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# Teachers with a refugee background work as educators in Germany

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## ABSTRACT

This study's focus is to determine refugee teachers' views regarding their ability to work as teachers in Germany, their initiatives, and the challenges they face. In this context, the study was conducted based on qualitative research methodology. In order to collect data a total of 265 teachers residing in the 16 states of Germany were reached. Upon examining the results, it is observed that the majority of participants express a desire to work as teachers in Germany, while only a few have actually obtained the opportunity to work as teachers in Germany. More than half of the participants who are currently working as teachers reside in the North Rhine-Westphalia state. When analyzing the results, it becomes evident that a significant portion of the participants are strongly inclined to pursue a teaching career in Germany. However, the data reveals that the actual attainment of employment as teacher in Germany remains relatively low among the respondents. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that a majority of the teachers currently employed in the profession are concentrated in the North Rhine-Westphalia state.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In various periods of history, individuals have been forced to migrate and relocate due to political [1], war [2], economic [3] and natural disasters [4]. In some cases, these migrations have taken place within the borders of the country, while in others they have crossed borders. Especially in the last 20 years, as a result of the Syrian civil war and the Ukraine-Russia war, we can say that there have been large migrations across borders.

In the Turkish context, an unsuccessful military coup was attempted on July 15, 2016. Following the coup attempt, institutions linked to the Hizmet Movement (also known as the Gülen Movement) were closed down [5], and investigations were launched against hundreds of thousands of people [6]. After the coup attempt, hundreds of thousands of people lost their jobs and freedom. In addition, thousands of private institutions were closed down. According to the July 23, 2016 decree law [7] published in the official gazette, 934 private schools, and 301 educational tutoring centers were closed.

Approximately 27,000 teachers lost their jobs in connection with these closed institutions, and the education licenses of 21,000 of these teachers were revoked [6]–[8]. In addition, a total of 41,205 teachers working in public schools were dismissed from their jobs by 36 different decrees [9]. The vast majority of these teachers have been subjected to detention or arrest. As a result, people sought different options. The most

important of these is to migrate to other countries. In the context of Germany, it is evident that this country has experienced significant emigration (between 1933 and 1945) as well as being a recipient of extensive immigration [10], [11]. Germany is perceived as an opportunity-rich nation that attracts individuals with diverse backgrounds who seek to build a better future.

According to the agreement signed between Turkey and West Germany in 1961 [12], the migration journey from Turkey to Germany began with labor migration. Since then, migration to Germany has been considered significant and prestigious for Turkish citizens. Therefore, a significant number of individuals who have been politically persecuted after July 15, 2016, have chosen Germany as a major destination. Almost all of these individuals forced into migration are university graduates [13]. The purges in Turkey's education system can also be seen as a form of brain drain for the country. The focus of this study is limited to those whose profession is teaching.

Teaching is more widely known by people in society than any other profession. This is because every individual is obligated to attend school from a certain age and be educated by teachers [14]. Therefore, the teaching profession holds a distinct and special importance for every nation [15]. Due to the significance of the profession, teachers are central players in the education system, and it is undeniable that they have a significant impact on students' learning and development [16], [17]. The teaching profession not only has a significant impact on students' development but also on the social and personal characteristics of teachers. In particular, the influence of the profession on teachers has been referred to as "teacher identity" by researchers [18]–[20].

Teacher identity is formed through the integration of a teacher's practical experiences and personal backgrounds, creating a strong connection between the teacher and the teaching profession [18]. It also refers to what teachers consider significant in both their professional practice and personal lives. This identity is widely recognized and accepted in society [21]. In this respect, it can be stated that it is a natural process for individuals who have been teaching for a certain period of time to demand continuity in their profession. Teachers who are professionally committed and who are forced to migrate for various reasons tend to continue in their jobs.

In Germany, as in many other countries, becoming a teacher requires a university degree. However, a teacher trainee must specialize and be certified in two different subjects. After graduating from the university comes the internship (Referendariat). The internship varies from state to state but usually lasts two years. After successfully completing these two steps, you must pass the state examination (Staatsexamen) for your teaching specialization. This consists of written and oral exams as well as an assessment of your practical teaching skills. After passing the exam, a teaching certificate is awarded. In Germany, teacher training policy falls under the jurisdiction of the federal states' respective education authorities. Therefore, the training programs in the different states differ in structure and content, especially in terms of the number, variety, and combinations of school subjects in which teachers are trained [22].

How does this process work for non-graduates from German universities? First of all, the foreign diploma must be recognized in Germany. The exact requirements and procedures for recognition vary depending on the federal state. If you did a minor, you will also have to fulfill this requirement. In some cases, additional pedagogical qualifications are required to meet the requirements of the German education system. This includes, for example, participation in special further education programs or successful completion of integration courses. One of these is the Lehrkraft Plus program. The website of the University of Siegen describes this program as follows [23]. Lehrkraft Plus is a qualification program for people with a refugee background who have worked as teachers in their home country and wish to continue their work in Germany. As part of the one-year program, participants acquire linguistic, pedagogical-didactic, subject-didactic, and intercultural knowledge and skills for use in schools in Germany. One of the prerequisites for this program is a diploma equivalence and the other is to have at least B-2 level German language skills. But can you work as a teacher in Germany after fulfilling all these requirements? This is where the problem starts.

The population of migrant pupils in German schools [24] shows that Germany is making significant efforts to embrace cultural diversity and promote inclusion. The situation is different with regard to the employment and integration of teachers with a migrant or refugee background into the education system. According to the data of Mediendienst Integration [25], this situation can be understood more clearly. Analyzing data from 2021, about 13% of teachers in schools have a migrant background. Around 70 percent of these are German citizens. These figures suggest that it is difficult for individuals with a migrant background or refugees to teach in Germany. These difficulties stem from prejudices/stereotypes, discrimination [26]–[30], and religious discrimination [31], [32] as well as the background of refugees [33], [34].

The biggest factor stemming from refugees' background is their language proficiency [34], [35]. In addition, the minor subject required in Germany is seen as the second major factor in becoming a teacher. Teachers who overcome all these obstacles may still encounter German bureaucracy [36], prejudices [30], and possible difficulties with procedures that vary depending on the federal state (Bundesland) in Germany [28]. In this context his study aims to reveal the views of refugee teachers about being able to teach in Germany, their attempts, and the difficulties they face. Within the scope of this purpose, the following questions were

sought to be answered in the study.

- i) What are refugee teachers' views on working as a teacher in Germany?
- ii) What kind of initiatives do refugee teachers take to be able to teach in Germany?
- iii) What are the difficulties refugee teachers face in order to be able to teach in Germany?

## **2. METHOD**

### **2.1. Research characteristics**

In this study, qualitative methods and techniques were used due to their suitability to the nature of the study. Qualitative research involves the collection and analysis of non-numerical data (e.g. text, video or audio) to understand concepts, ideas or experiences [37].

### **2.2. Research participants**

The participants of the study are teachers working in public and private schools who have been subjected to political repression following the failed military coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016. The criterion sampling method, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used in the sample selection of the study. The basic understanding in selecting criterion sampling is to study all situations that meet some criteria [38]. The main criterion of the study was to examine the professional processes of teachers who lost their freedom and profession after the coup attempt on July 15, 2016, in their new lives in Germany. Two hundred sixty-five teachers completed the interview from 25 subjects from 13 different states of Germany. 51.3% of the participants are female, and 48.7% are male. 70.7% are between the ages of 30-45, and 64% have 5-10 years of experience. Accordingly, we can state that the participants have young and dynamic demographic characteristics. 22.7% of the teachers were from mathematics-geometry, 13.6% from primary school, and 10.2% from English. 71.3% of the teachers have been living in Germany for three years or more. When the distribution of participants in terms of the states of Germany is analyzed, 32.8% reside in North Rhine-Westphalia, 18.5% in Hesse, and 14.7% in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria.

### **2.3. Instrument**

The interview form for the research consists of a total of 12 questions. Out of these, eight are multiple-choice questions, while the remaining four are open-ended questions. During the preparation of the open-ended questions, priority was given to designing questions that would yield relevant data for the research. These questions were submitted to two academics who are experts in qualitative research and three Turkish language teachers to evaluate language appropriateness. The opinions and evaluations of these experts were an important source of feedback on the quality and appropriateness of the questions.

After the evaluation, the questionnaire was completed by fifteen teachers for pilot application. After the piloting process, the questionnaire form was finalized by making the necessary arrangements and sent to the participants for implementation. In this respect, the content of the open-ended questions of the questionnaire form is as follows;

- i) Experiences and opinions about working as a teacher in Germany and, if working as a teacher, how this is achieved,
- ii) Attempts to work as a teacher in Germany,
- iii) Barriers to working as a teacher in Germany,
- iv) Opportunities for teaching in Germany.

The questions are designed to enable participants to share their thoughts and experiences regarding their teaching experiences, work processes, initiatives, obstacles, and opportunities in Germany.

### **2.4. Data analysis**

The interview form was sent to the teachers via Google Forms. The forms filled in by the teachers were transferred to the computer in Excel format. Separate Word files were assigned for each question. In this way, a data set of 50 pages was obtained. The data was analyzed using inductive analysis techniques by transferring it to the MAXQDA program. The method of inductive content analysis can be applied to open-ended or semi-structured data. With this method, researchers use concepts, categories, or themes to answer research questions, reduce, group, and abstract data. In the research process, the data obtained from teachers were independently read and coded by both researchers.

Each researcher examined the data independently and conducted their own coding to identify specific themes or concepts. These codings were later compared by the researchers in a meeting. In the meeting, the codings made by each researcher were shared and discussed to reach an agreement on similarities, differences,

or common themes. Thus, consensus among the researchers was achieved in the analysis and interpretation of the data, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

In this comparison, a consistency rate of 88.8% was found. According to Miles and Huberman [39], a minimum agreement of 80% is expected for inter-coder reliability ( $Reliability = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement) * 100$ ). Codes that could not reach a consensus were examined through discussions until a resolution was reached. As a result of these discussions, the details of the codings are presented in Table 1. This table includes different codings that emerged during the discussions and the coding understanding that was eventually agreed upon.

Table 1. Inter-coder agreement

Main Theme	Subthemes	1 <sup>st</sup> Author	2 <sup>nd</sup> Author
Opinions	Professional interest	√	√
	Not giving up	√	x
	Diploma equivalency	√	√
	Teacher training programs	√	√
	Volunteering	√	√
Fulfillments (Initiatives)	Improving language skills	√	√
	Studying a second subject	√	√
	Online applications	x	√
	Residential status	√	√
	Different fields of work	√	√
Difficulties	Language proficiency	√	√
	Dual subject requirement	√	√
	Bureaucratic barriers	√	√
Opportunities	Headscarf	√	√
		√	√

In Table 1, it can be observed that the researchers reached a consensus on four main themes and 12 subthemes. However, after the initial coding, there was a disagreement among the researchers regarding two subthemes. Through discussions, it was decided to include the subtheme of "not giving up" in the study, while the subtheme of "online applications" was excluded from the scope of the research.

These discussions were conducted by evaluating factors such as the focus of the research, data analysis, and identification of themes. Despite the researchers having different views on these two subthemes, they reached a common understanding through the discussions and made decisions in line with the purpose and scope of the study. Thus, the themes and sub-themes presented in Table 1 were determined as a result of the agreement between the researchers.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Participants' views on working as a teacher in Germany

One of the questions in the interview form aims to determine the participants' interest in working as teachers in Germany. This question is asked due to the wide range of job opportunities in Germany and the potential for individuals to pursue different career fields. The main purpose of the question is to identify participants' interest and preferences for the teaching profession in Germany. The diversity of job opportunities in Germany and the possibility of pursuing different career fields are important factors in shaping individuals' career goals.

Therefore, this question included in the scope of the study was used to understand participants' career preferences and their interest in the teaching profession in Germany. The question has a multiple-choice structure that allows participants to express their preferences. According to the findings, (n=265) 86.4% of the participants indicated their desire to work as teachers in Germany. Participants expressed their intention to utilize their teaching experiences in Turkey in Germany as well, and they believed they would be successful in their profession here. For example, participant T-47 stated that:

*I have worked in government institutions for 19 years and have given private lessons for 5 years... I love my job, and I want to teach here as well.*

T-36 expressed:

*Considering my field, most of the people I talk to say that I have a good chance of becoming a teacher. This motivates me even more and knowing that there is a need for teachers encourages me to act swiftly in learning the language.*

According to the research findings, participants who expressed a desire to work as teachers reported receiving predominantly negative feedback when discussing their intentions with their German acquaintances. However, the analyses conducted revealed that participants were not inclined to easily abandon their aspirations

for a teaching career. This finding indicates the participants' strong determination and passion for the teaching profession. Despite facing negative responses and encountering challenges, participants expressed their intention to persist in pursuing their goal of working as teachers. For instance, they articulated their stance as follows:

*When I mention to the Germans around me that I want to work as an elementary school teacher again, they often respond with 'that's very difficult.' It's a disheartening situation. Nevertheless, I will still give it a try. (T-75).*

*In my opinion, Turkish friends who come here should not give up; if they manage to improve their language skills, they can easily work as teachers. (T-236).*

When examining the perspectives of participants regarding becoming teachers, it is observed that the issue of diploma equivalency is significant and prioritized. This is because individuals who come to Germany from countries outside the European Union, such as Turkey, are required to present their university diplomas for recognition.

When examining the participants, it was found that 52.1% have completed the diploma equivalency process, while 16.6% are still in the process of equivalency. A significant portion of those who have not yet initiated the diploma equivalency process are waiting for the recognition of their status in Germany.

*After everything is finished, I am considering shaping myself according to whatever needs to be done. (T-185).*

*I arrived in Germany eight months ago. I am attending a language course with the aim of learning German primarily. Additionally, I am waiting for the completion of diploma equivalency and asylum procedures. (T-117).*

On the other hand, there are also teachers whose diploma equivalence is not recognized for various reasons. Based on the teachers' views, we found that these reasons differed from state to state. For example, a participant from Baden-Württemberg stated that he could not complete his diploma equivalence due to incomplete credits:

*I haven't received my diploma equivalence yet, but it is a big obstacle for me to take courses from the university again due to the missing credits. Although I have 20 years of experience, I am worried that small obstacles will arise in front of me. (T-59).*

*They make diploma equivalency very difficult...(T-64).*

In Turkey, graduates of education faculties or those who have received pedagogical training in faculties of arts and sciences must pass a theoretical exam called KPSS (Public Personnel Selection Exam) in order to be appointed as teachers. In recent years, an interview exam has also been implemented. Candidates who achieve a sufficient score in these exams obtain the right to be appointed as teachers. However, these exams are not valid in any country other than Turkey. This is because each country has its own teacher recruitment processes and regulations. Nevertheless, another participant residing in the state of Baden-Württemberg, who could not provide evidence of having taken this written exam in Turkey, stated that he was unable to obtain diploma equivalency.

*I have sent my diploma, transcript, and the necessary documents to the relevant official institution. However, here they did not even initiate the process of recognizing my diploma because it is mistakenly believed that taking the KPSS exam in Turkey is a requirement to become a teacher. Since I did not have a KPSS certificate, none of my subjects were recognized. (T-72).*

Upon analyzing the survey forms, we have identified that teachers residing in the "Baden-Württemberg" state in particular experience similar problems. Additionally, when examining the perspectives of teachers, it is observed that they emphasize the need for those who meet the minimum requirements to adapt to the system promptly.

*Without being worn down by various prerequisites and bureaucratic processes, I hope that experienced teachers like myself, who fulfill the basic requirements, can join the education field as soon as possible. (T-214).*

### **3.2. The initiatives undertaken by the participants to work as teachers in Germany**

Through the second research question, an attempt was made to identify the initiatives undertaken by the participants to work as teachers in Germany.

When the data is analyzed, participants (n=265) indicated that the most common approaches they pursued to work as teachers in Germany were "participating in teacher training programs" (n=55), "volunteering or doing internships" (n=43), "improving language skills" (n=32), and pursuing a second subject specialization (n=16). However, participants whose status in Germany was not yet recognized (n=40) and those who pursued different career fields (n=12) mentioned that they had not undertaken any initiatives to work as teachers.

It is important to note that the majority of participants expressed their involvement or application to the "Lehrkräfte Plus" program, which is a qualification program specifically designed for refugee-origin teachers seeking to work as teachers in Germany. This program aims to support refugee-origin teachers with teaching experience in their home countries and their integration into the German education system [34]. The Lehrkräfte Plus program provides participants with training and support in various areas, including the German education system, teaching skills, and language proficiency. The program aims to enhance the competencies of participants to work as teachers in Germany, thus increasing their chances of finding employment and achieving success.

The participants, particularly those aspiring to work as teachers, have been observed to successfully achieve their goals upon successful completion of this program. For instance, participant T-120 stated that:

*Despite residing in Baden-Württemberg, I relocated to Siegen to enroll in the Lehrkräfte program at the university. After a year, I returned to my home state. Currently, I am studying Computer Science as a second subject and working as a teacher at a Realschule.*

This specific instance demonstrates the participant's proactive approach in moving to Siegen in order to take part in the Lehrkräfte program, followed by their subsequent return to their home state. It serves as an example of the participant's seamless integration into the German educational system and of their employment as teachers in their chosen fields.

Another point emphasized by the participants is voluntary work. Voluntary work offers various benefits for participants who want to teach in Germany. Voluntary work allows participants to gain experience and spend time on self-development. This can lead to benefits such as the development of language skills, and support for the learning process. Furthermore, voluntary work can assist participants in expanding their social networks. In fact, participants have expressed that they engage in voluntary work and recommend this approach to their peers. Participant T-7 stated that:

*I am currently working as a teacher, but I advise those who want to work to first overcome the language barrier and then gain experience by working in voluntary positions.*

Participant T-192 mentioned:

*I am not currently working, but I engage in voluntary art workshops in German associations.*

Another view obtained from the participants is that they attach importance to improving their German skills. Proficiency in the German language is an important requirement for teaching in Germany. Enhancing language skills enables participants to effectively communicate in the classroom and provide better education to their students. The provision of state-funded German courses, especially for political refugees, is an important step towards language learning. Through these courses, participants have the opportunity to enhance their language skills and acquire the necessary language proficiency required for teaching in Germany. Participant T-49 also emphasized this point by stating that:

*I have not applied to work as a physics teacher. As far as I have observed, my colleagues struggle the most with German. I can apply for a physics after further improving my German skills.*

Furthermore, it was observed that participants express their willingness to engage in volunteer work in order to improve their language skills. They recognize that by doing so, they can attain good language proficiency. Participant T-103 stated that:

*I am currently attending a language course. I am considering volunteering until I reach language proficiency.*

Along with all these attempts, there were also participants who had not yet made any attempt to teach. The teachers who have not taken any initiative explain this situation with two different reasons.

The first is that the residence status in Germany is not yet clear,

*I haven't reached the residence stage yet." (T-14) "The residence came very late and I haven't done anything yet." (T-176).*

The second reason is their pursuit of alternative career paths outside of teaching.

For instance, participant T-27 mentioned that:

*I entered the IT field," and participant T-24 stated, "I couldn't find the strength to pursue teaching, so I am working as a pedagogy specialist.*

### 3.3. The challenges faced by participants in pursuing teaching in Germany

The aim of our third research question is to identify the challenges encountered by participants in pursuing teaching in Germany. According to the data obtained from the survey forms, teachers have ranked the challenges to becoming a teacher in Germany as follows: language proficiency (n=150), dual-subject requirement (n=67), bureaucratic barriers (n=42), and headscarf issue (n=22).

Individuals who migrate to a different country naturally face the obligation to overcome language barriers. Learning a new language is not only challenging but also brings along many advantages. When the

demographic structure of the study group is analyzed, it is seen that it is a group that has been forced to migrate due to political reasons and wants to complete the integration process successfully. Therefore, it can be stated that learning a new language may be more difficult for participants compared to ordinary individuals. In this regard, participant T-56 expresses their views as follows:

*Of course, we have language problems and will continue to have language problems for a while. I hope I can succeed as soon as possible. Because I think it is not easy to hold on to life again after all the negativities experienced.*

*C2 level German is a very high level, and we don't use most of what we learn in German courses in a school setting. Pursuing university education again is also challenging for us as parents. (T-75).*

In Turkey, it is accepted that having a diploma in a single subject is sufficient to graduate as a teacher. However, in Germany, the requirement is to have qualifications in two subjects. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges among participants is the necessity to complete the second subject.

*T-67: "I would like to talk about the state I am in. There are many of us, including myself, facing a similar situation. Despite the need for teachers, no effort is being made to include us in the system. A teacher training program could be organized here to complete the second subject."*

*T-154: "Of course, the language and dual subject requirement are pushing me towards the fear of not being able to pursue my beloved profession."*

The participants indicate that they are not hesitant to undergo further education in order to complete the second subject. They also expect facilitation in this process and hope that their teaching experiences will be taken into consideration by German authorities. T-149 states that:

*...it would be very beneficial to enable a more practical-oriented acquisition of the second subject in a shorter period of time while practicing our profession.*

*T-159 expresses the following opinion: "Despite the high demand for teachers and our extensive experience in Turkey, they make it difficult for us to work as teachers here. In my opinion experienced teachers should be employed in schools without the requirement of a second subject."*

Participants have expressed that bureaucratic barrier are another obstacle they face in working as teachers. Upon analyzing the interview forms, it has been observed that bureaucratic barriers vary from one state to another. Participants have mentioned that some officials facilitate the procedures, while others adopt a more rigid approach.

*...we are drowning in bureaucracy and paperwork, many people who have completed the Lehrkräfte Programme are looking for a position but cannot find one, job applications are made over and over again, yet they know us and they have us at their disposal, but they spend so much money to train and prepare us, but we are left alone in terms of assigning positions to schools... (T-205).*

It is observed that similar attitudes are exhibited by school administrators as well.

*In order to improve my German language skills, I wanted to volunteer at a primary school to assist teachers and children. I didn't ask for any payment. They said it's not possible without insurance. The procedures are too excessive. It shouldn't be like this. (T-29).*

On the other hand, participants who stated that they did not encounter any bureaucratic obstacles expressed their views as follows:

*I haven't experienced any negative situation. Generally, I have always received positive support." (T-30).*

*Since I decided to continue as a teacher, 95% of my colleagues here have always supported and motivated me during practice and the rest of the work process. (T-35).*

The majority of the participants included in our study were women (n=136). Unlike male participants, female participants also perceive wearing a headscarf as an obstacle to being able to teach.

*First of all, despite my excellent proficiency in German, my job is made much more difficult due to the prejudice against wearing a headscarf." (T-257)."*

*...they direct us to schools with only one subject, otherwise finding a job is not easy, especially with a headscarf. (T-69).*

Among the teachers who participated in the study, there are also those who have started practicing their own profession despite all the difficulties. Only 28.67% (n=76) of the participants, including volunteers and interns, are currently engaged in their own jobs. When evaluated in terms of subject areas, 22.66% are math-geometry teachers, 14.66% are English teachers, and 10.66% are primary school teachers. When the distribution of work is analyzed according to the states of Germany, 52% of the participants work in North Rhine-Westphalia, 12% in Hesse, 10.66% in Baden-Württemberg, and 6.66% in Rhineland- Pfalz.

When we asked the participants who succeeded in becoming a teacher how they did it, they mostly stated that they first sought out volunteering opportunities and contacted schools and other organizations.

*I completed a language course followed by a Weiterbildung (Assistant der Lehrkräfte), then I volunteered at a primary school to improve my language skills further. In the last few years, I have been interviewed in different cities in response to my applications. Finally, I am now working as a Herkunftssprachliche Unterricht. (T-4).*

Participants working as teachers stated that it is important to be courageous and assertive. They also stated that not having the desired level of language skills should not be seen as an obstacle in communication. Participants pointed out that language skills can constantly improve in life.

*"First of all, we need to be brave. We are not much different from the teachers here regarding experience and knowledge. One should only focus on language. Once we have mastered the language at a certain level, we need to apply and try our luck." (T-120).*

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The focus of this study is to elucidate the perspectives, initiatives, and challenges of refugee or asylum seeker teachers regarding their ability to work as teachers in Germany. The research examines the participants' aspirations to work as teachers in Germany, the initiatives they undertake to achieve this goal, and the obstacles they encounter in the process. Teaching is a profession that occupies an important position throughout the world. Education is fundamental to societies' development and progress, and teachers play a key role in this process. Teaching is not only the job of teaching what you know or the technology of teaching; it is also a profession with humanistic dimensions involving love and giving heart [40]. Those who practice this profession do not want to break away from it [41], and there is a strong bond between teachers and the teaching profession [18].

For the participants, the teaching profession is not only a job but also a lifestyle and a system of values. In this context, while expressing themselves through their experiences and profession, they emphasize that the teaching profession is an important element of their identity. Erikson [42] states that identity is acquired through the interaction and experience of the individual with their environment. Mead [38], on the other hand, noted that identity is not a phenomenon that a person possesses; on the contrary, it develops throughout one's life.

The most common initiative that the participants of the study took in order to be able to teach was to participate in Lehrkraft Plus. Lehrkraft Plus is a program for internationally trained and experienced teachers with a refugee background. Teachers with a refugee background are eligible to apply for these programs with a B-2 German language level. The program generally lasts one year. Those who successfully complete the program are entitled to start as a trainee teacher in a school. This program is offered by certain universities in Germany. These universities are Bielefeld, Bochum, Essen-Duisburg, Cologne and Siegen. These Lehrkraft plus programs do not offer opportunities in all teaching branches. For example, primary school teaching. Those who successfully complete the program cannot work in all German states [43]. In the light of the explanations, it is seen that the program does not provide a definite assurance. In addition, teachers residing in different states of Germany have to move for the Lehrkraft plus program. This is an additional challenge for teachers who are married and have school-age children.

The participants' interest in this program indicates the need for updating and enhancing their education and competencies to teach in Germany. Such programs play a significant role in providing better integration and job opportunities in Germany for teachers of refugee background. These findings emphasize the participants' interest in teacher education programs and highlight the importance of these programs for them. Support programs of this kind can serve as a valuable resource for professional development and adaptation for teachers of refugee background.

Refugee individuals are expected to face various challenges such as integration [1], language learning [14], and finding employment [44]. Learning the language of the host country plays a crucial role in overcoming all of these challenges. Without good communication skills, achieving successful integration is difficult [35], and consequently, finding employment in one's own profession or any other field becomes more challenging. Our research participants confirm this situation. In fact, more than half of the participants stated that the language barrier is the biggest obstacle to working as a teacher in Germany.

Improving language skills alone is not sufficient to work as a teacher in Germany. Obtaining diploma equivalency is crucial. The process of working as a teacher can be challenging, especially in cases where the graduation is in a single subject area, as you need to have a second specialized subject (zweites fach) to work as a teacher [34]. The participants of the study express that completing a second subject is a hurdle they need to overcome in their professions. However, some participants also emphasize that bureaucratic barriers prevent them from pursuing education in a different field related to their own area of expertise.

The above-mentioned difficulties are common to all participants in the research as problems that need to be overcome. It is observed that the majority of the participants in the study are women. These female participants have expressed that in addition to other challenges, wearing a headscarf is seen as an obstacle that

needs to be overcome. It is noted that the Federal Constitutional Court, which is the highest court at the federal level, has previously addressed the issue of the ban on wearing headscarves for teachers in public service [45].

Accordingly, in 2015, a general ban on teachers wearing headscarves was deemed unconstitutional, as it was seen as a violation of freedom of belief (Article 4 Para. 2 of the Basic Law). However, if wearing a headscarf poses a concrete danger to peace in schools, specific bans are allowed (Case Nos. 1 BvR 471/10, 1 BvR 1181/10). Considering the above-mentioned legal provisions, we can say that there are two ways to work as a teacher in German schools while wearing a headscarf. The first is through the initiative of school principals, and the second is through individuals' strong communication skills.

Despite all these challenges, including volunteering and internships, nearly a quarter of the participants are currently actively employed. According to the data from the German Kultusministerkonferenz, the teacher shortage across Germany is expected to exceed 25,000 by 2025 [46]. One of the most striking results obtained in this study is that the majority of refugee-origin teachers are young and possess B2 level or higher language skills. Considering these results, it can be argued that Germany would benefit from harnessing this potential and integrating these young teachers into the education system.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the multifaceted challenges that refugee and asylum-seeking teachers in Germany face when seeking to integrate into the education system. Despite facing significant obstacles, such as language proficiency requirements, bureaucratic hurdles and cultural considerations such as wearing the headscarf, participants demonstrate resilience and determination to pursue their teaching careers. Initiatives such as the Lehrkraft Plus program offer promising avenues for professional development and integration, but also underline the need for more comprehensive support mechanisms. The findings underline the critical role that language proficiency and diploma recognition play in overcoming the challenges of teaching in Germany. The study also highlights demographic trends among teachers with a refugee background, particularly young and dynamic teachers, and suggests a potential solution to Germany's impending teacher shortage. Going forward, promoting inclusive policies, developing educational support programs and addressing institutional barriers are key steps towards harnessing the talents and contributions of refugee teachers, which will ultimately enrich the German educational landscape and promote social cohesion within communities.

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