



# EDUCATION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN WITHIN THE INTREF PROJECT FRAMEWORK

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## Abstract

*Amidst growing migratory movements and hurdles of assimilation, the INTREF initiative strives to craft a comprehensive strategy for the schooling of refugee children, melding e-learning, emotional and social support, along with adaptable teaching methods. This endeavor learns on principles like linguistic diversity, cross-cultural skills, and customizing the educational journey, crucial for assimilation and triumph within academic settings. Studies indicate the indispensability of bespoke linguistic assistance, cognizance of cultural variances, and personalized educational tactics for the seamless school transition and societal assimilation of children in refuge. The project devised a survey instrument aimed at evaluating the baseline educational scenario in the participating nations and formulating education plans tailored to specific needs. This survey zeroes on four pivotal areas: linguistic proficiency, cross-cultural consciousness, embracing diversity, and pedagogical customization. Feedback from 31 students, 30 teachers and 28 parents revealed a pressing need for augmented linguistic aid in Slovenia, heightened cross-cultural understanding, and classroom method modification to enrich the academic experiences*

*of culturally diverse children. The findings also underscore a discernible discrepancy between the perspectives of educators versus those of parents and children. The insights from this survey lay the groundwork for creating innovative instructional units and resources, finely adapted to the needs of children in refuge. By forging links between theoretical insights and practical application, as well as among various educational stakeholders, INTREF is ready to enrich the discourse and practices surrounding inclusivity, and endeavor made increasingly pertinent by the recent global disruptions, including the migratory dilemma and the COVID-19 outbreak.*

**Keywords:** *educational system, individualization of education, integration practices, intercultural competence, refugee children*

## Introduction

The current global rise in refugee movements has brought attention to the urgent need for effective integration strategies, particularly in the field of education. Educational institutions play a pivotal role in facilitating the smooth transition of refugee children into new communities, laying the groundwork for their future success and well-being. Yet, the challenge of integrating these children into existing educational systems is multifaceted, involving linguistic barriers, cultural differences, and the need for social acceptance and individualized learning approaches. In the broadest context, it does not only cover the current education of children but also lifelong learning of refugee youth and adults across various stages of their lives (Morrice, 2021). This study builds on the work of Morrice (2021) expanding the focus to encompass the broader educational challenges faced by refugee youth and adults. Furthermore, recent research has emphasized the necessity of adaptive educational models that cater to the evolving needs of refugees in host countries, such as the holistic model proposed for integrating refugee students in various educational contexts (Cerna, 2019). Cerna's model provides a critical framework for understanding how educational institutions can adjust to better serve refugee populations, which this study will further explore.

Moreover, teachers and other educational workers face challenges not only mentioned above but also within the educational system itself when it comes to including refugee children, necessitating adjustments in teaching practices and educational policies. Currently, the lack of resources, professional training, standardized procedures, and accountability measures, combined with an educational system that appears inflexible or ill-adapted to refugee children, exacerbates inequalities between refugees and domestic children by failing to meet their unique educational needs (Mock-Munoz de Luna, 2020). This gap in the educational system's readiness has been further highlighted by recent studies that call for more comprehensive teacher training and the development of intercultural competence among educators (Antonijadu et al. 2022). These findings underscore the importance of equipping teachers with the necessary skills to manage diverse classrooms and support refugee students effectively (Dolan et al., 2021).

The deficiency of teacher education in this area has been identified as a significant factor affecting the well-being and success of refugee children by other researchers as well. Piper et al. (2020) argued that the problem is not so much access to education for refugee children as the need for substantial investment in improving the learning outcomes of these children. This directly relates to the role of the teacher. Papapostolou et al. (2020) stressed the necessity for teacher education to manage diversity in the classroom. According to Mogli (2020), teachers are not prepared to successfully approach refugee students to create conditions for their seamless integration into the education system. This is primarily due to a lack of skills for psychological support of students and communication difficulties due to a lack of language knowledge. Soyu et al. (2020) also emphasized the teachers' lack of preparedness with knowledge that would help them overcome pedagogical challenges, highlighting a lack of knowledge about the cultural backgrounds of refugee students and the educational system's unpreparedness for refugee education. These studies collectively highlight the critical gaps in

teacher preparedness, which this research aims to address. Amid numerous studies exploring the field and suggesting various solutions and practices based on social justice and inclusion, Karsli-Calamak and Kilinc (2019) underlined the importance of dialogue about inclusive education to envisage new ways of supporting refugee children and their teachers. Teacher's perspectives on the challenges of integrating refugee children emphasize the necessity for intercultural competence and adequate resources (Antonijadu et al., 2022). Veck and Wharton (2019) highlighted the importance of creating inclusive school cultures, aligning with Dryden-Petterson (2022), who confirmed that refugee youth primarily need education that enables them to connect their past with their present and future, necessitating engagement with teachers and schools. The proposed study will explore how these inclusive cultures can be cultivated through targeted policies and practices. The school plays a crucial role in helping refugee children find a sense of security and in aiding the realization of their learning potential through a supportive and understanding educational environment (Thomas, 2016).

One of the more significant factors affecting the success of these children in integrating into education is also their family. The study by Zegin and Atas Akdemir (2020) on refugees in Turkey showed that parents of refugee students often do not attend parent-teacher meetings, do not contact teachers, and do not support their children at home with their educational development. The inability of parents to speak the language spoken in the school environment and their perception of their status in Turkey as temporary influence their priority on ensuring their children's physiological needs over education. This highlights the critical need for support systems that engage refugee families in the educational process, facilitating communication and involvement to enhance their children's educational experiences (Cranston et al., 2021). In addition to the role of teachers and other educational stakeholders, it is also important to examine the role that refugee families play in the educational process, as they often face numerous challenges, including seeking stability, security, and access to basic services, which directly impact the educational opportunities and success of their children (Yunus Mohd, 2022). Yalcin and Simsar (2020) highlighted communication issues as factors affecting children's adjustment to school, including the financial condition of families, official procedures, and prejudices, indicating a complex web of factors that need to be addressed to support refugee children effectively in education (Cerna, 2019).

The integration of refugee children in education also involves understanding their perspectives and experiences, which is crucial for developing effective educational strategies. For example, Guo et al. (2019) found that Syrian refugee children in Canada struggle with making friends and face bullying and racism, affecting their sense of belonging. Similarly, Korntheuer and Damm (2020) highlighted the varying educational policies and their impact on refugee students in different German states, suggesting the need for consistent and inclusive policies. Additionally, teachers' perspectives on the challenges of integrating refugee children emphasize the necessity for intercultural competence and adequate resources (Antonijadu et al. 2022). Further, the involvement of social work in schools can significantly support the integration process by addressing the psychosocial needs of refugee children (Snoubar & Duman, 2017). Dolan et al. (2021) found that social-emotional learning programs can improve refugee children's perceptions of school and academic skills. Moreover, understanding the role of literacy education and the challenges faced by refugee children in learning a new language is crucial for their academic success (Wofford & Tibi, 2018).

### *Research Problem*

The integration of refugee children into educational systems goes beyond the mere provision of conventional academic knowledge. It requires a broad spectrum of needs, including linguistic proficiency, psychosocial well-being, and the ability to navigate and contribute to a

multicultural environment. Previous studies (e.g. Celik et al. 2021; Hong & Cai, 2023; Koehler & Schneider, 2019) have underscored the multifaceted nature of these challenges, highlighting the gap between the existing educational paradigms and the requisites of effective integration (Cerna, 2019). Despite the growing recognition of these needs, there remains a lack of holistic and empirically driven strategies that address the educational requirements of refugee children in a comprehensive manner (Antonijadu et al, 2022). Thus, the central problem of this research is the ongoing gap between the educational needs of refugee children and the current practices in educational systems. This research seeks to address this gap by identifying and developing integrative educational methodologies that not only facilitate academic learning but also promote social inclusion and emotional resilience among refugee children. Specifically, the study aims to provide an evidence-based framework that responds to these multifaceted needs within the Slovenian educational context.

### *Research Focus*

Building upon the identified gaps and challenges, this study focuses on exploring and analyzing the current state of refugee children's education in Slovenia as part of the INTREF project, whose main objective is to devise and validate an educational framework that combines digital learning tools, psychosocial support and flexible pedagogies in the Slovenian educational landscape. This framework emphasizes multilingualism, intercultural competence, and personalized learning pathways, which are crucial for creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment in Slovenia. Based on the responses to questionnaires from teachers, parents, and children, this study offers an insight into four key research areas: language proficiency, interculturality, acceptance, and individualized teaching approaches. The focus of this study centered on the differing perspectives towards refugee children's education held by teachers on one side, and by parents and children on the other.

To explore these areas comprehensively, four research questions were formulated:

- R1: How does the provision of additional language support both within and outside the school environment influence the language acquisition process of refugee children from the perspective of teachers, and from the perspective of parents and children?
- R2: To what extent do educational practices and the school environment reflect and respect the cultural background of refugee children from the perspective of teachers, and from the perspective of parents and children?
- R3: How do refugee children perceive their social integration within the school community, and what are the views of teachers, and the views of parents and children, regarding the inclusion and acceptance of these children?
- RQ4: What is the attitude of teachers, and the attitude of parents and children towards the individualization of academic expectations and standards for refugee children?

## **Research Methodology**

### *General Background*

In Slovenia, the integration of refugee children into the education system is underpinned by comprehensive legal and policy frameworks designed to ensure equal access to education for all. Primary education, compulsory and free of charge, lasts for nine years and accommodates children from a wide array of backgrounds, including EU citizens, Slovenians without Slovenian citizenship, and those with international protection, under conditions mirroring those for Slovenian citizens. Specific provisions within the Primary School Act facilitate the inclusion of refugee students by organizing Slovenian language and culture classes, granting the right

to compulsory primary education on equal terms, and allowing for adjusted assessments and promotion criteria to cater to their unique educational needs. This approach is complemented by the availability of resources such as the website [infotujci.si](http://infotujci.si), which offers essential information for foreigners seeking integration into Slovenian society, supported by translation services to bridge language barriers effectively.

The study is focused on a comparative analysis of perceptions on language, interculturality, acceptance, and individualization among teachers, students, and parents. This analysis examines how these key aspects of educational integration are perceived differently by each group within the participating countries. The research aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of current policies and practices in meeting the diverse needs of refugee children.

The research was conducted over a two-month period, from September to October 2023. During this time, data was collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups involving teachers, students, and parents across various regions in Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey.

### *Sample*

The sample of this study was selected through a convenience sampling method, encompassing a total of 322 participants from primary schools in Germany (75 participants of which 30 students, 30 teachers, and 15 parents), Slovakia (89 participants of which 31 students, 30 teachers, and 28 parents), Slovenia (78 participants of which 31 students, 30 teachers, and 17 parents) and Turkey (80 participants of which 30 students, 30 teachers, and 20 parents), in line with the project's objectives. The utilization of a convenience sample allowed for the collection of data within a specific educational context, providing valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of students, teachers, and parents regarding the integration of refugee children into the educational system. The convenience sample was particularly suitable for this study due to the exploratory nature of the research, where the primary goal was to gain initial insights into key issues within a defined context.

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and in accordance with the research standards and ethics of Institute of Contemporary Technology, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, University of Maribor (FNM ICT) and approved by the Ethical commission for studies involving humans (October, 2023).

### *Instrument and Procedures*

To explore the formulated research domains – language, proficiency, interculturality, acceptance, and individualized teaching approaches, three distinct questionnaires were developed, each tailored to one of the participant groups: teachers, parents, and students. These instruments were designed to capture a comprehensive understanding of the educational experiences and integration processes of refugee students from the perspectives of key stakeholders within the school environment.

The questionnaires – one for each group – encompassed items specifically aimed at elucidating the support systems in place for language acquisition, the extent of intercultural integration and awareness within the school community, the level of acceptance, and inclusion experienced by refugee students, and the individualization of teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of students by covering key topics such as language support, the use of digital tools for communication, respect for authority, cultural integration, inclusivity in school meals, feelings of belonging, peer relationships, and the adaptation of academic standards to individual needs, the instruments were able to capture the multifaceted nature of the educational integration process from various perspectives.

The questionnaires were administered in the fall of 2023, ensuring that responses reflected the current educational climate and integration experiences. To accommodate the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the student participants, the student questionnaires were translated into multiple languages which ensured a higher degree of comprehension and independent completion. This multilingual approach was essential for ensuring the inclusivity and accessibility of the research process, enabling all participants to engage meaningfully and provide insights into their experiences and perceptions regarding the integration of refugee students into the educational system.

The study adhered to standardized procedures to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected through the questionnaires. The questionnaires for teachers, parents, and students were meticulously designed to ensure consistency in how questions were posed, minimizing variations in understanding and interpretation, thus enhancing the reliability of the responses. Additionally, a thorough content review by a panel of experts in education and refugee studies further strengthened reliability. These experts assessed the relevance and clarity of each question, ensuring that the instruments accurately captured the constructs of interest. Feedback from this review led to the refinement of several questions to eliminate potential sources of misunderstanding, thereby increasing the reliability of the responses.

Before the official distribution, the questionnaires underwent pilot testing with 2 participants from each participant category (teachers, parents, and students). This preliminary testing phase allowed for the identification and correction of ambiguities or biases in the questions. Adjustments were made based on the pilot feedback, ensuring that the final version of the questionnaire was clear and consistently understood by all respondents. The study employed established theoretical frameworks related to language acquisition, interculturality, social integration, and individualized teaching as the foundation for questionnaire design. This alignment with recognized constructs supported the validity of the instruments in measuring the intended variables. By collecting and comparing data from teachers, parents, and students, the study employed a form of data triangulation to enhance validity. This comparative analysis helped to corroborate findings across different viewpoints, adding depth and validity to the conclusions drawn.

Following the validation process, the questionnaires were distributed to the respective participant groups. The administration of these questionnaires was carried out within the school setting, under conditions that facilitated focus and minimized distractions, thereby maximizing the accuracy of the students' responses. Teachers received their questionnaires with instructions that emphasized the significance of their insights for improving educational strategies and integration practices. The completion of these questionnaires was facilitated by providing sufficient time and resources, ensuring that teachers could provide thoughtful and reflective responses. Parents were also encouraged to complete their questionnaires, with the option to use translation services or assistance as necessary to overcome any language barriers. This approach was critical to ensuring that all parents, regardless of their proficiency in the school's primary language, could contribute their perspectives and experiences.

### *Data Analysis*

Once collected, the responses were anonymized to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. The data were then systematically coded and entered into a database for analysis. The analysis was performed in IBM SPSS Statistics 29 and was guided by the research questions, with a focus on identifying patterns, discrepancies, and insights that would inform the study's conclusions and recommendations.

The data analysis phase involved employing descriptive statistics to compare mean and standard deviation across responses from three groups: teachers, students, and parents.

This comparison focused on four thematic areas: language, interculturality, acceptance, and individualization. The objective was to uncover patterns, similarities, and differences in perceptions and experiences regarding the integration of refugee students into the educational system. The questionnaire was quantified using a Likert scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree), allowing for a detailed assessment of attitudes and experiences across the spectrum of participants. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to determine statistically significant differences between groups' mean scores to verify whether the differences observed in perceptions and experiences among teachers, students, and parents were not merely random variations but reflected statistically significant trends.

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were paramount. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the research was conducted in accordance with ethical standards that safeguard the rights, privacy, and well-being of all involved. This rigorous adherence to standardized procedures and ethical guidelines ensured the integrity of the research process and the credibility of the findings.

## Research Results

The analysis of the provided data revealed significant insights into the perceptions of teachers, students, and parents regarding language, interculturality, acceptance, and individualization within the educational context of refugee children. The comparative analysis is represented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Comparative Analysis of Perceptions on Language, Interculturality, Acceptance, and Individualization Among Teachers, Students, and Parents*

Category	Teacher		Student		Parent		ANOVA
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
<b>Language</b>							
Access to additional language support	1.98	1.384	3.52	1.198	3.23	1.615	$F(2, 318) = 40.831, p = .001$
Utilization of digital tools for communication	2.98	1.230	3.07	1.545	3.28	1.475	$F(2, 318) = 1.030, p = .358$
<b>Interculturality</b>							
Respect for authority and teacher guidance	3.95	.998	4.02	.944	4.19	.943	$F(2, 318) = 1.477, p = .230$
Valuation of educational knowledge	3.76	.961	3.89	1.124	4.56	.884	$F(2, 318) = 16.570, p = .001$
Cultural integration and classroom awareness	3.45	1.028	2.72	1.273	3.44	1.041	$F(2, 318) = 15.571, p = .001$
Inclusivity and cultural respect in school meals	3.34	1.247	2.84	1.354	3.65	1.244	$F(2, 318) = 10.173, p = .001$
<b>Acceptance</b>							
Feeling of belonging and school enjoyment	3.58	.967	3.93	1.010	4.19	.956	$F(2, 318) = 9.510, p = .001$
Inclusion in peer activities	3.68	.830	3.09	1.354	3.46	1.440	$F(2, 318) = 7.337, p = .001$
Friendships across cultural backgrounds	3.80	.904	3.40	1.222	3.46	1.368	$F(2, 318) = 3.960, p = .020$
Peer support during challenges	3.78	.884	3.57	1.175	3.76	1.295	$F(2, 318) = 1.226, p = .295$
<b>Individualization</b>							
Academic expectations and standards	3.86	.955	2.38	1.273	3.34	1.501	$F(2, 318) = 44.489, p = .001$
Monitoring and acknowledgment of progress	3.80	1.149	3.02	1.411	3.46	1.302	$F(2, 318) = 10.910, p = .001$
Consideration of adjusted academic standards	2.91	1.167	3.26	1.301	3.30	1.409	$F(2, 318) = 3.083, p = .047$
Class placement based on ability	3.73	1.069	-	-	2.81	1.527	$F(1, 198) = 24.721, p = .001$

As shown in Table 1, significant differences are observed in the first category of language domain. Specifically, students perceived a significantly higher level of additional language support ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.198$ ) compared to teachers ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 1.384$ ) and parents ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.615$ ), with a clear statistical significance ( $F(2,318) = 4.831$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This indicates that students were generally satisfied with the language support they received, whereas parents and particularly teachers saw room for improvement in this area. Conversely, in the category of using digital tools for communication, the differences across groups were minor and not statistically significant ( $F(2, 318) = 1.030$ ,  $p = .358$ ), suggesting a relatively uniform perception across the groups.

Table 1 also highlights statistically significant differences in most categories within the interculturality domain. For instance, respect for authority and teacher leadership was rated higher by parents ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = .943$ ) and students ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = .944$ ) than by teachers ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = .998$ ), although this difference was not statistically significant ( $F(2, 318) = 1.477$ ,  $p = .230$ ), implying different experiences of the teacher's role between the groups. In contrast, the value placed on educational knowledge showed a significant disparity, with parents ( $M = 4.56$ ,  $SD = .884$ ) rating it much higher than teachers ( $M = 3.76$ ,  $SD = .961$ ) and students ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.124$ ), with a significant statistical difference ( $F(2, 318) = 16.570$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Additionally, significant differences were observed in perceptions of cultural integration and classroom awareness, where students reported a lower average ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $SD = 1.273$ ) compared to parents ( $M = 3.44$ ,  $SD = 1.041$ ) and teachers ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = 1.028$ ), as shown by a significant F value ( $F(2, 318) = 15.571$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Lastly, in the category of inclusivity and cultural respect in school meals, parents perceive the highest level ( $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = 1.244$ ), followed by teachers ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.247$ ) and students ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 1.354$ ), with statistically significant differences ( $F(2, 318) = 10.173$ ,  $p = .001$ ), suggesting that parents particularly valued the school's efforts in this area.

In the domain of acceptance, as outlined in Table 1, there are significant insights into how students feel within the school environment. Parents ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = .956$ ) and students ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.010$ ) reported a higher sense of belonging and enjoyment at school compared to teachers ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = .967$ ), with a statistically significant difference ( $F(2, 318) = 9.510$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This finding suggests that students and their parents viewed the school environment more positively than teachers did. Furthermore, students felt less included in peer activities ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.354$ ) than perceived by their parents ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.440$ ) and teachers ( $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = .830$ ), with significant differences ( $F(2, 318) = 7.337$ ,  $p = .001$ ), indicating a potential area for improvement in fostering student inclusivity. Regarding friendships across cultural backgrounds, parents again reported higher average values ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.368$ ) compared to teachers ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = .904$ ) and students ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.222$ ), with significant differences ( $F(2, 318) = 3.960$ ,  $p = .020$ ). In contrast, peer support during challenges showed no statistically significant differences across the groups ( $F(2, 318) = 1.226$ ,  $p = .295$ ), indicating consensus on this aspect.

Finally, in individualization, particularly regarding the adjustment and recognition of progress, Table 1 shows statistically significant differences in academic expectations and standards. Parents ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 1.501$ ) had the highest expectations for their children to meet the same standards as domestic students, while students strongly disagreed with the statement that teachers demanded too much from them ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.273$ ), with significant differences ( $F(2, 318) = 44.489$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This suggests discrepancies in perceptions of teacher demands between the groups. Additionally, teachers moderately agree that refugee children had enough time for their progress to be monitored ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 1.149$ ), while students and parents had slightly different views, with parents agreeing that the monitoring period was sufficient ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 1.302$ ), and students showing moderate agreement ( $M = 3.02$ ,  $SD = 1.411$ ). These differences are statistically significant ( $F(2, 318) = 10.910$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Regarding



the consideration of adjusted academic standards, students reported a greater extent that teachers did not require them to know as much as domestic students ( $M = 3.26, SD = 1.301$ ), while teachers disagreed with the necessity of adjusting standards ( $M = 2.91, SD = 1.167$ ), with statistically significant differences ( $F(2, 318) = 3.083, p = .047$ ). Lastly, on the question of student placement in class based on abilities, significant differences are present between teachers and parents ( $F(1, 198) = 24.721, p = .001$ ), with parents being more supportive of placement based on abilities ( $M = 4.14, SD = 1.098$ ) compared to teachers ( $M = 2.81, SD = 1.527$ ).

## Discussion

The exploration of the educational integration of refugee children in Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey has yielded significant insights, which are essential for shaping future educational policies and practices. The main findings from this study underscore the existence of substantial discrepancies between the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students across key areas including language support, interculturality, acceptance and individualized education. Notably, the discrepancy in perceptions of language support among stakeholders aligns with Zegin and Atas Akdemir (2020), emphasizing the need for enhanced parental engagement and addressing language barriers to improve support for refugee students. Similar challenges have been noted in the integration of Ukrainian refugee children in Germany, where language barriers and the lack of culturally sensitive support systems have been highlighted as key obstacles (Fert, 2023).

For the first research question regarding the impact of additional language support, it was evident that students perceive a significantly higher level of support than what is recognized by teachers and parents, as shown by the statistically significant differences in perceptions. This disconnect underscores the need for a reassessment of language assistance programs, to ensure they are meeting the needs of all stakeholders. The minor differences observed in the use of digital tools for communication, which were not statistically significant, suggest that these tools are uniformly perceived across groups, indicating a potential area for standardization in digital communication strategies. This is consistent with findings from the “Lend a Hand” project, which emphasized the importance of standardized approaches in the use of digital tools for enhancing the social inclusion of refugee students (Almeida et al., 2019).

The exploration of interculturality within the school environment, as posed in the second question, revealed that parents highly value efforts towards cultural integration, as evidenced by the significant differences in their perceptions compared to those of teachers and students. This finding suggests that initiatives fostering an inclusive culture are well-received by families but may not be as visible or valued by teachers and students. This resonates with the emphasis on creating inclusive school cultures highlighted by Veck and Wharton (2019), indicating the importance of making intercultural efforts more apparent and appreciated across all groups. Furthermore, research in Sweden, Germany, Greece, Lebanon, and Turkey has shown that inclusive educational environments, which involve close collaboration among children, educators, and communities, are crucial for the successful integration of refugee children (Crul et al., 2019).

The study’s findings on acceptance and social integration reflect the necessity of policies that connect students’ pasts, presents, and futures, as advocated by Dryden-Peterson (2022). The discrepancies between the positive perceptions of parents and students versus the more critical viewpoint of teachers, particularly in areas of social inclusion and friendships across cultural backgrounds, suggest the potential area for development in enhancing the inclusivity and acceptance within the school community. This indicates a need for more targeted interventions that can bridge the gap between differing perceptions and foster a more cohesive and supportive

school environment. A comparative policy analysis in Germany also underscores the need for context-sensitive policies that address the specific integration challenges faced by refugee students in different regions (Korntheuer & Damm, 2020).

Lastly, the study explored the individualized education approaches for refugee children that revealed divergent views on the adjustment of academic expectations and standards. The significant differences in perceptions between teachers and parents, particularly regarding the placement of students based on abilities, point to a critical need for dialogue between educators and families. This dialogue is essential to ensure that educational practices are both equitable and tailored to meet diverse learning needs. The findings emphasize the importance of personalized education plans that consider the unique backgrounds and experiences of refugee children, aiming to foster a sense of belonging and support their overall well-being. The importance of such individualized approaches is further supported by findings that highlight the role of vocational education and training in supporting the integration of young refugees, particularly in overcoming language and cultural barriers (Jorgensen et al. 2021).

The study's main findings reveal several key areas of discrepancy in the perceptions of teachers, parents, and students regarding the educational integration of refugee children. These discrepancies are particularly evident in the areas of language support, interculturality, acceptance, and individualized education. For example, while students generally perceive a higher level of language support, teachers and parents recognize significant gaps, indicating a need for more consistent and effective language programs. This finding aligns with Zegin and Atas Akdemir's (2020) observations about the critical gap in parental involvement due to language barriers, suggesting that language support must be expanded not only for students but also for their families to ensure comprehensive integration. Furthermore, the study highlights differing views on interculturality, with parents placing a higher value on cultural integration efforts than teachers and students. This discrepancy suggests that while schools may implement intercultural initiatives, these efforts are not sufficiently visible or impactful from the perspective of all stakeholders. This echoes Veck and Wharton's (2019) insights on the importance of creating inclusive school cultures, where intercultural efforts are recognized and appreciated by the entire school community. The findings suggest that schools need to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of their intercultural programs to foster a more inclusive environment. The study also identifies a gap in acceptance and social integration, with parents and students generally holding more positive views than teachers, particularly regarding social inclusion and cross-cultural friendships. This gap highlights the potential for targeted interventions to improve teachers' perceptions and practices around inclusion, thereby bridging the divide between these differing viewpoints. As Dryden-Peterson (2022) emphasizes, policies that connect students' pasts, presents, and futures are essential for fostering meaningful social integration, indicating that schools need to adopt more contextually sensitive approaches to inclusion that consider the unique experiences of refugee students.

In terms of individualized education, the study uncovers significant differences in how academic expectations and standards are perceived by teachers and parents, particularly regarding student placement based on abilities. This finding underscores the need for open dialogue between educators and families to ensure that educational practices are equitable and tailored to the diverse needs of refugee children. The necessity of such individualized approaches is supported by Karsli-Calamak and Kilinc (2019), who argue that diverse educational needs and backgrounds must be considered in curriculum design and policymaking. The study contributes to this ongoing discussion by emphasizing the importance of personalized education plans that are responsive to the unique challenges faced by refugee students.

The findings collectively underscore the need for enhanced communication and collaboration between teachers, parents, and students to address the identified discrepancies. Implementing comprehensive support systems that address not only academic but also social

and emotional needs is imperative. The study highlights the critical role of personalized education plans that take into consideration the unique backgrounds and experiences of refugee children, aiming to foster a sense of belonging and support their overall well-being.

While this study has provided valuable insights into the educational integration of refugee children, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response bias, as participants may have interpreted questions differently or provided socially desirable answers. Second, the study was conducted within a specific geographic region, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study captures perceptions at a single point in time, which does not account for how these perceptions might change over time with ongoing integration efforts. Finally, the study's focus on the perspectives of teachers, parents, and students, while comprehensive, does not include the views of other important stakeholders such as policymakers, school administrators, or community organizations. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs, expanding the geographic scope, and including a broader range of stakeholders to provide a more nuanced understanding of the integration process.

This research highlights the complex interplay between language support, interculturality, acceptance and individualization in the educational integration of refugee children. It calls for a collaborative effort among teachers, parents, and students to develop and implement strategies that not only address academic needs but also support the holistic development and well-being of refugee children in their new educational environments. The findings serve as a foundation for future research aimed at optimizing educational practices for refugee children and ensuring their successful integration into society.

## Conclusions and Implications

The essence of this study transcends the mere collation and analysis of responses regarding the educational integration of refugee children in Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia and Turkey. It reveals a disparity in perceptions among teachers, parents, and students, that underscores a broader, systemic challenge. This challenge is not only about linguistic support or cultural integration but also about the fundamental recognition and fulfillment of refugee children's unique educational needs and their right to an inclusive, respectful learning environment. By illuminating these disparities, the study not only confirms the necessity of a multifaceted approach to refugee education but also contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics at play within educational systems facing the task of integration.

The findings advocate for a paradigm shift towards more personalized, culturally sensitive educational practices that not only address language acquisition but also foster a sense of belonging and acceptance among refugee children. This study has successfully highlighted the critical gaps and has laid the groundwork for future endeavors in crafting educational strategies that are as diverse as the populations they aim to serve.

There is a clear imperative for ongoing research and action that further explores the effectiveness of integrated educational frameworks. This includes examining the long-term outcomes of such approaches on students' academic achievements, social integration, and overall well-being. While this study offers a significant contribution to the field, it also underscores the complexity of educational integration efforts and the need for continued dialogue, innovation, and commitment from all stakeholders involved. As we move forward, it is essential to keep in mind that the ultimate goal is not merely to accommodate refugee children within our schools but to empower them to thrive within their new communities. The path forward should be paved with strategies that are informed by empathy, evidence, and a steadfast commitment to inclusivity and equity.

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## Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no competing interest.

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