Chapter Two

The Role of Inclusive Education in Social Inclusion of Refugees

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Introduction

Increasing cross-border movements and global migration challenge traditional citizenship and national education approaches. Global migration, both of labourers and migrants, unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers displaced by war or political and economic instability produced new transnational communities and culturally diverse societies (Osler & Starkey, 2003). Consequences of these movements are particularly visible in many European countries, where distinct communities of migrants have become part of the cultural landscape. However, migrants and refugees globally access education at lower rates than other children. According to UNHCR statistics, 'in 2016, only 61 per cent of refugee children accessed primary school, compared to 91 per cent of all children globally; at the secondary level, 23 per cent of refugee children accessed education, whereas 84 per cent of young people did globally' (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018, p. 6). All these developments demonstrate an urgent need to re-conceptualise education in the face of newly emerging transnational communities, increasing diversity and global migration (Osler & Starkey, 2005; Soysal, 1994; Schiffauer et al., 2004).

Inclusive education has recently become a dominant policy concept on a global scale to address the needs of different groups and promote social cohesion. It has emerged as a field of educational research, lifelong education and teacher education. Ensuring inclusive education is the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) set by the United Nations as part of its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Several international bodies such as UNESCO and UNICEF regularly publish guidelines for inclusive education (UNESCO, 2005, 2017, 2020) and col-

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laborate on international projects with member states for transforming their educational systems on inclusive principles. In addition, there is an increasing amount of funds and government budgets on inclusive education and a growing number of conferences and academic publications (Slee, 2018). As a specific case, for instance, the term 'inclusive education' has become widely used and turned into a national education policy in Turkey since 2016, directed mainly to address the needs of refugees ('population under temporary protection' with their official status) from Syria. Turkey has been the top refugee-hosting country globally as of 2021. The number of Syrian children between 5–17 years old is 1,197,124 and 64% of them are registered in schools as of June, 2021 (Millî Eğitim Bakanliği, 2021). To address the educational needs of this population, Turkey has, in collaboration with UNICEF, launched Inclusive Education Projects in 2016 (Toker, 2021). Since then, the term inclusive education has been understood (sometimes with a negative attitude) by many teachers as an effort to include Syrian students.

Can inclusive education be an effective strategy for including refugees in host societies? To what extent are the policy recommendations, proposed actions and strategies of international bodies in the field of inclusive education effective in different national contexts? We need to review the concept and key features of inclusive education to clarify these questions.

What is Inclusive Education?

The term inclusive education originates from the field of Special Education. Until the 1970s, education of children with disabilities had been carried out separately from general education in many countries. However, beginning from the 1970s, disability activists, academicians, and several NGOs have been challenging this spatial and educational segregation and demanding inclusion based on human rights. As a result, several countries moved from segregation to inclusion of special education into regular schooling (UNESCO, 2005, 2020). Since then, inclusive education has been equated with including children with disabilities in general education.

However, within years, inclusive education has taken on a broader meaning, covering learners other than those with special needs. The Salamanca Statement, signed by 92 countries in 1994 is considered to be a turning point for the transformation of the concept. It has been noted in the Statement that 'every child has unique characteristics, in-

terests, abilities and learning needs' and so 'must be allowed to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning in regular schools, with additional support in the context of the regular curriculum' (UNESCO, 2020, p. 3). These principles were adopted and promoted by the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, which underlined the need to include working children, nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and other marginalised groups. UNESCO guideline in 2005 defined inclusion (UNESCO, 2005. p. 13):

> as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a shared vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.

This definition opens up spaces for the inclusion of refugees in national contexts. It also points out the role of several key actors in achieving inclusive education, which we will be discussing in the next section. For the moment, it is important to point out the ground on which inclusive education has been justified. In UNESCO guidelines and background papers, it is noted that inclusive education can be justified on educational, social and economic grounds. These are outlined as follows (UNESCO, 2019, p. 5):

> An educational justification: the requirement for schools to educate all children together means that they have to develop ways of teaching that respond to individual differences and that therefore benefit all children;
> A social justification: inclusive schools are intended to change attitudes to difference by educating all children together and form the basis for a just and non-discriminatory society; and
> An economic justification: it is likely to be less costly to establish and maintain schools that educate all children together than to set up a complex system of different types of schools specializing in particular groups of children.

Studies show that until recently, refugees were frequently educated in separate schools, separate from the nationals (Dryden-Peterson et

al., 2018). In Turkey, for instance, a great majority of Syrian students had received education in Temporary Education Centres, where a revised Syrian curriculum was followed with some extra Turkish lessons until 2017. However, refugee-only schools are unsustainable from a financial perspective. Moreover, they do not contribute to practices of living together with the nationals; instead, they maintain segregation. Therefore, the above-mentioned justifications are important for the nation-states to come to terms with the necessity of an inclusive education approach. They are also used for justifying the importance of inclusive education for teachers and different stakeholders in educational processes. Educational, social and economic justifications of inclusive education underline the fact that such approach is vital for the educational well-being of all children, for social cohesion of societies and financial rationality. Justifying the inclusive education approach on paper is relatively easy. Yet inclusive education involves dealing with prejudices, challenging dominant norms and settled educational practices. Genuine inclusive education therefore faces many challenges in national contexts. The following section will briefly review these challenges.

Key Features and Challenges in the Implementation of Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is sometimes understood as a technical phenomenon that can be achieved when followed by specific pedagogical approaches. It involves a particular pedagogy, yet an effective inclusive education should be based on a philosophy that requires addressing the problems of social cohesion, social exclusion and existing inequalities, and challenging dominant national norms and practices. Graham and Slee (2008, p. 278) argue that the term inclusion 'implies a bringing in that it presupposes a whole into which something (or someone) can be incorporated [...] [thus] there is an implicit centredness to the term inclusion, for it discursively privileges notions of the pre-existing by seeking to include the Other into a prefabricated, naturalised space.' So, if the inclusion of refugees means integrating them into existing Turkish, German, Italian, Greek or Slovenian cultures, this does little to address the issue of social cohesion and exclusionary practices in these societies.

UNESCO stresses that inclusion should be understood as 'a dynamic approach to responding positively to pupil diversity and seeing indi-

vidual differences not as problems, but as opportunities for enriching learning' (UNESCO, 2005, p. 12). This is an important statement regarding the philosophy of inclusive education. However, how can we make teachers and national students see refugee children as a richness for learning environments in the face of structural impediments and negative stereotypes of refugees in many contexts? The reason behind negative perception towards refugees is mostly an essentialised and naturalised notion of national cultures and norms. Such a notion of culture forms the centre. Thus, as Mac Ruarirc (2013, p. 12) puts it, what is required is 'making visible and a deconstruction of the centre from which different forms of exclusion and exclusionary practices derive.'

The way inclusive education is carried out to include Syrian children into national education in Turkey can illustrate this point. The Ministry of National Education (MONE) published a Teacher's Guide on Inclusive Education for those teachers who have refugee students in their classes (Aktekin, 2017). This guide has been developed as part of a project the MONE carried out in collaboration with UNICEF, and it is the first comprehensive work by the MONE on inclusive education. The Guide offers inclusive education as a strategy for including refugees by giving reference to several passages from UNICEF and UNESCO manuals. It underlines, for instance, that based on an inclusive educational approach, not students but schools should adapt to the social, cultural and emotional needs of students (Aktekin, 2017, p. 16). However, national education in Turkey has been organised on the bases of monocultural (Sunni Muslim and Turkish culture) and mono-linguistic principles. So how a genuine inclusive education could be achieved without questioning this dominant norm or the centre? Without challenging these prevailing norms, if I refer to Mac Ruarirc's words again, 'following a nominally inclusive policy trajectory alone may always privilege the centre' (2013, p. 16). In other words, refugee students may attend Turkish public schools. The MONE may promote an inclusive educational approach, but this does not reduce negative attitudes towards refugee children; it does not lead refugee students to develop a positive self-image and a sense of belonging.

This analysis can be further detailed with two terms, structural integration and relational integration, employed by Dryden-Peterson et al. (2018) in their analysis of fourteen different national cases regarding inclusion of refugee students. According to them, structural integration refers to the ability to access services like education. On the

other hand, relational integration is a socio-cultural process that includes an 'individual-level sense of belonging, or connectedness as well as group-level social cohesion' (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2018, p. 10). The study shows a critical gap between structural and relational integration. Countries may claim that they follow inclusive educational policies. Yet, they cannot develop a sense of belonging in refugee children and positive social contact between refugee and national students in order to achieve social cohesion. Representing and using the home languages of refugee students are both crucial to developing a sense of belonging and legitimising their cultural presence in national schools. Dryden-Peterson et al. note that the language is not limited to spoken, verbal language. Non-verbal and socio-cultural scripts also convey explicit and implicit messages to students about dominant norms (2018, p. 14). And this message in many countries – although they claim to implement inclusive policies – reproduces power relations and prevailing norms. It does not empower teachers and students for building cohesive social ties. Within the mono-lingual organisation of the Turkish education system, teachers cannot include Arabic or Kurdish as the home languages of Syrian refugees in their educational practices. Thus, while the Ministry of Education presents its initiative as inclusive education, studies demonstrate that public schools push Syrian pupils out of school. Refugee parents in this mono-lingual environment cannot monitor their children, and students often feel alienated and excluded (Çelik & İçduygu, 2019). In sum, although the Turkish education system closed refugee-only temporary education centres, led public schools to register refugee students and claimed to adopt inclusive educational practices, it is still far from achieving relational integration and genuine inclusion.

Educational actors sometimes blamed refugee families and students for not making enough effort to be part of the system. An effective inclusive educational approach, on the other hand, requires recognising the fact that refugee students' difficulties arise from the education system. Besides challenging the centre or the dominant social and educational norms, several factors can facilitate or inhibit inclusive practices such as 'teacher skills and attitudes, infrastructure, pedagogical strategies and the curriculum' (UNESCO, 2017). First, teachers enact inclusive education at a local level. Therefore, they need to be continuously supported for developing skills for inclusive approaches and pedagogical strategies. Educational infrastructure is also crucial for in-

clusive education. If physical and social infrastructure is not accessible for refugee students, inclusive policies cannot be implemented effectively. And lastly, inclusive education requires questioning the curriculum and textbooks. Textbooks have traditionally been designed to raise loyal citizens and create a homogenous society with a distinct national identity. In many contexts, national curriculum and textbooks relay, as Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) note, a specific cultural capital through which dominant groups recreate their own position of superiority. In a school where cultural capital, language and practices of refugee students are not represented and are seen as worthless, there is little chance of speaking about effective inclusive education. In other words, inclusive education does not only involve a technical or organisational change. It also entails a clear philosophy that challenges power relations and traditional national identities, and promotes a vision of living together with our differences.

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