



Turkish University Students` Attitudes, Contact Quantity, and Ethno-cultural Empathy toward Syrian Refugees: A Mediation Model

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the mediating role of ethno-cultural empathy in the relationship between contact quantity and attitudes toward Syrian refugees in a sample of Turkish University students. Using a cross-sectional design in a sample of 275 university students ($M_{age} = 22.46$), an online measurement tool was applied that included demographic information, contact quantity, ethno-cultural empathy, and attitudes toward Syrian refugees. The results showed that ethno-cultural empathy was positively related to both contact quantity and attitude toward Syrian refugees. Moreover, ethno-cultural empathy was found to play an important mediating role in the relationship between frequency of contact and attitudes towards Syrians. This finding reveals that an increase in contact quantity is associated with an increase in ethno-cultural empathy and this relationship positively affects attitudes towards Syrians. In the attitude of the local people toward the Syrian refugees, socio-political strategies were discussed and suggestions for future work were made.

Keywords: attitude toward Syrians, contact quantity, ethno-cultural empathy, mediation model, university students

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 6.8 million Syrian refugees have had to leave their hometowns as a result of mass migration brought on by the Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021a). With over 3.7 million Syrian refugees living there, Turkey is the nation that hosts the most refugees worldwide. According to the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM, 2021) data, approximately 0.7% of Syrian refugees are in temporary protection status (YUKK, art. 91) in Turkey residing in temporary shelters (99.3% in Gaziantep and Hatay, which are close to Turkey's Syrian border, and mainly in Adana and Istanbul). The fact that Syrian refugees who sought asylum in Turkey due to the conflict lived in the nation for an extended period, such as 13 years, exacerbated the issue of social cohesiveness and integration between local residents and Syrian refugees. As the length of time of Syrian refugees in Turkey increased, local residents regarded this scenario as a threat and risk (Toğral-Koca, 2016), and more disputes between the two groups became probable. A total of 181 violent court cases involving Syrian refugees occurred in Turkey in 2017, and 35 people died as a result, according to the International Crisis Group (ICG, 2018). Previous studies reveal that the anxiety stemming from being an asylum seeker continues in the background among Syrians even after they have acquired Turkish citizenship (Akyol, 2022). In this context, it is important to explore the main factors affecting the attitudes of the local population in Turkey towards Syrians and to reveal their power of influence.

As a destination country or a country of transit, Turkey has recently seen a multiethnic migratory flow. In the migrant wave coming from Syria, the first refugee camps were established in the province of Hatay in 2011 (Güçer et al., 2013), and by 2021, there were 7 such camps (PMM, 2021). These mass movements resulted in intolerance, conflict, social unrest, and economic friction in addition to enhancing Turkey's social and cultural life (Brouwer & Boroş, 2010). The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (YUKK) No. 6458 included asylum seekers in the protection status, but they still had to reconstruct their lives in Turkey by assimilating into the local society and picking up the language. Discrimination, lack of social support, and employment difficulties are among other aspects of life in a new country (Akyol, 2022; Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). Due to the migrant flood that occurred in Turkey in 2011, many people anticipate that Syrians would eventually return to their home countries. However, since the Syrian civil war has grown more complex, some Turkish local residents are now

“accepting” the idea that Syrians will stay in Turkey for a while (İçduygu, 2015). To help Syrian refugees residing in Turkey adapt to Turkish society, "temporary protection" status was provided to Syrian refugees in October 2014, and the "open door" policy was maintained (Adalı & Türkyılmaz, 2019; Erdoğan, 2018). Syrian refugees with temporary protection status have exacerbated internal public criticism that, on the one hand, it has damaged Turkey's sociocultural framework and, on the other, the government has given Syrian refugees too much financial help (Erdoğan et al., 2017). As per and Kuru (2020), these public critiques strengthen the negative perceptions of the local people toward Syrian refugees and prevent the social contact between the two groups from turning into a dialogue. It is crucial to comprehend the factors that underlie these judgments since local residents' hostile attitudes toward Syrian refugees have recently grown more overt. Moreover, the fact that Syrians in Turkey are becoming an increasingly closed society (Uslu, 2022) may lead to marginalization, the riskiest form of acculturation. Similarly, minority group students at universities in Turkey encounter social experiences that evoke marginalization and stigmatization (Ateşok et al., 2020). This study intends to explore crucial ideas with a holistic perspective, such as contact quantity, empathy for other cultures, and political/religious orientations, which are supposed to influence attitudes toward Syrian refugees in Turkey. It is anticipated that this study will make significant additions to the literature by using the following practical and theoretical framework as a guide.

Contact quantity and attitude toward Syrian refugees

Recent scientific research has highlighted the possible role of social interaction in decreasing intergroup prejudice. *Intergroup Interaction Theory*, a traditional social psychology method for eliminating intergroup bias, proposes evidence for the positive effects of contact with members of disadvantaged groups (Allport, 1954, 1979). One of the primary factors in this study, “contact quantity”, quantifies how frequently individuals with various identities interact with one another (Akbaş, 2010). One of the settings in Turkey where persons of Syrian ancestry are seen most frequently is at universities. Based on this aspect, the formation of views about Syrian refugees was examined in this study using university students, who essentially represent the varied structure of society. Furthermore, given that university students exhibit greater levels of cultural awareness (Erişen, 2018) and empathy (Dizer & İyigün, 2009; Wen et al., 2013), it was anticipated that there would be more frequent interaction and, thus, more reliable information on how much an attitude was impacted. Every day, more and more Syrian students are enrolling in Turkish universities. While there were roughly

10.000 Syrian university students registered in Turkish universities in 2015-2016, this number rose to 37.001 in 2020-21 (UNCHR, 2021b). In addition, 392 Syrian academics are known to work at various Turkish universities (Migration and Integration Report, 2018). In this context, university students are thought to be a vital bridge in the process of harmonization and integration between local residents and Syrian refugees, and universities might have a microcosmic effect in terms of Turkish sociology. Therefore, it is anticipated that this study, which is carried out with university students who have frequent interaction with Syrian refugees, will shine a spotlight on a significant problem area. It is now necessary to address ideas like multicultural psychological counseling and immigration/immigrant psychology on a practical level due to recent large-scale migratory movements on a worldwide scale. It is found that there are not enough large-scale integration studies for immigrant integration in Turkey.

Cultural empathy is strengthened as one develops a tolerance for other cultures and individuals (Human Library, 2021). Nevertheless, when it comes to Syrian refugees living in Turkey, the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM, 2021) data shows that the majority of Syrian refugees reside in Istanbul (total population in Istanbul = 534.000; ratio to Istanbul population: 3.36%). Despite the high frequency of encounters, 78% of Istanbul residents said they had no close contact with any Syrian refugees (Şar & Kuru, 2020). The issue of socialization and integration between local residents and Syrian refugees is brought up by this circumstance. A social psychology notion called the "exposure effect" (Zajonc, 1968) should now be considered. The development of a favorable attitude toward those individuals who are not part of the causal chain in the process following exposure to someone they had previously been neutral toward is known as the exposure effect. With increased contact quantity, a favorable attitude toward Syrian refugees may emerge in this context, regardless of ethno-cultural empathy. In this study, a robust linear link between the frequency of interaction and attitudes against Syrian refugees was expected.

Ethno-cultural empathy as a mediating variable

The term "ethno-cultural empathy" refers to the emotional and cognitive sensitivity needed to foster mutually beneficial understanding between distinct racial and ethnic structures (Batson et al., 1997; Carell, 1997). By including communicative empathy in the cognitive and emotional conceptual dilemma of empathy, Ridley and Lingle (1996) created the first comprehensive model of cultural empathy. In this conceptualization, one of the crucial aspects of the asylum seeker/refugee issue is ethno cultural empathy (Wang et al., 2003). Social interaction with people of out-of-group

social contact can have a significant impact on one's (ethno) cultural sensitivity. The fear of encountering individuals who do not share your ethnicity or your ideals lessens as the frequency of interaction increases. Reduced bias toward these individuals and an increase in empathy are results of greater awareness of these people and the capacity to interpret events from outside one's own group (Eller & Abrams, 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). As a result, increased contact quantity enhances the capacity to perceive the emotional intensity (i.e., ethno-cultural empathy) of the fragile and vulnerable asylum seeker/refugee status. Empathy with a member of the stigmatized group has the benefit of lowering prejudice toward the group as a whole (Hewstone, 2009). Strengthening cultural empathy by eradicating biases against other social identities is crucial to lowering intergroup anxiety and fostering positive out-of-group attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). When one cannot comprehend an ethnic minority group on an emotional or cognitive level, it is sometimes believed to be hard to adopt a good attitude toward them. Cultural empathy is thus one of the crucial prerequisites for a concern/condition-free approach to Syrians. The inability of Turkish university students to comprehend Syrian students and to adopt favorable attitudes is considered a significant integration issue, and as a result, typical student social cohesion requirements cannot be met (Türk et al., 2018). In this framework, the theoretical and empirical findings that the relationship between contact quantity and attitudes towards Syrians will be largely mediated through ethno-cultural empathy provided additional evidence for the designed model. In other words, it was hypothesized that an increase in the contact quantity would increase ethno-cultural empathy and an increase in ethno-cultural empathy would significantly affect attitudes towards Syrians.

Current Research

When the literature has been examined in general on the research topic, mediation effects have also been looked at in addition to direct approaches. A theoretical foundation for mediation has now been established by the current study. For instance, face-to-face intergroup interaction lowers bias toward the person or group contacted, according to meta-analysis research of 515 papers by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006). Intergroup contact is seen as one of psychology's most successful methods for fostering better intergroup connections within this paradigm (Dovidio et al., 2003). It is common knowledge that exposure to any ethnicity or minority group helps people have a deeper understanding of them. Because it is abundantly obvious that empathy has a significant predictive role in determining how Syrian refugees' social distance is perceived (Ekşi et al., 2020). Due to this

circumstance, the ethno-cultural empathetic propensity will strengthen with increased interaction, and attitudes toward the target group will improve. Based on the aforementioned theoretical and experimental framework, this study is anticipated to add to the body of knowledge on the possible benefits and drawbacks of intergroup contact as a medium for social interchange between local residents and Syrian refugees.

Hypothesis 1: Contact quantity is positively associated with ethno-cultural empathy.

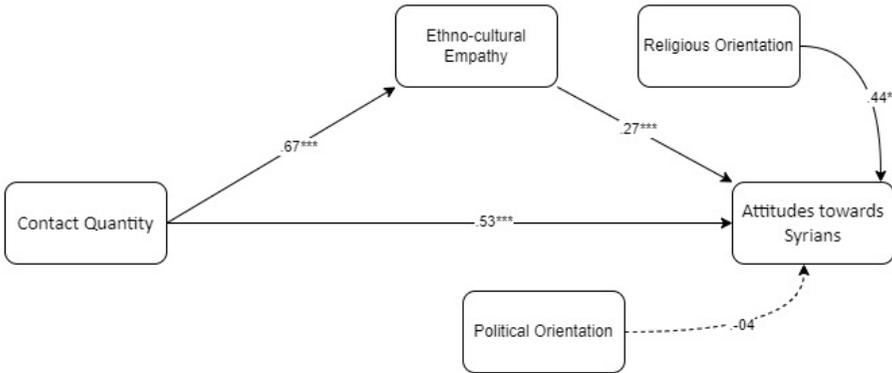
Hypothesis 2: Ethno-cultural empathy is positively related to attitude towards Syrian refugees.

Hypothesis 3: Contact quantity is positively related to attitude towards Syrian refugees.

Hypothesis 4: Ethno-cultural empathy has a positive mediating effect on the relationship between the contact quantity and the attitude toward Syrian refugees.

Figure 1.

*The coefficients shown are unstandardized regression coefficients. Dotted lines indicate non-significant effects. *p < .05. ***p < .001.*



Control variable

To members of the host society, immigrants frequently express opposite viewpoints. While some hosts see migration as an egalitarian force that encourages group participation, others see it as a natural danger (Pratto et al., 2006). Social Dominance Theory (SDT; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) highlights that it should be regarded in terms of people having distinct psychological orientations about perceiving diversity as a societal burden or as a benefit. Turkey has seen that political and religious orientations play a significant role in determining whether Syrian refugees are viewed as a threat

or a resource (Deslandes & Anderson, 2019; Kindap-Tepe et al., 2019). In fact, among 46 nations, Turkey was evaluated to have the third-highest level of political prejudice (Çakır, 2019). According to this framework, supporters of the Ak Party (Justice and Development Party), one of the political parties in Turkey that represents the right-wing political orientation, view Syrian refugees as "coreligionists" and interact with them more favorably than supporters of other political parties (Şar & Kuru, 2020). Similar to this, "Ansar and Muhajir" (helpers, and immigrants) are conceptualized as one of the primary sources of inspiration for local citizens who consider themselves religious, and the majority of Syrian refugees in Turkey represent the Sunni Muslim school (Schneider, 2008; Şar & Kuru, 2020). Metropoll, a national survey company, found that in Turkey favorable attitudes toward Syrian refugees had dramatically decreased and the percentage of people who supported their repatriation had risen to 82% in 2021 (Sencar, 2022). The fact that world perspective (e.g., political view) is already a significant factor in determining how people across the world and in Turkey feel about asylum seekers and refugees, however, cannot be disregarded (Muis & Immerzeel, 2017; UNHCR, 2009). Political and religious orientations were therefore designated as control variables in this study to investigate the major variables predicted by the model from a comprehensive standpoint and to provide more reliable results.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants and Procedures

This study is a quantitative research based on a cross-sectional design. In the study, being a student of Turkish origin in Turkish universities was defined as an inclusion criterion. The study data were gathered in November 2021. After receiving approval from the institution's Scientific Ethics Review Board, instruments was sent online (through Google forms) to university students ($Age_{range} = 18 - 33$, $M_{age} = 22.47$, $SD_{age} = 5.65$) who were studying in Istanbul. In surveys conducted before the pandemic, information was frequently gathered through in-person interviews. Due to the pandemic's beginning, quarantine regulations, and other local governments' health procedures, this method grew extremely challenging to accomplish. Due to these restrictions, we collected our data for this study via online methods. Convenience sampling method was used to access the participants. Istanbul is the province having the most Syrian residents in Turkey. Students at universities in Istanbul, where we believe that engagement and contact with Syrian refugees would be more common, were given access to Google Forms documents by the researchers through WhatsApp groups the students had

made for themselves. In the initial round, 302 college students from nine different institutions of higher learning answered the online questionnaires. Although face-to-face measurements are safer, it is thought that the control items used in online measurements and the provision of good preliminary information to the participants will significantly reduce this disadvantageous situation. The researcher used the control item ("for this question, please tick '3'") as one of the exclusion criteria, and 27 students were eliminated from the study as a result. Finally, the sample used for the analyses included 275 university students, 69.1% of whom were female and 30.9% of whom were male. No money or additional points were provided to the students during the data collection phase. They were asked to contribute to a scientific study on a voluntary basis.

Instruments

Demographic Information Form. Participants' gender, age, and institution of higher education were all recorded on this form. An 11-point rating scale with scores ranging from 0 (*I am entirely left-wing*) to 10 (*I am entirely right-wing*) was used to ascertain the participants' political orientation. Similarly, the participants' religious orientation was also assessed using an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (*I am not religious at all*) to 10 (*I am completely religious*).

Social Contact Scale (SCS). The Social Contact Scale is a 10-item Likert-type scale with response options ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*quite often*) that was created by Islam and Hewnstone in 1993 and translated into Turkish by Akbaş in 2010. SCS, which has sub-dimensions for contact quantity and contact quality, was created to assess the frequency and quality of interaction with minority groups. Only the 5-item contact quantity sub-dimension of the scale was utilized in this study. Example question: "*How frequently do you communicate as close friends with Syrian refugees?*" High scores suggest frequent interaction. Previous research has shown that SCS demonstrated evidence for its reliability ($\alpha = .83$; Akbaş, 2010). SCS further demonstrated good internal consistency and the current study has strong reliability ($\alpha = .83$).

Ethno-cultural Empathy Scale (EES). The Ethno-cultural Empathy Scale (EES; Wang et al., 2003) is a 30-item scale that has been translated into Turkish (Özdikmenli-Demir & Demir, 2014) and used to evaluate a person's propensity for empathizing with cultures of other ethnicities. Sample item: "*I will help members of different ethnic groups if I believe they are being discriminated against.*" It is a Likert-type scale, with a score range of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). High scores show a strong capacity for empathy across cultures. In its original research, EES was shown to have

acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .91$; Wang et al., 2003) and outstanding reliability ($\alpha = .93$; Özdikmenli-Demir & Demir, 2014) in its Turkish translation. EES also displayed high reliability in the current study ($\alpha = .90$).

The Scale of Attitudes toward Syrians (SATS). The Scale of Attitudes toward Syrians (SATS; Özüdoğru et al., 2018) is a 26-item, 3-dimensional (accept, threaten, reject) scale created to assess the frequency and quality of local residents' positive/negative attitudes toward Syrians. Only the acceptability sub-dimension was employed in the current study to assess attitudes toward Syrian refugees. Example: "*I think Syrians enrich our culture with their variety.*" The rating ranges from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) on a Likert-type scale. In its initial investigation, SATS was shown to have excellent reliability ($\alpha = .94$; Özüdoğru et al., 2018). SATS also showed high reliability in the current investigation ($\alpha = .95$).

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Missing data and normality assumptions were initially analyzed before the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analyses were tested. In the examination of missing data, 27 data were lost across all research measures (SCS, EES, and SATS). Observations with more than 5% missing data for any variable or more than 10% of the total number of items in the study were eliminated from the dataset (Kline, 2011). The total sample for the study consisted of 275 datasets. The data provided multivariate (VIF value and Mahalanobis) assumptions of normality (Weston & Gore, 2006). Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

Ethno-cultural empathy was positively correlated with contact quantity in Hypothesis 1, and it was hypothesized that attitudes toward Syrian refugees would also positively correlate with ethno-cultural empathy in Hypothesis 2. When Table 1 is analyzed, it is discovered that there is a positive link between contact quantity and ethno-cultural empathy ($r = .20, p < .01$). It is also discovered that there is a positive ($r = .56, p < .01$) association between ethno-cultural empathy and attitudes about Syrian refugees. The findings support Hypotheses 1 and 2. As per Hypothesis 3, the amount of interaction will have a favorable impact on how people feel toward Syrians. Correlation between the contact quantity and attitudes toward Syrian refugees of a positive nature ($r = .40, p < .01$). This result supports Hypothesis 3. The association between political orientation and attitude toward Syrian refugees is positive ($r = .14, p < .05$) and the relationship between religious orientation and attitude toward Syrian refugees is also positive ($r = .18, p < .01$), among the control variables.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviation, Scoring Ranges, Internal Consistency Coefficients and Correlation Coefficients of their Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α
1. CQ	—					1.90	1.14	1-5	.83
2. EE	.20**	—				3.79	.63	1-5	.90
3. ATS	.40**	.56**	—			2.82	.93	1-5	.95
4. PO	.14*	.14*	.14*	—		5.41	2.86	0-10	
5. RT	.13*	.07	.18**	.36**	—	7.18	2.44	0-10	

Note. CQ = contact quantity; EE = ethno-cultural empathy; ATS = attitude towards Syrian; PO = political orientation; RT = religious orientation. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Data Analytic Plan

The IBM SPSS 23 statistic program in PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) and AMOS version 20 tested the mediator models in the research paper. With 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effects, the indirect effects analysis of the current study was carried out using 5.000 bootstrapping resampling procedures. In the mediation analyses of this study, indirect effects were considered significant if their 95% confidence interval did not contain zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Figure 1 displays the independent variable (X) as contact quantity, the dependent variable (Y) as attitude toward Syrian refugees, and the ethno-cultural empathy-mediating variable (M). As control variables, political and religious orientations were added to the model.

While there was no correlation between political orientation and attitude toward Syrian refugees, there was a positive correlation between religious orientations and attitude toward Syrian refugees in the interaction between the control variables (religious and political orientation) and the outcome variable. With the conditional influence of political and religious orientations variables, all study hypotheses were tested. In Hypothesis 4, it was hypothesized that the effect of contact quantity on views toward Syrian refugees would be positively moderated by ethno-cultural empathy. The contact quantity is positively connected with both attitudes toward Syrian refugees ($\beta = .53, p < .001$) and ethno-cultural empathy ($\beta = .67, p < .001$). Syrian refugees' attitudes are positively associated with ethno-cultural

empathy ($\beta = .27, p < .001$). Finally, the indirect impact of contact quantity on attitudes toward Syrian refugees through ethno-cultural empathy is positively significant as a result of the mediation analysis utilizing the bootstrapping (bias-corrected bootstrapping) approach ($\beta = .18, SE = .05, [BC] 95\% CI [.072; .280]$). These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 4, which states that the relationship between contact quantity and attitudes toward Syrian refugees through ethno-cultural empathy accounted for 41% of the variation (The R^2 mediation effect size). Table 2 provides an overview of the findings.

Table 2

Direct and indirect effects of contact quantity on attitudes towards Syrians

Model paths	β	SE	P	95% CI [LB; UB]
Direct effect				
<i>CQ</i> → <i>EE</i>	.67	.19	.000	[.284; 1.059]
<i>EE</i> → <i>ATS</i>	.27	.25	.000	[.218; .319]
<i>CQ</i> → <i>ATS</i>	.54	.08	.000	[.377; .713]
Indirect effect				
<i>CQ</i> → <i>EE</i> → <i>ATS</i>	.18	.05	.000	[.072; .280]
Control variables				
<i>PO</i> → <i>ATS</i>	-.04	.19	.805	[-.331; .324]
<i>RO</i> → <i>ATS</i>	.44	.19	.033	[.135; .758]
R^2	.41**		.000	

Note: CQ = contact quantity; EE = ethno-cultural empathy; ATS = attitude towards Syrian; PO = political orientation; RT = religious orientation; β = unstandardized coefficients; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval; LB = lower bound; UB = upper bound. ** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study's objective is to examine the role of ethno-cultural empathy as a mediating role in the association between contact quantity and attitudes toward Syrian refugees. As anticipated, contact quantity and attitudes toward Syrian refugees were positively correlated with ethno-cultural empathy. These findings in the ethno-cultural empathy variable corroborate the research on ethno-cultural empathy's favorable mediation function in contact quantity attitudes about immigrants (Allport, 1954, 1979; Batson et al., 1997; Carell, 1997; Eller & Abrams, 2004; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). The finding that contact quantity positively affects attitudes toward Syrians is also in accordance with the research (Brophy, 1946; Dovidio et al., 2003; Hewstone, 2009; Zajonc, 1968). While religious orientation, one of the control factors,

positively influences attitudes toward Syrian refugees, political orientation was shown to have no significant link with attitudes toward Syrian refugees. The literature demonstrates that political and religious orientation is a significant factor in how one feels toward immigration (Anderson, 2018; Deslandes & Anderson, 2019; Güney & Konak, 2016; Kındap-Tepe et al., 2019; Schneider, 2008; Şar & Kuru, 2020). As a result, this finding is only partly consistent with the literature. In light of all these findings, it is believed that this study, which develops a model with current data and evaluates it in relation to the problem of immigrants/refugees, which is characterized as a political, economic, social, and legal sector, might be a source for interdisciplinary approaches.

Results from the model confirm the beneficial indirect impact of contact quantity on attitudes toward Syrian refugees through ethno-cultural empathy. Interacting with individuals from marginalized or stigmatized groups is a successful strategy in this situation for enhancing intergroup relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). It was noted that white sailors' racial attitudes improved when they cruised with blacks once the U.S. Merchant Marine started to desegregate (Brophy, 1946). Similarly, it was proposed in Allport's (1954) study that, under ideal conditions, intergroup interaction successfully diminishes unfavorable views. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that social interaction might amplify unfavorable attitudes (Padir, 2019; Tropp et al., 2012). This study demonstrates that a key factor in forming a favorable opinion of Syrian refugees is an increase in the frequency of interaction among university students. Additionally, this research demonstrates that college students are more sensitive to cultural variety and that deep conversations may develop during social interactions. The "exposure effect" (Zajonc, 1968), which is described as the formation of a favorable attitude without any justification when a person is exposed to a person (or an item) to which they were indifferent for a long time, exhibits positive outcomes in the current study as a consequence. Independent of ethno-cultural empathy, a significant linear association between the contact quantity and attitudes toward Syrian refugees was discovered in this study. As a result, the intermediary model, which was supported by its theoretical infrastructure, was validated in the study's model setting.

In the research of Batson et al. (1993), it is underlined that interaction with members of the outgroup lowers anxiety caused by uncertainty and enhances people's capacity for empathy. In the experimental study of Stephan et al. (2005), a group of Rwandan students who were subjected to manipulation that living in the US implies large costs to the government and that Rwandans were particularly prone to violence. In addition, a second

group that fostered empathy with Rwandan students was also defined in this study. Because of the experimental investigation, it was found that although the second group showed a good deal of empathy with Rwandan pupils, the first group had unfavorable attitudes against them (Stephan et al., 2005). This empirical study shows that there are several ways to distort local inhabitants' perceptions of the truth about immigration. Because, according to a study performed by Şar and Kuru (2020), social interaction with Syrian refugees does not result in favorable effects until it becomes a discourse. It is evident, therefore, that intimate communication between immigrants and social contacts results in data that more accurately represent the field. In the present research, it was shown that social interaction in the same physical setting significantly predicted ethno-cultural empathetic propensity and exhibited favorable opinions about Syrian refugees.

Being open to other life experiences and having empathy for prejudice that is focused on culture are two of the most efficient ways to build the intricate web of social and interpersonal interactions that characterizes a multicultural society (Vescio et al., 2003). Currently, research points to cultural empathy as one of the most useful indicators of favorable or unfavorable opinions toward Syrian refugees (Karaoğlu, 2015). This study found a significant relationship between the frequency of interaction and attitudes toward Syrian refugees and ethno-cultural empathy. In other words, it is evident that as the frequency of interaction rises, so does ethno-cultural empathy, and as a result, so does the attitude toward Syrian refugees.

Mass migration has an impact on a region's social and economic equilibrium, according to social psychology. The current state of affairs could make it more difficult for locals and migrants to develop positive relationships (Stephan, 2012). As a result, it promotes the growth of negative attitudes and intensifies the impression of threat in particular social groupings. Studies suggest that certain demographic traits, such as political, religious, and ethnic affiliation, may have a role in the development of views toward refugees and asylum seekers in this environment (Pedersen et al., 2005). Intergroup interaction has the potential to both foster positive attitudes and, in some circumstances, enhance relationships. Afro-Americans and Latinos who befriended white people showed a drop in their ethnic activism, according to the study by Tropp et al. (2012); however, Asian Americans with better status did not show a similar trend. Therefore, it is impossible to disregard the possibility that certain demographic patterns have an impact on how people feel toward refugees and asylum seekers. Currently, when we examine the literature, we can find that political and religious orientations stand out as significant demographic factors (Deslandes & Anderson, 2019; Kindap-Tepe

et al., 2019). Because it is clear from the perspective of political orientation that having a strong national identity and right-wing political orientations are helpful in the formation of misleading ideas and attitudes against asylum seekers (Anderson, 2018). Given that Turkey has the third-highest level of partisanship out of 46 nations (Çakır, 2019), it was believed that adding political orientations to the hypothetical model would allow the study to yield more thorough and reliable results. Political orientations, however, were found to be a weak predictor of attitudes toward Syrian refugees in this study. Additionally, it was discovered that the political orientations of the research participants were primarily centered (mean value = 5.41). Yet, in Şar and Kuru's (2020) study with the general public on the size of Istanbul, it was found that the participants' political orientation was heterogeneously distributed and that political orientation was one of the primary variables influencing attitudes toward Syrian refugees. There are allegedly two crucial paradigms at play here. First, young people in Turkey do not identify themselves with the extremes of the left or right (Tanyaş, 2015); second, participants' assessments of the perceived danger (economic and social; Padır, 2019) posed by Syrian refugees go beyond political orientations.

In the eyes of refugees and asylum seekers, a person's worldview and degree of religiosity are also significant factors. In this study, it was discovered that the religious orientation of participating university students was strong (mean value = 7.18). There is the fact that 88.4 per cent of Turks consider themselves to have strong religious beliefs (EVS/WVS, 2021). Additionally, it has been reported in studies conducted in the Turkish context that local citizens who identify as religious approach Syrian refugees based on their religious kinship (Güney & Konak, 2016; Kındap-Tepe et al., 2019). The fact that most of the Syrian refugees represent the Sunni Muslim school and adopt a conservative-religious lifestyle facilitates the local residents to develop a positive attitude (Schneider, 2008; Şar & Kuru, 2020). This study came up with the conclusion that people's attitudes regarding Syrian refugees are influenced by their religious orientations. Contrary to political trends, local inhabitants' attitudes toward Syrian refugees are favorably impacted by the "Ansar and Muhajir" (helpers and immigrants) understanding of Islamic teachings. According to the results of the current study, local residents' adoption of Muslim identity is therefore considered a crucial protective factor for the integration of Syrian refugees. Furthermore, it has been shown in a study that the asylum seeker/refugee phenomena are primarily defined by ethnic and religious (Ethnoreligious) identities and that political orientation is developed within this framework. Based on these

findings, we may offer a number of suggestions to policymakers, university administrations, and psychological counselors working with immigrants.

The establishment of the "Ministry of Immigration and Integration" should be one of Turkey's top priorities in the near future so that issues like contact quantity, contact quality, and microaggression can be thoroughly addressed through administrative and bureaucratic structures while avoiding sociologically marginalizing Syrian refugees. The fact that contact quantity, ethno-cultural empathy, religious and political orientation, as well as other social, psychological and political processes may be influential in the process of discovering the factors affecting attitudes towards Syrians should be on the agenda of policymakers. Because Syrians' perception of local people can accelerate integration, which is one of the elements of acculturation, but it can also open the door to marginalization.

Counseling centers that will strengthen social cohesion between Syrian students and Turkish students can be established. Focus group studies can be conducted on inclusive education. Orientation training can be given importance in the academic and administrative structuring of universities because the societal structure is micro-cosmically impacted by universities. Finally, limitations in personnel and technical equipment in university-based guidance and psychological counseling units (Erkan et al., 2011) interrupt clinical-level psychological counseling services. An ethnographic study on the issue areas of international students in Turkey discovered that students, although having problems, are unaware that they can seek help from the university's guidance and psychological counseling section (Bilgili, 2016). However, research to strengthen behavioral repertoires, such as marathon group work and assertiveness training with international students, will increase the frequency of interaction. With more frequent interaction, there is little doubt that attitudes toward Syrian refugees will improve. Furthermore, interaction groups to be developed under the leadership of the guidance and psychological counseling center can perform integration studies that will be a model for society at the university level, by uncovering the dynamics that impede contact between locals and foreigners from converting into social discourse and by breaking down potential resistances.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study contains several limitations. First, the study's cross-sectional design does not entirely permit evaluating the causal order of the variables developed in accordance with the theoretical framework. Thus, a longitudinal or experimental design is required to investigate the theories that are believed to influence attitudes toward Syrian refugees in a causal manner. Second, the study evaluated a hypothetical design on a sample of college

students. But research that includes unemployed people, those working in the public and private sectors, and retirees in the sample would provide more inclusive results since the hypothetical model has to reflect local citizens holistically. However, we were only able to examine a small area/audience in the current study (i.e., university students). Third, this study investigates the limiting conceptions of attitudes regarding Syrian refugees. Future research might study the impact of contextual factors, such as nomophobia, age, language, gender, and the use of social media for specific purposes. Fourth, this study employed a quantitative research methodology. In future studies, we propose undertaking in-depth qualitative research on the substance of local residents' meetings with Syrian refugees in Turkey, as well as how their attitudes and views about the process impact their attitudes toward them. Fifth, there was little social interaction with the four million Syrian refugees living in Turkey in previous investigations (Şar & Kuru, 2020) and the current study. With the help of this study, it has been clear that the issue of social integration may be effectively solved by increasing contact quantity. Researchers can thus conduct investigations that will show the causal and mediating chain that will identify the factors that influence the frequency of interaction. The participants may not have felt comfortable discussing their political beliefs on the internet because the data for this study was gathered online. It is commonly understood in Turkey that expressing political opinions online will prohibit one from being followed or from advancing one's profession in the future, particularly among young people. Given that face-to-face data collection using paper and pencil allows participants to disguise themselves more readily (as opposed to the potential of online data collection leaving a trail), we propose that research data involving political views in countries such as Turkey not be gathered online.

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