribes, migration from Central Asia to Anatolia, the transition from Anatolia to the Balkans and Europe, Turkish and returning to Anatolia at the end of the 19th century. Already in historiography, migration is presented as the most fundamental characteristic of “Turkishness.” The foundation of Modern Türkiye is also a migration story. The political elites who founded modern Türkiye had a migration experience, along with the leading writers and poets of the period. Migrations such as the 93 War¹, population movements in the last period of the Ottoman Empire, the exodus after the Balkan Wars, the 1915 Armenian Deportation, and the Population Exchange with Greece in 1923 completely changed the demographic structure of Türkiye.

1 The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.

A multi-national and multi-religious empire was transformed into a society dominated by one nation and one religion. There have been many important migration phenomena in the history of modern Türkiye, such as, forced resettlement in the 1930s; migration from rural to urban areas after the 1950s; labor migration to European countries, especially Germany, after the 1960s; and migration to the city centers after the 1980s took place due to terrorism and counter-terrorism practices. In addition to these recent internal migrations, especially after the 1990s migrations from abroad to Türkiye have increased. Migrants who fled from the atrocities in Bulgaria and the Bosnian and Kosovo Wars, Russia's invasion of Afghanistan, the Iran-Iraq war, and the United States' (USA) invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan have directly turned the migration route to Türkiye. Finally, after the civil war in Syria, more than 3.5 million Syrians migrated to Türkiye. Almost everyone in Türkiye has had their lives impacted by migration as a result of these occurrences.

Although Türkiye has always been and remains a country of migration, and migrants are a part of almost everyone's life in Türkiye, negative attitudes towards migrants persist and can cause serious problems. Dissatisfaction and negative, exclusionary, anxious, and xenophobic attitudes and behaviors towards migrants are frequently shared on social media, publicly expressed by politicians, and reinforced by the media. The most obvious manifestations of these attitudes currently are the discriminatory actions taken against migrants from Syria and Afghanistan. Anti-migrant sentiment has even led to attacks on Syrians' workplaces and homes.²

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- 2 The most serious of the attacks on Syrian migrants was on August 10, 2021 in the Altındağ district of Ankara, where many of these migrants settle upon arrival in Türkiye. Hundreds of people met to attack Syrians' homes, workplaces, and cars. (<https://www.dw.com/tr/alt%C4%B1nda%C4%9Fda-suriyelilerin-ev-ve-i%C5%9Fyerlerine-sald%C4%B1r%C4%B1/a-58836336>). After these events, judicial

To create greater social harmony against this backdrop of migration, it is essential to adopt more favorable attitudes and behavior toward migration and migrants. Schools are among the most important institutions that can foster a positive attitude towards migration and migrants. Determining how children communicate with migrant children and what is taught about migration and migrants in schools are crucial tools for developing positive attitudes towards migration and migrants, and thus improving relationships between migrants and the native populations of their host countries. In this context, it is very important to determine how migration and migrants are portrayed in textbooks. Deficiencies and problems can be identified by analyzing what is taught to children about migration and migrants through textbooks, and what kind of approach the textbooks follow concerning these concepts. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine how migration and migrants are portrayed in textbooks, to ultimately recommend ways to improve textbooks by encouraging more welcoming attitudes and behaviors toward migrants.

Purpose and Importance of the Study

Significant research on migration and education has been conducted, especially in recent years, regarding the access of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to education and the difficulties they face during their educational journeys (e.g., Emin, 2019; Taştan & Çelik, 2017; Yılmaz, 2021). However, the understanding of migration and approaches towards migrants in textbooks have not been discussed sufficiently; only a few studies have been conducted examining the curriculum and textbooks in specific subjects (Dündar & Kenyon, 2020; Kılcan & Şimşek, 2021; Sezer & Şanlı, 2017). Furthermore, the Georg Eckert Institute conducted

actions were initiated against more than 60 people accused of participating in the unrest.

a study that historically examined the migration and migrant phenomena in Turkish history, geography, and citizenship textbooks (Georg Eckert Institute, 2017a, 2017b).

While a significant body of work has explored the difficulties faced by migrants when accessing quality education, as illustrated in the literature section, there are very few studies on how migrants and migration are portrayed in textbooks. A portion of these studies addresses the issue of migration in contexts such as global citizenship and multicultural education. Additionally, most of these studies focus on the curricula and textbooks for history, geography, and citizenship courses. Since textbooks and educational processes are important issues impacting children's approaches to various social and cultural phenomena, it becomes necessary to examine textbooks to better address a variety of local and global issues.

Critics frequently note that textbooks are not an absolute guide for curriculum, that because some teachers support students with different resources beyond the assigned textbooks for their courses, that students and their families don't keep these books on their library shelves at home, and that they are often discarded at the end of the year, especially in countries where secondary school and university entrance exams are extremely important and thus students tend to use supplementary materials more frequently. Türkiye is one such country where textbooks are not kept after the academic year ends. Instead, these materials are reprinted and distributed for all students at the beginning of the each academic year, even if there is no change in their content. At the end of the academic year, these books are bought by paper collectors at their value as "waste-paper." The Ministry of National Education (MoNE) states in its official letters every year that children in public schools should not be forced to purchase additional resources, and any teacher who requires their classes to do so will be subject to

investigation. Despite this, children are often given additional resources in schools that are used more frequently than the formal textbooks.

Despite the claims that textbooks are not very important, these textbooks remain important because they demonstrate the boundaries of official and valid knowledge within a society. Critical elements of textbooks include the images they show, the language they use, the topics they cover and do not cover, the dominant discourse of the country they employ, and the ways they define the groups that are legitimated and those that are prohibited from speaking. As Çayır (2014) emphasizes, teachers, students, and all other segments of the Turkish society are familiar with the content and basic messages of the national textbooks, even if they do not read them. In fact, textbooks are also taught in private schools and provided to private school students free of charge. Moreover, I observed during my doctoral study that textbooks are used more intensively in early grades and that the rate of adherence to textbooks decreases as students move on to advanced grade levels (Çelik, 2012). However, this inconsistent textbook use does not prevent the books' messages from reaching the students. In other words, even when textbooks are not used, teachers and students are aware of the messages of the books that directly transfer the official ideology, particularly in the subjects of history, geography, and social studies.

Textbooks are an important tool in constructing "us" and "the other," as will be discussed later. Depending on how these groups are constructed, how inclusive or exclusionary they are, how much space is allowed for individual freedoms, and who is prioritized in the individual-state dichotomy, textbooks may encourage students to have more liberal, inclusive, and democratic attitudes and behaviors, thus fostering having sensitivity; or they may consolidate undemocratic, nationalist, exclusionary,

and discriminatory discourse, thus fostering social tensions and negative attitudes and behaviors towards migrants. In this sense, it is very important to analyze the content of the textbooks in Türkiye to reveal the prevailing attitudes towards migration and migrants, identify negative discourses, and make suggestions for improvement of the discourse they use. Since Türkiye has experienced an intense wave of migration in recent years, it is critical to determine how the issues related to migration and migrants are presented in textbooks, which might provide important data for understanding both national and individual attitudes towards migrants.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the representations of migration and migrants in Turkish textbooks. The study aims to analyze migration and migrants in textbooks in three contexts. First, it examines how migration and migrants are handled conceptually in textbooks. This analysis seeks to answer questions such as which concepts related to migration are included in the textbooks, how these concepts are defined, which concepts are not included under the umbrella of “migration,” which types of migration are defined, and what reasons are given for migration. Second, the study analyzes how migration is handled contextually, including the context in which migration and migrants are handled in the textbooks, how migrants are placed in the national community, how the relations between the host society and migrants are established, and what meaning is attributed to migrants. Finally, the study identifies which phenomena related to migration are included in the textbooks, and excluded, which migrations are included in the textbooks beyond those related to Türkiye and Turks.

Which Textbooks were Examined?

This study examined the textbooks for grades 1 to 12 used in public and private schools during the 2019-2020 academic year

and approved by Board of Education (BoE) under the Ministry of National Education. In Türkiye, a book needs to meet several requirements to qualify as a textbook: it must be prepared according to the national curriculum of the subjects included in the weekly course schedule of formal and non-formal education institutions before being examined and approved by the BoE³ (**Ministry of National Education Textbooks and Educational Materials Regulation, 2012**). The MoNE does not define materials as textbooks if they are distributed for a fee and/or paid for by parents, not prepared in accordance with the national curriculum, not approved by the BoE, go by different names (e.g., **resource books, test books, lecture books, etc.**), and/or are intended to prepare students for exams (**MoNE, 2019, p. 3**). In Türkiye, the MoNE provides textbooks free of charge to students in both public and private schools. Additionally, the MoNE's website offers access to textbooks in digital format.

This study examines textbooks for grades 1–12 in the fields of social and human sciences, where migration and migrants are discussed in depth. The extant research on textbooks generally examines history, geography, and social studies texts (e.g., **Faas, 2011; Georg Eckert Institute, 2017a, 2017b; O'Connor & Faas, 2012; Patterson & Choi, 2018; UNESCO, 2018**). In addition to history, geography, and social studies textbooks, this study also examines Turkish language and literature, philosophy, sociology, psychology, religious culture and moral knowledge (RCMK) textbooks. Also analyzed within the scope of the research were the textbooks for various elective courses at the secondary

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- 3 According to the 2012 Ministry of National Education Regulation on Textbooks and Educational Materials, textbooks are evaluated by a panel created by the BoE. A separate panel is convened for each course's materials. Each panel consists of 6–8 people including teachers, field educators/experts, visual design experts, and language experts. The relevant textbook is reviewed by the panelists before they assemble for a meeting, where a decision is made regarding the suitability and adequacy of the textbook.

education level related to history and geography, such as international relations, history of Islamic culture and civilization, sociology, psychology, and economics. While identifying the textbooks for inclusion in the study sample, it became apparent that materials prepared by both public and private publishing houses were used at some grade levels. In this case, the textbooks prepared by both publishers were examined for each relevant course.⁴

Development Process for the Screening Criteria

After identifying the textbooks, the screening criteria was developed, the research team that would examine the books was trained, the books were examined in accordance with the screening criteria, the research findings were reviewed, and cross-checks were conducted on the data.

To develop the screening criteria, I first reviewed the scholarly literature on textbooks to determine how previous studies examined the textbooks they identified, which criteria they used, and how they designed their analytical methods. The Human Rights in Textbooks Project, which does not directly address the subject of migration but instead systematically examines textbooks, was utilized to the screening criteria (Çayır, 2014). Then I analyzed the project done by the Georg Eckert Institute on how migration and migrants are presented in textbooks in Türkiye. While I could not access the full report of this project, I was able to read summaries of the reports published on the institute's website (Georg Eckert Institute, 2017a, 2017b), which served as an important reference when preparing the screening criteria. The draft screening criteria, prepared after the literature review, was shared an online workshop organized by the Migration Research Foundation (MRF) for experts and MRF personnel. After

4 The list of examined books is provided in Appendix 1.