Challenges for schools in communities with internal migration flows: evidence from Turkey

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	Turkey is a country that has experienced and continues to experience a dramatic degree of both rural-to-urban and inter-regional internal migration. Migrants tend to settle in *gecekondu* areas in either established inner-city neighborhoods or in newer squatter settlements built on undeveloped land bordering rural areas on the urban periphery. Schools in these areas are invariably impacted by this extensive and unplanned internal migration. This study aimed to examine the challenges facing schools located in migrant communities in Turkey. The findings show that such schools are likely to be resource-poor, overcrowded urban facilities that face challenges related to poor school quality, low academic achievement of students, intercultural issues related to the diverse student population and a lack of parental awareness regarding education and child development. Students were also reported to suffer from malnutrition and a lack of adequate physiological and emotional support. Furthermore, teachers attributed the physiological, psycho-social and academic shortcomings of children mainly to their poor language skills, the low socio-economic status of families and household poverty.

1. Introduction

In Europe populations tend to move from East to West as a means of improving their standards of living. Migration is viewed as a means of investing in human capital that enables migrants to secure employment for themselves and educational opportunities for their children (Kulu and Billari, 2004; Wegren and Drury, 2001). In fact, however, the percentage of migrants who are actually able to attain the sought-for improved living standards in their new location is quite low in comparison to the level of expectations. Unless parents settle in neighborhoods that offer living standards higher than their places of origin, the conditions faced by their children are likely to remain the same or even to worsen, especially in terms of schooling.

Research shows that inter-provincial migration is driven by structural factors such as long-term regional differences in employment rates and labor productivity (Kulu and Billari, 2004); security and forced migration (Erman, 2001); differences in educational opportunities (Valverde and Vila, 2003; Wegren and Drury, 2001); and the urban/rural structure of provinces (Coulombe, 2006). According to Coulombe (2006), migration has a powerful effect on the redistribution of human capital from predominantly rural to predominantly urban provinces and from poor to rich provinces. Education per se has not been found to play

a significant role in promoting migration and, in some cases, is inversely related to migration (Wan, 1995).

Turkey is a country that has witnessed a significant amount of internal migration over the past five decades. Some researchers assert that developments in mass communication and transportation since the 1950s have made urban settings more attractive to internal migrants in Turkey (Ozturk, 2007). Indeed, data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK, 2008) indicates that the percent of the Turkish population residing in urban areas increased from 59 percent in 1990 to 65 percent in the early 2000s and to 72 percent in 2007. Moreover, the percent of the population residing in poor *gecekondu*[1] neighborhoods increased from five percent in 1955 to 27 percent in 2002 (Baslevent and Dayioglu, 2005). Such inter-regional, urban–rural movement impacts the education system in

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[1] Literally "built overnight", the term *gecekondu* is used to describe the shantytown neighborhoods constructed by poor migrants, usually on the outer fringes of Turkey's largest cities. A distinction can be made between "inner *gecekondu* settlements" and "outer *gecekondu* settlements". The former, established by earlier generations of migrants, have been physically surrounded by and incorporated into the expanding urban infrastructure, but retain certain characteristics that set them apart from the surrounding city neighborhoods. The latter are newer squatter settlements constructed on the urban-rural interface that may lack basic services. Erman (2001) highlights that academic discourse on gecekondu people described the population at times as the rural other, other times the disadvantaged other, and later have described gecekondu people as the "Other" who is less than and inferior to the middle and upper class. Recent research on gecekondu people refers to "cultural inferiority of rural migrants/the gecekondu people" with some exceptions (Erman, 2001, p. 999).

the new communities as well as in the ones that are left behind (Goodwin, 2002). Although numerous studies have examined how international migration has affected issues relating to education, there is little research on how internal migration impacts education. In this study, the author examined the challenges faced by K-8 schools located in provinces subjected to high levels of in-migration, out-migration, or both. Specifically, this study posed the research question: "What are the challenges faced by schools in migrant communities in areas confronted by in- and out-migration with regard to school quality, teacher needs and student needs?" It is hoped that by examining the needs of primary school children and teachers at these schools, this research may ultimately play a role in the development of educational and social policies that will allow nations struggling with internal migration to improve school quality in a way that affects schooling outcomes of the poor.

1.1. Schooling and migration

The quality of schooling that migrant students receive is largely dependent upon the resources of the local communities in which they reside. Both internal and external migration produces similar outcomes in terms of impact on the education of current and future generations. In both cases, urban schools must struggle to balance the allocation of scarce educational resources among migrants and the native poor (Rong and Brown, 2002).

The communities in which parents choose to settle may have little or no impact on their children's education (Verropoulou et al., 2002). In cases where parents move to neighborhoods that provide better opportunities for schooling, migration may have a positive effect on children's education (Verropoulou et al., 2002). Unfortunately, migrant students are most likely to attend resource-poor, overcrowded inner-city schools (Contreras, 2002). Such schools tend to dominate the bottom rankings in terms of school quality and educational achievement (Thompson, 2004).

Improving educational opportunities for children living in poverty may have a positive impact on their future, and increasing the earnings of low-income groups can open up new opportunities, including social mobility for children from poor families (Mukho-padhaya, 2003). However, in spite of various government efforts to address the issue of poverty through education, in some cases, it is students from advantageous backgrounds who are the main beneficiaries of education policies. In countries like Singapore, students from higher SES families continue to represent the top strata of academic achievers, indicating that policies aimed at improving school conditions are likely to increase income disparities (Mukhopadhaya, 2003).

Educational deprivation, sometimes referred to as 'poverty of education', is an integral part of human poverty. Accordingly, the educational status of the population is used as an indicator in measuring conditions such as living standards, quality of life, human development and human poverty (Tilak, p. 195, 2002). A significant and inverse relationship has been found between education and poverty, with a large drop in poverty rates occurring between illiterates and primary/secondary school graduates (Tilak, 2002). Parental education has also been shown to have a major effect on learning outcomes. Studies indicate that an increase in maternal education is positively correlated with children's reading and mathematics outcomes and negatively correlated with their behavior problems (Verropoulou et al., 2002), and paternal education has been shown to have a greater impact on children's learning outcomes (Abadzi, 2008) than low economic status. Moreover, increases in education levels of older siblings have a positive impact on the education of migrant children (Kuhn, 2006a,b).

As referred to above, family economies and home-related factors are important but not prominent reasons for student achievement. A study (Marks et al., 2006) based on data from the 2000 International Students Assessment (PISA) found that in many countries, social resources had little impact on student achievement; rather, educational inequality was explained by differences in material resources, school tracks, school types and curriculum tracking within schools. Most of the research conducted ignores the effects of poverty and its educational outcomes (Thompson, 2004).

Quality of education is influenced by a combination of economic, home-related and school-related factors. For instance, socio-demographic status has been shown to be an important predictor of adolescent attitude and behavior (Ecevit and Kasapoglu, 2005). School-related factors include poor school infrastructure, such as overcrowding and sub-standard physical conditions of school buildings, as well as a lack of investment in human capital, including an insufficient number of teachers and schools, long distances from home to school and the absence of an attractive learning environment (World Bank, 2005).

Another factor to consider with regard to educating migrant children is whether or not teachers are adequately prepared to respond appropriately to the needs of the new migrants entering their classrooms (Goodwin, 2002). For instance, in Turkey, there is evidence that migrant students have lower self-esteem and life satisfaction than non-migrant students (Aksel et al., 2007). A major component of quality schooling includes well-qualified teachers who can confront the challenges presented by poor resources as well those of cultural differences. Research has shown that truly effective teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, values and attitudes can provide quality schooling even in resource-poor schools (Beloin and Peterson, 2000). However, a recent study on diverse intercultural communities in Turkey found that teachers have little experience or knowledge of how to deal with classroom diversity, with the exception of learning differences (Akar et al., 2008). In fact, Sahin (2003) argues that poor language skills result in early dropout in these communities. Receiving communities also face social, economic and demographic challenges as a result of the interaction with migrant populations (Goodwin, 2002; Rong and Brown, 2002).

Educational systems need to determine how to meet the needs of migrant students in terms of access to schools and school programs, differentiated curricula, assessment and placement, school climate, availability of support services and community involvement (Goodwin, 2002; Rong and Brown, 2002). In a study that compared low-mobility and high-mobility urban schools (Nakagawa et al., 2002), researchers found that cultural activities were often organized to help students and parents feel welcome at high-mobility schools, which offered a variety of services and programs to families, including counseling, food and clothing banks and educational and vocational training. However, principals at schools with higher levels of mobility reported lower levels of parental involvement, and the researchers suggested that schools need to make greater efforts to reach out to families and build community.

There is no doubt that migration flows are positively correlated with both economic and educational demands. Despite the dramatic need to build a culturally responsive ethos in which migrant students are valued and assured equal opportunities for success (Johnson, 2003), research indicates that attempts on the part of schools with higher levels of mobility to improve school quality by building community have not necessarily translated into greater family involvement (Nakagawa et al., 2002). In this regard, it is important to examine the factors that can enable teachers to succeed at building community and securing parental participation in the educational development of children. Tsui (2005) has shown that while adequate financial support may help to create better schooling opportunities, factors such as high