



# Children's Moral Evaluations of Inclusion and Exclusion during Play in Regard to Ethnic Background

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the likelihood of children including a child of a different ethnic origin in their games. In focusing on 359 children aged six, eight, and twelve, the research sought to understand how the children categorized their views on this subject and whether the decision to include or exclude would change at the behest of peers, teachers, or parents. The study was inspired by the work presented by Walker et al. (2019), and five questions related to this topic were used as data collection tools. As a result of the deductive and inductive analyses, it was determined that most of the children believed that those from different ethnic origins should be included in play time. When the reasons for including children in games were examined, the answers given were generally connected the category of "Moral Justifications". For the children more prone to excluding peers of a different ethnicity, responses tended to find themselves in the "Cultural stereotypes/Personal characteristics" sub-category.

**Keywords** Ethnic · Exclusion · Inclusion · Moral justifications

## 1 Introduction

There has been a huge increase in the number of refugees in Türkiye following the Arab Spring. In the context of Social Field Theory, this study aimed to find out whether 6-, 8- and 12-year-old children would include children from different ethnic backgrounds in their games and whether they would change their minds if their friends, teachers and parents wanted them to do so. To do this, 359 children were read a scenario and asked questions about the scenario related to the research

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purpose. In the context of Social Field Theory, the child's responses are divided into three categories: moral, social/conventional and personal/psychological. It is in this context that moral reasoning, social inclusion, exclusion and ethnicity, refugee children in Türkiye and social field theory will be mentioned in the sub-headings that follow.

### 1.1 Moral Reasoning

Reasoning, a cognitive process, is defined as the extraction of one piece of information from another piece or pieces of information by following rules that preserve the truth in the newly derived information (Seok, 2011). Moral reasoning refers to reasoning about moral issues, moral values, and normative standards. It provides understanding at the level necessary for moral action (Seok, 2011; Talwar, 2011). As a complex and coordinated effort, moral reasoning involves not only cognition, but also the negotiation and coordination of values and cultural norms with respect to behaviour and relationships (Thornberg et al., 2016).

The ability to reason about moral issues provides a basic level of understanding necessary for moral action. Moral reasoning was first conceived as a process that progresses through a series of universal stages that transcend culture and context (e.g. Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1932). Nucci has argued that moral concepts are not really universal and that it is very difficult to separate moral cognition from context and culture (Nucci & Gingo, 2010). While some aspects of moral cognition are arguably non-arbitrary (such as harm and injustice), many moral issues are matters of convention that are context dependent and based on agreed social rules. These social rules naturally vary according to social context and culture, and social structure has a significant impact on how morality is experienced and thought about in everyday life (Goswami, 2002; Helwig & Turiel, 2002; Nucci, 2002, 2016). Therefore, the study of moral reasoning is fundamental to understanding the relationships between individuals and the functioning of society; because norms regulate social interactions and expectations both within and between groups. Individuals do not grow up in a "social vacuum"; they construct their moral knowledge, sense of justice and representation of how the world works by interacting with the society in which they live (Passini, 2010).

### 1.2 Social Inclusion & Exclusion and Ethnicity

Research on child well-being has revealed that individual, family, and environment all factor into a child's positive social development. While discrimination and social exclusion can increase the risk such as perceptions of discrimination and forms of social exclusion, social acceptance and social networks can provide protection (Oxman-Martinez et al., 2012). Social exclusion is defined by Power and Wilson (2000) as a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture that detaches groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and prevents them from fully participating in the normatively determined activities of the society in which they live. Social exclusion is a common aspect of social life, ranging from everyday

events to large-scale social tragedies. Many factors, from gender to socioeconomic level and ethnicity, may be the reasons for social exclusion (Killen, 2007; Oxman-Martinez et al., 2012). These forms of interpersonal and intergroup exclusion cause conflict, tension, and, in extreme cases, chronic distress. In the world of children, exclusion is most often studied in the context of interpersonal conflict rather than intergroup conflict. For example, research on peer rejection and victimization has focused on individual differences and social deficiencies that contribute to being a bully or victim. Social exclusion can be a temporary situation or it can be permanent. Findings show that long-term effects upon children and adults who experience widespread exclusion may manifest themselves as depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Killen, 2007). Experiences of social exclusion, especially for children from minority groups, appear as a phenomenon that needs attention, as they can potentially hinder healthy development (Crocker et al., 1994).

Findings on rights and social exclusion suggest that reasoning, the weighing and balancing different opinions and goals, and evaluative scrutiny are all part of moral functioning (Killen et al., 2002). The findings also show that judgments regarding social relationships are multifaceted, as is morality (Mulvey et al., 2010). Aspects such as avoidance of harm, benefit to people, rights, trust, and justice coexist. Social life is such that one moral good may conflict with another. However, it is believed that individuals are reflective enough to identify different moral goods and the ways in which they can clash, as it allows for the determination of priorities (Walker et al., 2019).

Exclusion occurs at many levels and contexts, from interpersonal to intergroup; each mode reflects different types of intentions and goals. The exclusion of children based on group characteristics, such as ethnic background, can be referred to as intergroup exclusion. Children's moral reasoning on issues such as gender, race, or ethnic background certainly can influence their tendency toward social inclusion (Walker et al., 2019).

This research is particularly interested in social inclusion/exclusion based on ethnic background as this focus provides a way in which to explore children's moral and social reasoning. The development of prejudice and social exclusion is related to the emergence of critical social-cognitive abilities (e.g., moral reasoning and social perspective-taking) and understanding of group identity, norms, and dynamics. Recent research has focused on children's social exclusion and prejudice in intergroup contexts where there are opposing group identities. An example could be a neighborhood of ethnically heterogeneous families of children who exclude one another from participating in the peer group based on their possession of an alternate ethnicity (quoted Walker et al., 2019, pp.3).

### 1.3 Refugee Children in Turkiye

Turkiye is a complex country where people from different cultural backgrounds live together. The complexity of these multi-ethnic relations increased after the Arab Spring in 2010. Turkiye was seen as one of the preferred countries for refugees from the crises. According to UNICEF, there are currently more than one million

refugees in Türkiye. According to 2023 data from the Directorate of Immigration Management, a unit of the Ministry of Interior, there are approximately 3.2 million refugees. Half of them are between 0 and 18 years of age (<https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>). Research conducted with refugees in Türkiye shows that these children have problems with education, housing, abuse, protection and health (Akman & Yazıcı, 2022). In order to solve these problems, some rights have been granted to these children in Türkiye. In April 2014, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (YUKK) No. 6458 recognised the right to education and training, the right to health, the right to social services and social assistance, and the right to respect for private life. Today, these rights are enjoyed not only by Syrians but by refugees of all nationalities.

Initially, the focus was on the immediate needs of the Syrian refugee population, which grew rapidly after the Arab Spring, and education issues did not come to the fore. Over time, however, as it became clear that Syrian refugees would be living in Türkiye for a long time, other situations came to the fore. In one of these, education, these children were initially taught in their mother tongue in camps. However, when it became clear that the number of Syrians living in camps was small compared to those living in Türkiye, the Ministry of National Education tried to find solutions for educating these children by issuing circulars on 26 April 2013 and 26 September 2013 and by carrying out various activities. The Republic of Türkiye has started to provide education to these children both in public schools affiliated to the Ministry of National Education and in schools opened within the framework of the Project for Supporting the Integration of Syrian Children into the Turkish Education System (PIKTES). The aim is to help them adapt to society and avoid psychosocial problems (Akman & Yazıcı, 2022; Emin, 2016).

Access to health services for refugee children in Türkiye is shaped according to the circular of the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Solidarity of the Prime Ministry of the Republic of Türkiye, dated 20 May 2009. According to this circular, Article 60/2 of the Social Insurance and General Health Insurance Law No. 5510, which came into force in 2008, added "stateless persons and refugees" to the "persons considered as universal health insurance holders". Accordingly, children are also considered to be universal health insurance holders (Acar Yurtman, 2017) if they have legal asylum seeker or refugee status. In addition, since Türkiye is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they have the right to social services and social assistance and respect for private life (Akman & Yazıcı, 2022).

#### 1.4 Theoretical Framework

Development has long been an attractive topic for researchers. The first theory that dealt with morality as a field of development was the Psychoanalytic Theory. It asserts that morality is formed based on the developing conscience of the child. Piaget examined moral development by basing moral elements on particular concepts. In these two basic theories, Freud addressed basic issues such as parent relationships, emotions, and guilt, while Piaget examined the fundamental issues of cognition, justice, and peer relationships (Çam et al., 2012). Kohlberg revolutionized

Moral Development Theory with an anti-behavioral approach (Stroud, 2001). Each theory plays a significant role in better understanding moral development. However, in the last 50 years, theoretical approaches to moral development have undergone considerable changes (Austrian, 2008). Social Domain-Theory is one of the products of this new era.

This theory is based on a large body of research on how children, adolescents, and adults form different and complexly structured types of thought in moral, social-conventional, and personal/ psychological domains. According to this theory, moral concepts relate to forms of social interaction that are universally applied based on their imperative, impersonal, and intrinsic characteristics. Researchers have found that moral rules can be generalized across contexts, they are obligatory, and they exist independent of rules and authority (Smetana et al., 2014). Field studies show that morality is based on basic judgments about welfare, justice, and rights, which are considered essential and necessary, and that individuals struggle with moral problems in their social lives. A salient feature of moral judgments is that they involve different aspects of moral judgments that often conflict with each other. Within the framework of the social field, it has been argued that the development of morality occurs through children's interrelationships with adults and other children (Turiel, 2002, 2014). According to Social Domain Theory, moral concepts relate to forms of social interaction that are universally applied and that are based on their intrinsic characteristics, such as imperative, impersonal, and consequences for the rights and well-being of others. Researchers have also examined the ways by which people justify and evaluate their social actions. Results have shown that moral justifications include concerns about the harm or welfare, justice, or rights and obligations of others (Smetana et al., 2014).

According to this theory, there are three areas of social knowledge: moral, social conventions, and the personal/ psychological domain. Moral thought develops from actions that lead to the happiness, well-being, and rights of people with whom children interact (Çam et al., 2012). Social conventions are defined as agreed-upon regulations or expectations that regulate social interactions in different social settings. Social customs for children consist of arbitrary rules and standards to which children are expected to conform. (Smetana, 2011). The personal/psychological domain includes situations such as self-understanding, identity, personality, causal attributions, understanding of something, understanding of the reasons for one's own or another person's behaviour. When examining these situations, one of the points that should be taken into consideration is that each of them is part of the psychological field. And this field is the developmental system, which is the third structure and the third conceptual field of social knowledge (Smetana, 2011). The personal/psychological domain includes self-understanding, identity, personality, causal attributions, comprehension, and an acknowledgement of the reasons for one's behavior. Each of these characteristics is an aspect of the psychological domain. (Smetana, 2011). According to domain theory, moral, conventional, and personal domains are separate, selfregulating developmental systems that are not developmentally ordered or hierarchical, and are hypothesized to coexist from early age, although concepts in each domain change qualitatively with age (Lourenço, 2014, pp. 2). The domains constitute different configurations of thinking and developmental changes occur

within each domain. However, decisions in social situational contexts often involve coordination, which is a process of weighing and balancing different and sometimes conflicting considerations. Such social contexts can include conflicts between different moral goals or between moral and societal goals (Turiel & Banas, 2020).

According to Turiel, the development of thought in the field of morality can be explained primarily through socialization processes. The moral or immoral situations that children are exposed to during their interaction with their peers and the actions that lead to negative consequences are effective in their developing a sense of morality. In addition, the conception of ideas related to the field of social conventions mainly occurs with experiences children have in various social environments. Each child becomes intuitively aware that there are traditions unique to different social settings. Cultural context is considered the most important of these social environments. One of the central claims of the model put forward in the Social Domain Theory is that all children growing up in every culture are able to make the distinction between "morality" and "social convention" at an early age. However, social conventions can take quite different forms between cultures (Turiel, 2002; Wainryb and Turiel, 1994; Wainryb, 1993). From this perspective, children's assessments of violations may reflect consideration of the psychological, social, or moral domain. These judgments across domains reflect personal considerations, social convention expectations, and moral considerations. Children's decisions to include or exclude a peer involve complex reasoning within these jurisdictions.

## 1.5 The Current Study

Studies in the literature on inclusion and exclusion have examined gender (Killen et al., 2002; Ortega et al., 2021), special needs (Gasser et al., 2014; Scholes et al., 2017a, b, 2021; Walker et al., 2019) and ethnicity (Cuevas et al., 2014; Wainman et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2019) at Western countries. However, these studies made evaluations in the context of the school and by focusing on certain age groups.

This study differs from others in three aspects. Firstly, it deals specifically with friends, teachers, and parents – three relationships that have a significant place in children's lives. For this reason, this study included parents, friends, and teachers in the questioning. The second unique aspect to this study is that it focuses on different age groups. Researchers have determined that friendship relationships show different characteristics from one age group to another. For example, at the age of six or seven, children exhibit behaviors such as sharing, friendship, and sympathy, as well as competitiveness exhibited through fights and other conflicts.

The third difference is the Turkish sample. As mentioned above, the previous studies are examples from Western culture. Türkiye is known to be the country with the highest number of refugees in recent years (UNICEF, 2023). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2022 data, there are 3.6 million refugees in Türkiye and 47% of them are children (UNHCR, 2022) and they continue their education in general education schools (Akman & Yazıcı, 2022). It is extremely important to determine the reception status of Turkish and refugee children and to intervene if necessary (schools, teachers, policy makers...). This is

because a significant part of the refugees who come to Turkiye have fully settled here and it is important to achieve their social acceptance in order to ensure their social integration. Based on these contexts, a research scenario was created involving a foreign child. Children were asked to make a decision on whether to include or exclude the foreign child from the school. Afterward, research attempted to discern how effective friends, teachers, and parents were in getting each child to change his or her mind on the matter.

The research questions are as follows.

- How do 6, 8, and 12-year-old Turkish children process inclusion and exclusion based on ethnicity?
- Do children view social consensus or authority influence as legitimate reasons to change their mind on including or excluding based on ethnicity?
  - How do children justify their decisions to include or exclude based on ethnicity?

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Research Design

This research was designed as a qualitative study. It aimed to find out whether 6-, 8- and 12-year-old children included or excluded a foreign child who had just joined their class. Phenomenology, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in this study. The basic question in phenomenology is: "What is the meaning, structure and nature of the experience of the person, group or person of the phenomenon being studied?" (Patton, 2002). In this design, a single concept or idea is expressed and the emphasis is on the phenomenon that is being investigated (Creswell, 2013)..

### 2.2 Sample/ Study Group

The first study group of the study consisted of 368 children: 127 aged six (64 girls, 63 boys), 120 eight (62 girls and 58 boys), and 121 twelve (62 girls and 59 boys). The study group was selected from a city in Turkiye with a large refugee population. We selected ten kindergartens, ten primary schools, and ten secondary schools in the study group. All schools are public schools. Refugee children are being educated in each of the selected schools. Criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to select the research group. The criteria used in the selection of the research group are as follows: 1) In addition to Turkish children, there are children from Syria, Iraq and Iran in the schools included in the study group. 2) Only Turkish children were included in the selection of the study group in accordance with the purpose of the research. 3) Care was taken to ensure that there were no refugee children in the classrooms of the children participating in the research. In defining the criteria, care was taken to ensure that the children included in the study were aware of refugee children

but were not friends with them. This ensured that the children were aware of the refugee children and were not friends with them. The children were also asked if they had a refugee friend. None of the children in the study had a refugee friend. Before data collection, principals, teachers, parents, and children provided their permission for the research. During the data collection process, three children in the six- and eight-year-old groups who answered "I don't know" to the first question were not included in the data analysis. The final study group consisted of 359 children: Demographic information about the participants is shown in Table 1.

### 2.3 Data Collection

The researcher collected data through face-to-face interviews. The interviews, which lasted about 15 min each, were audio-recorded and transcribed. During the interview, the children were presented with a scenario (adapted from Walker et al., 2019) in which they had to decide whether to include a child of a different ethnic origin. While creating the scenarios, special attention was paid to the age group of the children. Below are the scenarios and questions presented to the six-year-old age group as an example:

*"Ayşe is in kindergarten. Zehra is a new kid in class. Zehra wants to make new friends, so she asks Ayşe if she will not play with her during circle time. Ayşe does not want to play with Zehra because she speaks a different language and comes from a different country."*

1. *Do you think Ayşe should play with Zehra even if she speaks a different language and comes from a different country?*
2. *Why do you think she should/should not play?*
3. *What if Ayşe's friends do/do not play with Zehra? Do you think she should continue to/not to play with her anyway? Why?*
4. *What if Ayşe's teacher says she should/should not play with Zehra? Do you think she should continue to/not to play with her anyway? Why?*
5. *What if Ayşe's parents say that she should/should not play with Zehra? (Do you think she should continue to/not to play with her anyway? Why?*

The stories and questions were tailored to the children's ages. A finger game was played with 6 and 8 year old children before reading the case study. This was done to focus their attention. Then the following instruction was given to the children: "Now we are going to talk about a child who is the same age as you. Ayşe is very confused about something. "Let's talk about the issue that is confusing Ayşe." Stories and questions were asked. Stories and questions were asked of the group of 12-year-olds, explaining that this was not an exam and that they were curious about their thoughts on the sample situation.



**Table 1** Note: This data is mandatory. Please Provide

	6		8		12	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>Child's gender</b>						
Girl	64	50,39	62	51,67	62	51,24
Boy	63	49,61	58	48,33	59	48,76
Total	127	100	120	100	121	100
<b>Number of siblings</b>						
None	45	35,43	28	23,33	25	20,66
1	43	33,86	51	42,5	62	51,24
2	27	21,26	30	25	24	19,83
3	12	9,45	11	9,17	10	8,27
Total	127	100	120	100	121	100
<b>Sibling order</b>						
1	63	49,60	66	55	57	47,10
2	32	25,20	40	33,33	39	32,23
3	32	25,20	14	11,67	25	20,67
Total	127	100	120	100	121	100
<b>Mother's age</b>						
25–29	22	17,32	9	7,5	-	-
30–34	48	37,80	53	44,17	3	2,48
35–39	35	27,56	28	23,33	45	37,19
40–44	10	7,87	17	14,17	52	42,98
45–49	11	8,67	8	6,67	13	10,74
50 above	1	0,78	5	4,16	8	6,61
Total	127	100	120	100	121	100
<b>Mother's Educational Status</b>						
Primary education	2	1,58	5	4,17	12	9,92
High school	49	38,58	42	35	51	42,15
Associate degree	23	18,11	19	15,83	19	15,70
Bachelor	45	35,43	43	35,83	37	30,58
Postgraduate	8	6,30	11	9,17	2	1,65
Total	127	100	120	100	121	100
<b>Mother's job</b>						
Housewife	54	42,52	50	41,67	50	41,32
Officer	25	19,70	13	10,83	30	24,79
Employee	14	11,03	28	23,33	11	9,09
Teacher	12	9,44	7	5,83	11	9,09
Nurse	11	8,67	12	10	8	6,62
Doctor	4	3,14	-	-	-	-
Other (Engineer, academician, social worker, etc.)	7	5,50	10	8,34	11	9,09
Total	127	100	120	100	121	100

**Table 1** (continued)

	6		8		12	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Father's age						
30–34	21	16,54	5	4,17	-	-
35–39	50	39,37	55	45,83	-	-
40–44	29	22,83	31	25,83	40	33,06
45–49	12	9,45	15	12,5	53	43,80
50 above	15	11,81	14	11,67	28	23,14
Total	127	100	120	100	121	100
Father's educational status						
Primary education	2	1,57	5	4,17	12	9,92
High school	49	38,59	42	35	55	45,46
Associate degree	23	18,11	19	15,83	12	9,92
Bachelor	45	35,43	43	35,83	40	33,05
Postgraduate	8	6,30	11	9,17	2	1,65
Total	127	100	120	100	121	100
Father's job						
Small business	28	22,05	22	18,33	40	33,05
Officer	31	24,41	38	31,68	36	29,75
Employee	30	23,63	22	18,33	18	14,88
Teacher	7	5,51	12	10	8	6,62
Doctor/Dentist	5	3,93	1	0,83	-	-
Academician	4	3,14	-	-	-	-
Engineer	22	17,33	25	20,83	19	15,70
Total	127	100	120	100	121	100

## 2.4 Data Analysis

In reviewing the data, the first and second questions were the priority for analysis. The frequencies of the children who want to play and those who do not want to play are given; then, the answers of the children who want to play and those who do not want to play are provided. These answers were then found in using the classification developed by Killen et al (2002) (see Table 2). This approach to data analysis reflects a process known as template analysis, in which significant categories or themes are developed using existing literature and previous research (deductive coding) and adapted during the analysis process (inductive coding) (King, 2004). Table 2 summarizes the template developed and applied to the children's responses. Categories include moral reasons (prosocial/empathy, inclusion/justice), social-conventional reasons (group functioning, cultural stereotypes/personal characteristics, external influences) and psychological reasons (personal choice, play is conditional). Children's responses were included in the pro-social category when they focused on helping and caring for the refugee children's feelings. If the children focused on human and children's rights (such

**Table 2** Moral Reasoning Justification Categories

Response Category	Definition
Moral justifications	
Prosocial/Empathy	Refers to helping others or caring for others by including them; or refers to feelings of the individual excluded; or to mutual benefit
Inclusion/Fairness	Refers to fairness in treatment of others; individuals have equal rights; or wrongfulness of discrimination based on a person's characteristics; or the consequences of discrimination
Social-conventional justifications	
Group functioning stereotypes	Refers to social expectations and traditions; and the need to make own group function well; including that there are understandings of how you behave with others in a peer group
Cultural stereotypes/ Personal characteristics	Refers to individual by their group membership and its effects; might learn wrong things; difference is a barrier. Refers to personal characteristics such as aggressive behaviour
External influences (peers, teachers, parents)	Refers to peers' opinions on whether or not to reject; or to authority figures' opinions; or to the authority of the school rules or the teacher as an arbiter for what you should do; appeal to an authority to solve the problem
Psychological justifications	
Personal choice	Refers to personal benefit or personal autonomy
Play is conditional	Refers to conditions that must be met before including the other

as Zehra's right to play, she is a human being and we cannot judge her by her language) and being fair, their responses were included in the Inclusion/Justice category. If they gave an example of a situation that they generally do in class / at home / in society (such as being introduced), the answers were included in the category of group functioning. If the children focused on Zehra's language difference, the responses were included in the category of cultural stereotypes/personal characteristics. If the children focused on the requests of their friends/parents/teachers and responded based on their opinions, their responses were included in the External Influences category. If the children saw the situation as an advantage for them (learning a new language, expanding their circle of friends, etc.), their responses were recorded in the category of personal choices. If the children's responses included a precondition (e.g. 'she can play if...'), their responses would be included in the category 'play is conditional', but no responses were found that fell into this category. Two strategies were used to ensure coding consistency. First, the researchers applied 20 interview texts individually and compared the coding. Afterward, the researchers used dialogic reliability checks (Akerlind, 2005), one of the methods used to ensure the reliability of data analysis in interviews, to reach a consensus on coding disagreements (approximately 10%). The

remaining transcripts were then analyzed using the template. Researchers continued dialogical reliability checks as the analysis progressed. In this process, another researcher acting as a referee provided support. The referee was not directly involved in the coding studies.

## 2.5 Results

Whether the children participating in the study would include children of different ethnic origins in their play and the reasons for exclusion are presented below.

When Table 3 is examined, it was determined that 79 (65.29%) children in the six-year-old age groups think that children from different ethnic origins should play with them, while 42 (34.71%) children think they should not play. When looking at the age of eight, 96 (82.05%) children believe they should be played with and 21 (17.95%) think they should not be. In the 12-year-old group, 113 (93.39%) children believe they should play together, and eight (6.61%) children think otherwise. The children's answers were classified based on the work of Killen et al., (2002), and can be noted in Table 3.

Table 4 shows that 126 different answers were given in the six-year-old group from a total of 121 children. Seventy-eight (61.90%) answers belonged to the "Moral justifications" category. In this category, 50 (39.68%) children's answers were related to "Prosocial/Empathy," while 28 (22.22%) answers were related to "Inclusion/Fairness." The answers of 37 children (29.37%) were in the "Social-conventional justifications" category. In this category, two (1.59%) answers are "Group functioning stereotypes," 32 (25.40%) "Cultural stereotypes/Personal characteristics," and three (2.38%) "External influences." The answer of 11 children was about "Psychological justifications." In this category, all (8.73%) answers are related to "Personal choice".

Below are sample answers related to these areas.

"Because if Zehra is left alone, she might get bored and upset." (Prosocial/empathy-would play. He refers to the feelings of the refugee child)

"Because she is a kid too, she should play with us." (Inclusion/fairness-would play. She thinks that since she is a child, she should play games too. She believes that play is the right of every child.)

**Table 3** Children's Inclusion/Exclusion of Children of Different Ethnic Origins from Their Games

Answers	f (age 6)	%(age 6)	f (age 8)	%(age 8)	f (age 12)	%(age12)
Play	86	71,07	96	82,05	113	93,39
Not play	35	28,93	21	17,95	8	6,61
Total	121	100	117	100	121	100

**Table 4** Categories of Children's Answers

Response Category	Definition	Age 6		Age 8		Age 12	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Moral justifications							
Prosocial/Empathy	Refers to helping others or caring for others by including them; or refers to feelings of the individual excluded; or to mutual benefit	50	39,68	78	56,52	50	34,96
Inclusion/Fairness	Refers to fairness in treatment of others; individuals have equal rights; or wrongfulness of discrimination based on a person's characteristics; or the consequences of discrimination	28	22,22	23	16,67	52	36,36
Social-conventional justifications							
Group functioning stereotypes	Refers to social expectations and traditions; and the need to make own group function well; including that there are understandings of how you behave with others in a peer group	2	1,59				
Cultural stereotypes/Personal characteristics	Refers to individual by their group membership, and its effects; might learn wrong things; difference is a barrier. Refers to personal characteristics such as aggressive behaviour	32	25,40	23	16,67	8	5,60
External influences (peers, teachers, parents)	Refers to peers' opinions on whether or not to reject; or to authority figures' opinions; or to the authority of the school rules or the teacher as an arbiter for what you should do; appeal to an authority to solve the problem	3	2,38				
Psychological justifications							
Personal choice	Refers to personal benefit or personal autonomy	11	8,73	14	10,14	33	23,08
Play is conditional	Refers to conditions that must be met before including the other	126	100	138	100	143	100

"Because our teacher introduces the new children to the class first, and then we play together." (Group functioning stereotypes- would play. Emphasizes the traditions of the class as a social environment).

"Because she is a foreigner, she does not speak the same language as we do." (Cultural stereotypes/Personal characteristics would not play. She thinks speaking a different language is an obstacle.)

"My mom will not let me play." (External influences- would not play. She takes into account the opinion of the authority.)

"I can learn her language, too." (Personal choice- would play. Focuses on a personal benefit – learning a new language)

All in all, 138 different answers were given in the eight-year-old age group, from a total of 117 children. One-hundred-one answers (73,19%) were in this age group's "Moral justifications" category. In this category, the answers of 78 (56.52%) children were related to "Prosocial/Empathy," while the answers of 23 (16.67%) children were related to "Inclusion/Fairness". The answers of 23 children (16.67%) were in the category of "Socialconventional justifications." All answers in this category were related to "Cultural stereotypes/Personal characteristics." The answer of 14 (10.14%) children in the eight-yearold group was in regard to "Psychological justifications." All answers in this category are about "Personal choice." Below are sample answers related to these areas.

"We have to help her as she has just arrived." (Prosocial/empathy- would play. She emphasizes helping)

"We should not discriminate, no matter what language she speaks." (Inclusion/fairness- would play. It emphasizes non-discrimination.)

"We can't get along because she speaks a different language." (Cultural stereotypes/Personal characteristics- would play)

"Thanks to Zehra, I can learn a new language." (Personal choice- would play. Focuses on a personal benefit – learning a new language)

A total of 143 different answers were given in the 12-year-old age group, from 121 different children. One-hundred-two answers (73.19%) were in this age group's "Moral justifications" category. In this category, 50 (34.96%) children's answers were about "Prosocial/Empathy," while 52 (36.36%) children's answers were about "Inclusion/Fairness." Eight children (5.60%) answered in the "Social-conventional justifications" category. All answers in this category are related to "Cultural stereotypes/Personal characteristics". The answer of 33 (23.08%) children in the 12-year-old group was in regard to "Psychological justifications." All answers in this category are about "Personal choice." Below are sample answers related to these areas.

"If they play, Zehra's harmony becomes easier." (Prosocial/empathy- would play. Refers caring for others by including them)

"Because she is also a human. Just because she speaks another language and comes from another country, should not mean she is to be excluded. We have to empathize." (Inclusion/fairness- would play. It emphasizes equality.)

"Because she speaks a different language. They can not play, because they don't understand each other." (Cultural stereotypes/Personal characteristics-would not play. She thinks speaking a different language is an obstacle.)  
 "They should see this as an opportunity and learn the language Zehra speaks." (Personal choice- would play. Focuses on a personal benefit – learning a new language)

Table 5 shows whether children change their minds at the request of friends, teachers, and parents. It is shown that 27 (22.32%) 6-year-olds, 19 (16.23) 8-year-olds, and six (4.96%) 12-year-olds changed their minds when their friends asked. Examples of this subject are presented below.

"If Ayşe's friends can play, then she can play." (6 years old, she thought she should not play first. She changed her opinion.)  
 "She should keep playing, because they are both kids. They can teach each other good games. (6 years old, he thought she should play. He did not change his opinion.).  
 "I tell my friends that Zehra is a good person, and I involve them in the game. (8 years old, he thought she should play. He did not change his opinion.).  
 "Still cannot understand what to say." (8 years old, she thought she shouldn't play. She did not change his opinion.).

When Table 5 is examined, it was seen that 55 (45.45%) 6-year-olds, 58 (49.57%) 8-year-olds, and 31 (25.62) 12-year-olds changed their minds when their teachers asked. 71 (58.68%) 6-year-olds, 68 (58.12%) 8-year-olds, and 33 (27.27%) 12-year-olds changed their minds when their parents asked. Examples of this are presented below. As for when the teacher gets involved, 55 (45.45%) 6-year-olds, 58 (49.57%) 8-year-olds, and 31 (25.62%) 12-year-olds changed their minds. Examples from these children are also given.

"If the teacher wants, she thinks she is a good guy and plays it." (6 years old, thought she should not play. She changed her opinion)

**Table 5** Children's Situations where Their Friends/Teachers/Parents Want to Change Their Minds

Answers	Peer (6–8-12)		Teacher (6–8-12)		Parent (6–8-12)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Play	74/88/109	61.16/75.21/90.08	57/73/88	47.10/62.39/72.73	45/60/83	37.19/51.28/68.60
Not play	41/29/12	33.89/24.79/9.92	60/44/33	49.59/37.61/27.27	74/57/38	61.16/58.72/31.40
Unstable	6/0/0	4.95/0/0	4/0/0	3.31/0/0	2/0/0	1.65/0/0
Total	121/117/121	100/100/100	121/117/121	100/100/100	121/117/121	100/100/100
Change decision						
Yes	27/19/6	22.32/16.23/4.96	55/58/31	45.45/49.57/25.62	71/68/33	58.68/58.12/27.27
No	88/98/115	72.73/83.77/95.04	62/59/90	51.24/50.43/74.38	48/49/88	39.67/41.88/72.73
Unstable	6/0/0	4.95/0/0	4/0/0	3.31/0/0	2/0/0	1.65/0/0
Total	121/117/121	100/100/100	121/117/121	100/100/100	121/117/121	100/100/100

"The teacher would not say such a thing!" (6 years old, thought she should play. She didn't change her opinion)

"Do not play if the teacher does not want it; then she might get angry." (8 years old, he thought she should play. He changed his opinion)

"I think she should still play; Zehra should not be alone." (8 years old, thought she should play. She didn't change her opinion)

"Let her not change her mind and keep playing." (12 years old, she thought she should play. She didn't change her opinion)

When Table 5 is examined, it was seen that 71 (58.68%) of 6-year-olds, 68 (58.12%) of 8-year-olds, and 33 (27.27%) of 12-year-olds changed their minds when their parents asked. Examples of this subject are presented below.

"If Ayşe wants to play, let her play." (6 years old, thought she should play. She didn't change her opinion)

"Ayşe should tell her mother that Zehra does not know their games." (6 years old, she thought she should not play. She didn't change her opinion)

"Ayşe should listen to her mother and play with her other friends." (6 years old she thought she should play. She changed her opinion)

"Let her play if her parents want it." (8 years old, he thought she should not play. He changed his opinion)

"Zehra should not be alone; let her keep playing." (8 years old, he thought she should play. He didn't change his opinion)

"Her own decision, let her continue if she wants to play." (12 years old, he thought she should play. He didn't change his opinion)

"Maybe her parents do not want her to talk to strangers. So she shouldn't play and her family shouldn't worry." (12 years old, she thought she should play. She changed her opinion)

## 2.6 Discussion

This study aimed to determine how the judgments of six-, eight-, and 12-year-olds regarding the inclusion of a child of a different ethnic origin may be formed. The area of analysis had to do with interpersonal characteristics that may be interrelated or mediated by the social context of the family, the social context of the school, and perceived group norms. For this purpose, scenarios were created by age groups, and questions were asked of the children. Two factors were considered when selecting the children to study. Schools where refugee children were studying were selected so that the children participating in the study would be aware of refugee children. However, care was taken to ensure that they were not friends/in the same class as these children. This is because children may give biased answers due to peer relationships in their classrooms. This helped to obtain more reliable responses by ensuring that the children were both aware of the refugee children and that there was no relationship between them.

As a result of the analysis, it was found that 71% of the children in the six-year-old group, 82% of the eight-year-olds, and 93% of the 12-year-olds believed that



children of different ethnic origins should be included in the games. A review of the literature has found that behaviour is more important to children than ethnicity (McGlothlin et al., 2005), and that they find exclusion morally wrong (Mulvey, 2016). As the age of the children increases, the acceptance rate of children speaking different languages increases. The reason for this is thought to be the developmental characteristics of children. When the relevant literature is examined, Crystal et al. (2008), Killen and Stangor, (2001), Killen et al., (2002), Wainman et al., (2012), and Walker et al., (2019) assert that the majority of children think that children from different ethnic backgrounds should be included in play time. When the reasons for including children from different ethnic origins were examined, it was determined that the answers of most of the children in all age groups were in the "Moral justifications" category. The answers of the 12-year-old groups are the most inclusive. This may be because these children are in the abstract operational stage. In this period, children's interest in social issues increases and they have a greater awareness of taking responsibility for these issues.

It can be said that the answers of the children in this period tend to belong to the category of "Moral justifications". Walker et al., (2019) also determined in their research with children aged six and seven that children's answers were mostly in the "Moral justifications" category. Similarly, Scholes et al., (2017a, b) found that children's responses fell into the 'moral justification' category. However, Killen et al., (2002) conducted a similar study with 294 children aged 9- 18, and it was determined that the majority of the answers were in the categories of "Social Conventional Justifications" and "Psychological Justifications". This variation in the children's answers is due to the time difference. When the sub-categories of the answers of the children participating in our study are examined, it was noted that the answers of the children in the six- and eight-year-old groups were mainly in the "Prosocial/Empathy" sub-category, while the answers of the twelve-year-old children belonged to the "Inclusion/Fairness" subcategory. The answers given in the "Psychological Justifications" category are mainly in the "Personal Choice" sub-category. It has been determined that the focus of all age groups here is that the children think Ayşe can learn a new language when she becomes friends with Zehra. When the "Social Conventional Justifications" category is examined, there are only two answers from this group that fall under the "Group functioning stereotypes" sub-category. The children stated that the teacher would introduce the new child and tell them to play.

It was determined that all the answers of the eight- and twelve-year-old children who thought that Zehra should not be included in the game were in the "Cultural stereotypes/Personal characteristics" sub-category. The answers of the six-year-old group were mostly classified this way as well. It seems that the answers of the children who think that Zehra should not be included in the game are generally related to the language barrier. There are several factors that cause a language barrier. First of all, refugee parents do not want their children to learn Turkish (Boylu & Işık, 2019). However, research has shown (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015) that knowing the language of the country in which refugee children are currently living helps to increase their confidence and well-being. Refugee families, who see Türkiye as a temporary place, do not consider it important for their children to learn Turkish. However, the language barrier also negatively affected refugee children's participation and

adaptation in activities (Özoruç and Sığırtaç, 2022). For this reason, children may have perceived speaking a different language as an obstacle. Furthermore, a survey conducted in 2016 found that 56 per cent of Turkish parents did not want their children to make friends with refugees. Parents' warnings to their children may also be a factor. Finally, refugee children first learned Arabic in temporary education centres set up in the camps prepared for them. Subsequently, the Ministry of National Education (MONE) established the Department of Immigration and Emergency Education, taking into account the idea that refugees could be permanent. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education changed its perspective and decided to close the temporary education centres and include Syrian children in the Ministry of Education curriculum. However, as mentioned above, integration could not be fully realised due to the language problem. For all these reasons, the children may have thought that Zehra should not be included in the game.

Acceptance of refugee children is important economically, socially and culturally. As mentioned above, in order for an individual to live in peace and tranquillity, acceptance by that society is essential. For this reason, it is extremely important to intervene in the acceptance of refugees and their adaptation to society. Undoubtedly, early intervention programmes have been very successful in this regard. A review of the literature has shown that intervention programmes implemented for refugees have reduced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Kataoka et al., 2003; Tyrer & Fazel, 2014), children's social-emotional development (Kardeş, 2018) and language development (Kupzyk et al., 2016; Kardeş; Sirin et al., 2018) and peer relationships (Tyrer & Fazel, 2014). These findings can predict that refugee children will receive less rehabilitation support in the years to come, that they will adapt more easily to society and that they will benefit society both socially and economically. It is therefore extremely important for policymakers to invest in these children now in order to reap future economic benefits. This situation is also important for the development of bilateral relations between countries. It can be said that the Turkish Government has done its part to help make this happen. The Turkish government is cooperating with other countries and doing its best to ensure that refugee children attend school, provide shelter and social support for families. In particular, it quickly issued circulars so that refugee children could be educated with their peers as soon as possible. Playrooms for these children have also been opened in communities where there are large numbers of refugees in Türkiye, with the support of UNICEF.

However, it was determined that three answers in the six-year-old age group were in the "External influences" sub-category. Similarly, Walker et al., (2019) determined that they did not include different ethnic origins because of their ethnic origin and personal characteristics. Wainman et al., (2012), on the other hand, stated that the answers of the children who did not want to include a child of a different ethnic origin in the game could not be categorized.

Bandura stated that interaction with other people is important for moral development (Caravita et al., 2014). Children's social experiences play an important role in making judgments about exclusion. Wang et al. (2021) found that friendship is a moderator of moral identity. Social consensus (peers) could influence children's decisions about whether to include or exclude others in their play. According to Killen et al., (2002), taking a socialcognitive domain perspective would suggest that

social consensus may be relevant for transgressions perceived as social-conventional but not moral (quoted Walker et al., 2019, pp.14). For this reason, the children participating in the research were asked whether they would change their minds if their peers asked. When the six-, eight-, and 12-year-old children were asked whether they would change their minds if they wanted to make decisions, it was determined that 22% of the children in the six-year-old group, 16% of the eight-year-olds, and 5% of the 12-year-olds thought that Ayşe should change her mind if her friends insisted. When the literature is examined, it is seen that there is a relationship between in-group inclusion and in-group norms, but there is no relationship between exclusion and in-group norms (Tropp et al., 2014). Walker et al., (2019) declared that approximately 14% of children between the ages of 6–7 change their minds if their friends ask. Similarly, Wainman et al., (2012) found that the majority of children aged 5–8 did not change their minds. Considering that the sharing and sympathy behaviors of children between 6–7 are important, it is expected that similar results will be obtained in our study and other studies. The answers of the children who think that Zehra should be included are mainly in the category of "Moral justifications."

In the study, teachers and parents, authority figures in the child's life, were also asked whether they would change their minds when asked. It was determined that 45% of the children in the 6-year-old group, 49% of the children in the eight-year-old group, and 25% of the children in the twelve-year-old group thought that Ayşe should change her mind if teacher asked her for changing her decision. A study published in 2011 by Moller and Tenenbaum found that children found it acceptable for teachers to exclude children on the basis of their ethnicity. Walker et al., (2019) determined that 32% of the children thought that the child should change his mind if the teacher asked. In the study conducted by Wainman et al., (2012), it was determined that 27% of the children thought that the child should change his or her mind if the teacher made such a request. In the 12-year-old group, a similar result was observed in other studies.

When the children were asked whether Ayşe should change her mind if their parents asked, it was determined that 59% of the children in the six-year-old group, 58% of the children in the eight-year-old group, and 27% of the children in the 12-year-old group thought that Ayşe should change her mind. According to the results of a survey conducted in Turkiye in 2016, 56 per cent of Turkish parents do not want their children to be friends with refugee children. Exposing children to discriminatory language against refugee children at home may have been effective in changing their minds.

### 3 Conclusion and Recommendations

According to Smetana, (2011), people are constantly interacting in daily social life. And consequently, they are exposed to a bombardment of information regarding social structure. People who come face to face with rules and different regulations in social interaction will inevitably violate them from time to time. Children have a differentiated and systematic idea of their social world. It is defined by three organized systems or domains of social knowledge: morality, social tradition, and

personal. As a result of the research, it was determined that six-, eight-, and 12-year-old children thought that children from different ethnic origins should be included in play time. Answers of those who believed they should be included tended toward the field of "Moral justifications." It can be seen that the responses of the children who think they should not play are in the area of 'cultural stereotypes/personal characteristics'. It can be seen that the children who think they should not play focus on the language barrier. As mentioned in the discussion section, refugee families do not want their children to speak Turkish. The main reason for this is that they do not want their children to forget their mother tongue. It is well known that German immigrants to America established German-American schools so that their children would not forget German. It is normal for people who immigrate to different countries to want to preserve their language and culture. However, in order to communicate in the country they are going to, it is essential for them to learn the language of that country. This is especially true for children. It hinders peer relationships. Although the Turkish government takes the necessary precautions for refugee children to be educated in mainstream schools, Turkish language education for these children and their families is not at the desired level. However, this situation can be prevented through cooperation with the EU Delegation to Turkiye and educational programmes prepared by the Ministry of National Education. Transitional efforts continue. However, this process is considered to be a two-way process. Research shows that young children in particular change their minds when asked by teachers and parents. As mentioned above, 56% of Turkish families do not want their children to make friends with refugees. For this reason, it is felt that not only refugee children and their families, but also Turkish children and their families should be included in the programmes. The Ministry of National Education provides training for teachers. However, Turkish families have not been involved in this process. Therefore, not only they and teachers, but also Turkish children and their families should be involved in the adaptation of refugees. As will be seen in the next paragraph, parents have been shown to have a greater influence on children and to change more children's minds when they want to.

When children were asked whether they would change their minds more based on input from peers, teachers, and parents, this study found that children change their minds more often when a teacher requests it compared to what has been recorded in previous (e.g., Walker et al., 2019) studies. Again, in this study, parents appear as more influential authority figures in changing their ideas. Does the development in morality, tradition, and personal fields follow a parallel course in every society and culture at similar ages and in similar ways? The question is one of the topics of discussion for theory. This study certainly revealed some interesting differences in the context of authority figures in Turkiye, a nation situated in the overlap between eastern and western culture.

The following recommendations can be made as a result of the research.

- As a result of the research, it was seen that especially six-year-old children change their minds when their peers/teachers or their parents demand it. For this reason, early intervention programs for young children and families can be prepared. It is thought that realizing the social acceptance of refugees is important for a sustainable and peaceful society.

In the research conducted by Istanbul Bilgi University Child Studies Unit (2015), in order to make life easier for refugee children, it was stated that language barriers should be removed, cooperation between official institutions and organisations should be increased and institutions should be supported, teachers should be supported, social acceptance should be increased and school-family relations should be supported. As mentioned above, children most often changed their minds when their parents wanted them to. It is therefore considered important for sustainability that policy-makers emphasise adult education in order to fully integrate refugees into society.

-The United Nations Development Goals for 2030 include the article "Achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for all and provide lifelong learning opportunities for all". In this context, it is extremely important for teachers to demonstrate an understanding of education that is sensitive to multiculturalism. When the responses were examined, almost half of the children aged 6 and 8 changed their minds when asked by their teachers. Teachers can focus more on multiculturalism and respect for differences in their classrooms. Children can see that their teacher agrees. They can also accept it more easily.

-This study looked at children who were refugee children in their schools but did not have refugee children in their classes. In future studies, children who will be refugee children can be studied in their classrooms. In this way, children's opinions can be obtained without meeting refugee children and their behaviour towards refugee children in the classroom can be studied.

#### 4 Limitations and Future Research

-This research is descriptive. In future studies, quantitative or mixed studies can be conducted by adding different variables (teaching styles, parental attitudes, etc.). In this way, changes in children's attitudes can be examined according to variables (peers, parents and teachers) and age.

-In this study, only one scenario was presented to the children, and then five questions were asked. In future research, it is possible to benefit from observation along with scenarios and questions by working with children of different ethnic origins in the classroom.

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