

## Parents' Views on the Education of Turkish Children Living in Switzerland

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The current era is one of the periods in human history when the phenomenon of migration is at its highest level. Individuals leave the countries they live in and settle in different countries for economic, security or different demographic reasons. Like all Western European countries, Switzerland has provided labour force from countries such as Turkey to complete the manpower deficit. The aim of this research is to get the opinions of parents who are currently in the 2nd and 3rd generation about their children's education. The research was designed as a case study. The data were collected in the Canton of Basel, Switzerland in 2023 with a questionnaire/interview form developed by Arı (2007) and updated for this research. In this case study with 77 individuals living in the canton of Basel, Switzerland, it is seen that parents are satisfied with the Swiss educational institutions, they are not concerned about the integration and success of their children, but they are afraid that their children will lose their language, cultural and religious values. The greatest expectation from Turkish educational institutions is in this direction.

Keywords: migration, migrant children, Turks in Switzerland, parents' views, education

### INTRODUCTION

Although immigration is a phenomenon that has existed throughout human history, drawing borders more clearly, especially in the last 100 years, is an issue that has become the main agenda item of every country in the world due to economic, wars and famine reasons. As a solution to the labour shortage that emerged after the Second World War, Western European countries imported workers from some countries such as Turkey and planned to employ them temporarily. However, considering that the 4th generation is currently living in these countries, it is seen that this immigration situation is permanent.

Immigrants have a hybrid culture that includes elements of their original home culture and the host culture. Immigrant culture is often referred to as the "original" culture of a group, consisting of an entire way of life, including languages, ideas, beliefs, values, behaviours, and all that immigrants bring with them when they arrive in their new country (Zhou & Bankson III, 1994). It is therefore difficult to define or serve them because they think and act differently.

Karataş (2003) states that the adaptation problems of workers sent abroad should be addressed in the context of the personal characteristics of the individuals participating in migration, ethnic origin, the work of the worker, the characteristics and income level of the work, the level of benefiting from the social services offered in the country, the laws, policies and regulations enacted by the receiving and sending countries regarding migrant labor. Each of these variables explains the integration of individuals into countries.

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Adaptation problems, which are seen to a great extent in the first generation and to a lesser extent in the second generation, will gradually disappear in subsequent generations. The differences between the immigrants and the host culture will gradually diminish (Zhou & Bankson III, 1994). Turkish groups living in different countries of Western Europe will successfully integrate into the society they live in. Considering their numbers and linguistic strength, they will continue to be a strong group in their societies. Future generations will continue to acquire Turkish and preserve their mother tongue (Yağmur, 2006).

Today, it is a more acceptable sociological reality that people can blend their own culture with the host culture instead of adopting the host culture as it is. In order to achieve this, the education of individuals who know their own language, culture and values and who can meet the host culture at the middle point gains importance. The existence of individuals is directly proportional to their mastery of their mother tongue. Individuals who master their mother tongue can easily learn the language of the country they live in and integrate better. The educational policies implemented in Western Europe for immigrant groups are diametrically opposed to the European Union's discourse on "minority policies". According to the EU's Maastricht criteria, education in the mother tongue of ethnic minorities should be considered within the framework of human rights and individuals belonging to ethnic minorities should be able to receive education in their mother tongue (Yağmur, 2010).

Switzerland, where 2/3 of the population consists of immigrants, has been a country where immigrant problems are experienced at a minimum rate and harmonisation processes are relatively healthy. However, this was not Switzerland's first plan. Switzerland has always tried to keep its immigration policy, which started in the 1970s, temporary and under control, but demographic realities and economic reasons have made the country's anti-foreignisation policies dysfunctional (Fibbi, Lerch & Warner, 2006).

In terms of education, it is difficult to say that immigrants have fully achieved the success of other groups in Switzerland. Especially in international examinations such as Pisa and Timms, children from families from the former Yugoslavia and Turkey are below the Swiss average. Similarly, the proportion of Turkish children in "cantonschule" schools, where academic education is provided, is lower than in institutions providing vocational education (Kayır, 2008). Studies on the children of Turks living in Switzerland show that they are behind both their Swiss peers and other immigrant groups in terms of achievement. Turkish children are directed more and more to special education and vocational training schools as they progress through the education levels. While Turkish children tend to attend vocational courses and classes, they do not participate sufficiently in Turkish and Turkish culture classes (Kayadibi, 1993).

Parents are the most important stakeholders of educational institutions. The desired level of parental participation in educational processes and especially in school environments leads to numerous gains for the student, family, teacher and institution. Parent involvement, first of all, makes the child feel safer in the school environment. Students in a safe educational environment are more successful, have high self-confidence and adapt to the community they are in (Şen, 2022). The participation of families in education is of great importance for the success of education. However, there are various obstacles for families to participate in education processes. These barriers may arise directly from the lack of support from families for educational processes, as well as from the inability to establish a healthy teacher-parent interaction, social prejudices, school working hours and parent participation policy (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Although the number of studies on the education of Turks in Switzerland has increased recently, it is seen that the number of studies in which parents' views on the educational processes are collected has not yet reached a number that would constitute a literature. In addition, since the individuals who had children in the study conducted by Arı (2007) are now parents, it is thought that a comparative analysis

can be made between the two studies and it can be concluded what kind of changes in parental attitudes have occurred in the passing time and generation.

The aim of this study is to evaluate the information regarding the short-term education of Turkish parents living in Switzerland. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought.

1. What are the issues regarding the educational services offered by Switzerland to Turkish parents?
2. What concerns do Turkish parents have regarding their short-distance future?
3. What are the issues of Turkish parents regarding education in Turkey?
4. To what extent have the findings of the research conducted by Arı (2007) changed today?

### **METHOD**

Immigration is a subject that may vary according to the country of origin, country of residence and even individuals. Since the research deals with the educational experiences of individuals in Switzerland, it was deemed appropriate to use the case study method, one of the qualitative research designs. According to Flyvbjerg (2011), the case study is a research method that provides in-depth opportunities on a limited theme, but the researcher cannot generalise about the subject. Although it is positioned within qualitative research methods, quantitative or mixed methods can also be used in case study design.

In this study, the educational experiences of Turkish people with school-age children living in Switzerland are analysed. Expectations of the parents of the students from Switzerland and Turkey, their experiences, problems and demands are included in the scope of the study.

### **Study Group**

The study group of the research consists of 77 people. Criterion sampling method was used to determine the sample. Criterion sampling is the study of all situations that meet a predetermined set of criteria. The criterion is created by the researcher, or a list of previously prepared criteria can be used (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The criteria for this study were that the parents had children of school age and that they had received/were receiving services from the Swiss and Turkish education organisations abroad. Demographic data about the study group are given in Table 1.

Table 1  
Study Group

Sex	Male	Female			
	53	24			
	%68	%31			
Education	Primary School	Lower-Secondary School	Upper -Secondary School	Bachelor's	Graduate
	12	12	34	13	5
	%16	%16	%45	%17	%6
Marital Status	Single	Married	No info		
	11	62	4		
	%13	%84			
Duration of Residence in Switzerland	Born in Switzerland	0-10	11-20	20+	
	10	9	17	41	
	%13	%12	%22	%51	
Number of children	1	2	3	4	5+
	10	29	22	11	4
	%13	%38	%29	%15	%5
Age	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	
	8	38	21	10	
	%11	%49	%27	%13	

### Data Collection Tool

The research data were collected with the "Questionnaire Form on Educational Problems of Turks living in Switzerland" created by Arı (2007) and updated by the authors for this article. The questionnaire form consists of 53 questions. The first 21 questions consist of demographic questions to collect information about the respondents. Questions 22-24 inquire about the parents' country preferences in terms of education. Questions 25-49 aim to measure the parents' views on the educational services provided by Switzerland and Turkey with Likert-type questions. In the last part, questions 50-53 were prepared as open-ended and multiple-choice questions in order to learn the concerns, problems and expectations of the individuals. To get opinions on the validity and reliability of the questionnaire form, the questionnaire form was sent to an expert working on migration and two experts in educational research / measurement and evaluation, and the form was finalised according to their opinions. The questionnaire was finalised after the pilot application in Switzerland. While preparing the data collection tool, a multi-dimensional measurement was tried to be made by including knowledge, fact, behaviour and belief-opinion question (Büyüköztürk, 2005).

### Procedure

Data were collected between July and September 2023 in the canton of Basel Stadt, Switzerland, using printed forms. The first author of the study delivered the questionnaires to the parents in places where Turks regularly visit such as mosques, restaurants, cafes, cultural centres, markets, barbershops, etc. Out of a total of 300 questionnaires distributed, 140 were returned, but 77 questionnaires were filled in completely and according to the criteria. This number was considered sufficient for the case study. The sample was limited due to the small number of individuals in the parent position in the society and the criterion of receiving education services from both Turkey and Switzerland.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained with the data collection tool were subjected to frequency analysis. Jamovi statistical data analysis programme was used for this purpose. In addition, the answers to the open-ended questions in the last part of the questionnaire form were interpreted by thematic data analysis.

In thematic analysis, themes were first identified. Then, patterns between these themes were identified and a general judgement was tried to be reached from specific issues in an inductive manner (Braun & Clarke, 2019). While determining the themes, open-ended questions as well as the answers given to Likert-type questions showing the tendencies of the respondents were also used.

As seen in Table 1, a significant portion of the participants were male (68%). This is directly proportional to the fact that male population mobility is more intense in the areas where the data were collected. 45% of the participants are high school graduates. When analysed in terms of marital status, it is seen that 11 of the 73 respondents are single parents. 88% of the participants have been living in Switzerland for more than 10 years. It is seen that having 2 and 3 children is more common among the participants (67% total). Most of the participants are middle-aged.

### **FINDINGS**

In the first part of the study, demographic questions were followed by information about the daily lives of the respondents related to education in Switzerland. In Switzerland, living space in houses is determined according to the number of rooms and there are criteria for determining the number of rooms for a family to live. It is important for children to have a study area/room of their own during their education process. Participants were asked whether their children had their own rooms/study areas and it was seen that 63 participants (83%) were able to give their children a room at home to study. 13 participants (17%) said that their children did not have a private area where they could study. 1 participant did not provide information for this question.

The most prioritised issue for the education of Turkish people abroad and for their integration both in the motherland and in the country of residence is the use and teaching of the mother tongue. Because individuals think in their mother tongue and build their subsequent learning on it. All of the participants stated that all or some of their communication with their children in the home environment is conducted in Turkish. It is also seen that parents' TV preferences are Turkish channels (n= 54, 76%). When we look at the children, this rate decreases (n=36, 49%). Younger children tend to watch more German or English TV channels.

Similar to the findings related to TV, 11 of the parents stated that foreign music was the music they listened to the most (15%), while this situation increased in children (n=30, 44%). The new generation has a higher preference for foreign music.

Public school education in Switzerland is free of charge. The private school rate is also very low across the country. However, parents can send their children to different courses and activities if they wish. When the Turkish people living in Switzerland were asked where they spend their money, it was observed that the highest expenditures were made on food (n=14), health (8) and rent (n=55). The number of parents who stated that they spend the highest proportion of their budget on education is 5 (6 per cent). It can be seen that the expenditure items of Turks living in Switzerland are aimed at meeting minimum living conditions.

When parents were asked whether their children had any difficulties in speaking and understanding Turkish, 55 (71%) parents stated that their children had no or very little difficulty in speaking and

understanding Turkish. 13 (17%) said that their children had difficulties in speaking and understanding Turkish.

The frequency distribution of parents' answers to a series of questions about their children's adaptation to Swiss schools is as follows:

Table 2  
Children's adaptation to school

Criteria	Never- Little		Sometimes		Almost Always-Always	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Language problems	35	46.7	14	18.7	26	34.7
Disciplinary problems	45	58.5	20	26	12	15.6
Behaviour problems	45	58	19	25.3	11	14.3
Socialising with friends	6	8.2	7	9.5	66	82,5

In response to the question whether the students had problems with the language of instruction in Swiss schools, almost half of the respondents stated that their children did not have any problems (n=36, 46.7%). However, a large proportion of the students had problems with the language at school (sometimes n=14; almost always, always n=26). given that full command of the language is a key factor in the teaching and learning process, it is foreseeable that this could lead to many different problems.

Another set of questions asked to the parents was about their satisfaction with the Swiss school and education system. The information is given in Table 3.

Table 3  
Satisfaction with Swiss Schools

Criteria	None- Little		Medium		Good-Excellent	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Foreign Language Education	12	15.6	14	18.2	51	66.2
Racial Discrimination	36	49.3	21	28.8	16	21.9
Quality of education	27	36	12	16	36	48
Satisfaction from the education	11	14.7	10	13.3	54	72
Quality of school managers	15	20	19	25.3	41	54.7
Quality of school settings	10	13.1	18	23.7	48	63.2
Quality of teachers	14	18.7	20	26.7	41	54.6
Quality of curriculums	14	18.7	15	20	46	61.3
Quality of lesson content	14	18.6	14	18.6	47	62.6
Quality of books	12	15.8	12	15.8	52	68.4
Quality of materials	4	5.5	10	13.7	59	78.9
Quality of classroom atmosphere	5	6.9	17	23	51	69.8
Satisfaction from the friends of their children	10	13.6	17	23	47	63.6
Satisfaction of Turkish culture content	39	57.4	13	19.1	16	23.1

The highest rates of satisfaction are found in educational materials (78.9 %), textbooks (68.4 %) and foreign language education (66.2 %), while the only issue on which parents express negative comments is the lack of Turkish cultural content in educational programs and materials (23.1 %).

Two survey questions were asked about the extent to which parents were able to support their children's educational processes. The responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4  
Parental support for education

Criteria	Never- Little		Sometimes		Almost Always-Always	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Helping their children for homework	22	29.8	16	21.6	36	48.6
Taking care of childrens' education	36	31.7	11	14.7	41	54.7

According to parent responses, it is seen that parents have a supportive attitude towards helping students with their homework. Parents think that they are concerned about their children's education and training. Approximately 30 per cent of the parents think that they make no or very little contribution to their children's education. Almost 1 out of every 3 parents are not sufficiently involved in the education processes of their children.

As in many countries around the world, there are teachers sent by the Republic of Turkey to teach Turkish and Turkish culture in Switzerland within the framework of bilateral agreements. There is also an education attaché office in Switzerland to coordinate the educational matters of the citizens in the country. Many non-governmental organizations supported by Turkey are active in Switzerland. The parents in the study group were asked 3 questions about these services provided by Turkey.

Table 5  
Parental support for education

Criteria	Never- Little		Sometimes		Almost Always-Always	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
I am satisfied with the Turkish educational institutions in Switzerland	33	50	13	19.7	20	30.3
I am satisfied with the teachers from Turkey	28	43.1	15	23.1	22	33.8
I find the Turkish teachers competent.	36	54.5	15	22.7	15	21.7

When the responses of the parents are analyzed, it is understood that the teachers coming from Turkey are not considered adequate and the services provided by the educational institutions in Turkey are not considered adequate. This is in contrast to the attitude towards Swiss school institutions and teachers.

When parents were asked whether they would prefer their child's teacher to be Turkish, 27 of them said they would prefer this (36.1%), while 25 said they would prefer a foreign teacher (33.1%). Twenty-two of the parents said that the nationality of the teacher would not make a difference for them.

When parents were asked in which language they would like their children to receive education, 16 parents preferred Turkish (21.3 %). 29 parents stated that they would prefer English and 29 parents stated that they would prefer schools with German as the medium of instruction (38.7%).

When parents were asked in which country it would be better for their children to receive education, most of them preferred Switzerland (n= 56, 75.7%). The number of parents who preferred Turkey was 13. 4 parents stated that they would prefer their children to receive education in a country other than these two countries.

In the questionnaire form, a list of 7 items related to the most common parental concerns in the literature was presented to the parents. Parents were asked to make a choice among these items, and if they had any additional suggestions, they were asked to add them under the heading "other". The main

reason for determining a selective question type is to get clearer information. The frequency results regarding the concerns of the parents about their children are given in Table 6.

Table 6  
Reasons for parents' concerns about their children

Source of concern	f
Losing moral values	59
Apostasy	50
Acquiring harmful habits	39
Not having a good education	38
Joining harmful groups	22
Not having a good job	12

When the responses of the parents are analysed, it is seen that they are concerned about the loss of their cultural, moral and religious values by their children. Immigrant families are afraid of losing their own characteristics. The next concerns are that the child does not receive a good education and that he/she will be in groups of friends that will harm him/her. The concern that "the child will not be able to get a good job", which is expected to be one of the highest concerns in Turkey, is not prioritised by parents in Switzerland.

At the end of the questionnaire form, the respondents were asked 3 open-ended questions. The first two of these questions were related to the educational problems experienced by the children in Switzerland, while the last question was related to the educational activities carried out by Turkey in Switzerland.

Table 7  
The problems faced in Swiss Schools

Problem	f
Xenophobia	11
Cultural Difference/ Adaptation	9
Lack of religious education	9
lack of language skills	6
course contents are difficult	2
Teacher's unjust behaviour	2
Teacher's prejudice	2
Teachers incompetency	1
Forcing to do a profession	1
Teachers giving very low grades	1

Parents most frequently mentioned problems that would make them feel excluded as an answer. Among the parents who gave feedback, xenophobia was presented as the most common problem. Again, the problems that students experience due to the differences between the culture of their parents and the culture of the country they live in have an important place. Language, like culture, was also cited as a source of problems. The fact that the Swiss education system does not provide the content of the Islamic religion as expected by the individuals in the study group was also cited as a problem.

Parent: *There is good education in the kindergarten and primary school. However, in secondary and high schools, unfortunately, the education on privacy, respect, morality and*



*homosexuality is very inadequate. I am worried about the future. Unlimited freedom brings problems.*

*Parent: (my child) has been subjected to psychological pressure by the education staff because he/she carries foreign and religious values.*

*Parent: ... There are too many foreign children in the classrooms....*

*Parent: our children are lost between two cultures. Many children are crushed between two identities in this way. Our children have a weak language and a weak culture. Religious education is also not enough. They have many questions in their heads.*

*Parent: Children cannot live their Muslim identity sufficiently and want to be like them.*

*Parent: ...Teachers make the lesson really boring...*

What is noteworthy in these opinions is that parents do not comment on the academic education their children receive, but criticise them on the basis of identity and culture. One parent complained about the fact that there are too many foreign nationals in the classrooms, even though she came to the country as a "foreigner".

When the parents were asked what their demands are from Switzerland, they gave the following answers.

Table 8  
Parent's expectations from Swiss Schools

Expectation	f
A fair education	11
Respect to the cultural differences	4
Special attention to their children	4
Teaching religion to students	4
Humanistic education	2
Teaching foreign language effectively	1
Effective Vocational Education	1

The biggest demand of parents is that their children should not be discriminated against on the basis of their language, religion or nationality. Parents demand that their children's cultural values are protected and that they are made to feel that their children are valuable by taking care of them.

Finally, the respondents were asked what kind of demands they have from the Turkish authorities related to education. The thematic distribution of the answers given by the parents is given in Table 9.

Table 9  
Parent's expectations from Turkish Authorities

Expectation	f
Regular visits by Turkish officials	5
Effective Turkish lesson	5
Activities for teaching values	4
Activities for teaching religion	4
Opening Turkish private schools	2
Cultural events	2
Family education programs	1
Apprenticeship programmes for Turks abroad	1

One of the main expectations of the parents abroad from the education officials of Turkey is that they should be interested in their problems and that they should be visited. Afterwards, they expect educational content on language, religion and culture to ensure that their children do not forget their own identity. Two of the parents stated that Turkey should open a school in Switzerland.

## **DISCUSSION**

Switzerland is among the countries with the highest quality of life in the world. International studies have shown that most of the problems related to education, like many other problems, have been eliminated. Turks living in Switzerland have also received their share of this prosperity. It is difficult to expect that parents in the 2nd or 3rd generation and their children in the 3rd and 4th generations will have similar perspectives towards Turkey and Turkish. This situation can be understood by the differences in the TV channels that parents and their children watch, the music they listen to and the language they use. In his study, Ari (2007) stated that the television viewing habits of the students did not differ from their parents and that they watched the same programmes. This causes their Turkish proficiency to increase.

A significant portion of the parents still think that their children have language problems and that they are subjected to discrimination, even if partially, because they are Turkish. Turkish children can socialise easily with their friends in schools and do not have discipline and behaviour problems. Fibbi, Lench & Wanner (2006) reached results confirming the research findings. Although the quality of education and the level of integration increase as generations change, there are significant differences between Swiss and immigrants, especially in the labour market. Griga and Hadjar (2014) and Fleischman, Deboosere & Neels (2013) also show in their study that individuals with a migrant background are discriminated against in one way or another, regardless of their generation.

Turkish children will eventually catch up in terms of education. This is because with each new generation, children whose parents were born in that country and who have assimilated the system of that country start school. Germany is a pioneer in terms of Turkish immigration compared to other European countries and children of Turkish origin have higher rates of higher education than their German peers (Kristen, Reimer & Kogan, 2008). Kristien and Granato (2007) see this new situation as the parents of the first and second generation coming from a different educational background and culture and not being able to adapt to the educational situation in Europe. Van de Werfhorst and Tubergen (2007) and Levels, Dronkers, Krooyerkamp, (2008) argue that immigrant families cannot have academically successful children in the early stages due to their low educational level and socio-economic status. In our study parents are satisfied with the education system in their country. They gave positive answers to the questions about the elements of education. They feel deficiency in the teaching of religious subjects and elements of Turkish culture. It is also seen that the rate of their involvement in education and training processes is high.

The main concern of parents about the future of their children is that they will move away from the values and culture in which they were brought up and become lost in Swiss society. Loss of values, apostasy, and the acquisition of harmful habits were listed as the biggest causes of concern. Parents do not think that their children will have professional difficulties. This can be seen as a fundamental difference with their peers in Turkey. Ari (2007) also asked the parents of students what their biggest concerns were about the future of their children and found that the parents were most concerned about their children not receiving a good education. In this study, it is seen that this concern has shifted to the lower ranks. Zhou and Bankson (1994) found that children from immigrant backgrounds are more prone to abandon their old culture in the larger societies in which they live, and that they are more likely to leave their old culture for a new one. In his study on this subject, Berkay (1982) states that Turkish children in Switzerland had problems with language skills even in those years. Even first-

generation citizens living at that time fear the cultural loss of their families and children, whom they were able to take with them after 3 years.

At this stage, the main expectation of the parents from Turkey is to provide support to overcome this anxiety. For this purpose, their main expectations are to visit them more, to deal with their problems, to inform their children about language, religion, and moral values. The continuation of Turkish mother tongue and culture classes taught by teachers from Turkey plays an important role in preventing such disengagement. Sarıbaş (2022) concludes that exposure to Turkish and attendance at Turkish schools are important for children living in Switzerland to develop a more positive and competent attitude towards Turkish.

This research was conducted in the same region where the study of Arı (2007) was conducted and using a similar questionnaire form. From this point of view, although it is an independent study, its longitudinal characteristics can also be considered. In those study and this research, parents did not prefer Turkish-language education, to have their children's education completed in Turkey and to have their children learn from Turkish teachers. It is seen that parents find the Swiss education system successful in both studies, and that they think that their children's language deficiencies negatively affect their children's school success.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, when the opinions of the parents about their children are analysed, it can be seen that there is a group of people who are satisfied with the Swiss education system and teachers but find Turkey's interest in educational processes insufficient. Parents expect their children to keep the cultural values they grew up with alive. What they want is to be able to maintain the education and living standards they are satisfied with in Switzerland without losing their own values.

Due to financial and spatial difficulties, this research was carried out in a short period of time by collecting data through a questionnaire. A study may be recommended in which more extensive and in-depth interviews can be conducted and in which other cantons of Switzerland.

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