

Challenges Faced by Migrant Girls in Accessing Education: A Systematic Literature Review of Studies Indexed in Web of Science

Nur Özdemir |  0000-0003-0285-8222 |  nurrozdeemiir@gmail.com

Independent Researcher, Konya, Türkiye

Abstract

Migration is a social process that affects individuals' lives in many ways. Migrant girls, one of the groups most affected by this process, face gender-based disadvantages in addition to the experience of migration. This study aims to analyse the challenges migrant girls face in accessing education through a systematic literature review, based on predefined criteria and drawing on research available in the Web of Science database. Within the scope of the research, 33 articles published between 2015 and 3 June 2026 that met the specified inclusion criteria were analysed. The study employed document analysis within a qualitative research framework. The findings indicate that multidimensional barriers shape migrant girls' educational experiences. The most frequently highlighted problem areas in the examined studies were identified as language barriers, difficulties with cultural adaptation, discrimination and social exclusion, gender-based inequalities, economic deprivation, psychosocial risks and early marriage. Furthermore, it was observed that digital inequalities emerging during periods of crisis and increased domestic responsibilities negatively affect migrant girls' access to education and their retention in education. Consequently, it has been understood that migrant girls' educational experiences are not limited to academic processes alone; they are significantly influenced by the social, cultural, economic and psychological factors that arise at the intersection of migration status and gender. Therefore, it is necessary to develop comprehensive and inclusive policies to support migrant girls' access to education and continuity in education.

Keywords

Migration, Education, Migrant Girls, Gender, Systematic Review

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Göçmen Kız Çocuklarının Eğitime Erişimde Karşılaştıkları Zorluklar: Web of Science Kapsamındaki Çalışmaların Sistematik Bir Literatür İncelemesi

Nur Özdemir |  0000-0003-0285-8222 |  nurozdemiir@gmail.com

Bağımsız Araştırmacı, Konya, Türkiye

Öz

Göç, bireylerin yaşamlarını çok boyutlu biçimde etkileyen toplumsal bir süreçtir. Bu süreçten en fazla etkilenen gruplardan biri olan göçmen kız çocukları, göçmenlik deneyimine ek olarak toplumsal cinsiyet temelli dezavantajlarla karşı karşıya kalmaktadır. Bu çalışma, göçmen kız çocuklarının eğitime erişiminde karşılaştıkları sorunları Web of Science veri tabanında yer alan araştırmalar üzerinden önceden belirlenen ölçütler doğrultusunda sistematik bir literatür incelemesi yaklaşımıyla analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Araştırma kapsamında, 2015–03 Haziran 2026 tarihleri arasında yayımlanan ve belirlenen dâhil edilme ölçütlerini karşılayan 33 makale analiz edilmiştir. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yaklaşımı kapsamında doküman analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bulgular, göçmen kız çocuklarının eğitim deneyimlerinin çok boyutlu engeller tarafından şekillendiğini göstermektedir. İncelenen çalışmalarda en sık vurgulanan sorun alanlarının dil engelleri, kültürel uyum güçlükleri, ayrımcılık ve sosyal dışlanma, toplumsal cinsiyet temelli eşitsizlikler, ekonomik yetersizlikler, psikososyal riskler ve erken yaşta evlilik olduğu belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca kriz dönemlerinde ortaya çıkan dijital eşitsizliklerin ve artan ev içi sorumlulukların, göçmen kız çocuklarının eğitime erişimini ve eğitimde kalma durumlarını olumsuz etkilediği görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak, göçmen kız çocuklarının eğitim deneyimlerinin yalnızca akademik süreçlerle sınırlı olmadığı; göçmenlik statüsü ile toplumsal cinsiyetin kesişiminde ortaya çıkan sosyal, kültürel, ekonomik ve psikolojik etkenlerden önemli ölçüde etkilendiği anlaşılmıştır. Bu nedenle, göçmen kız çocuklarının eğitime erişimlerini ve eğitimde sürekliliklerini desteklemeye yönelik bütüncül ve kapsayıcı politikaların geliştirilmesi gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Göç, Eğitim, Göçmen Kız Çocukları, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Sistematik İnceleme

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Introduction

Migration, as a sociological phenomenon, refers to the movement of individuals from one place to another for various reasons, including war, economic hardship, educational opportunities, natural disasters, and other factors. This process affects not only the migrants themselves but also the sending and receiving communities in multifaceted ways.¹ Migrant children, who are particularly regarded as belonging to vulnerable, at-risk or disadvantaged groups, experience the effects of the migration process more profoundly. These children face significant challenges, including psychosocial, linguistic, and cultural adjustment.²

Education, whilst being a fundamental right that enables migrant individuals to participate in social life, also plays a crucial role in fostering social adaptation and social integration. However, access to education in the context of migration encompasses not only physical inclusion within the school system but also access to quality learning environments, the development of a sense of belonging, and the continuity of the educational process. Furthermore, various factors, such as age, gender, and socio-economic conditions, shape individuals' educational experiences in different ways. In this context, it is evident that certain groups among migrant children are at greater risk in terms of access to education and educational retention.

Among migrant children, migrant girls find themselves in a more vulnerable position as they experience both the disadvantages arising from the migration experience and gender-based inequalities simultaneously. This disadvantageous situation can adversely affect their access to education, school attendance, and academic achievement. The literature highlights that the barriers migrant girls face in their educational journeys are multifaceted; factors such as language barriers, difficulties with cultural adaptation, discrimination and social exclusion, economic deprivation, early marriage, and increased domestic responsibilities are emphasised as directly shaping this process. For this reason, the educational experiences of migrant girls must be addressed not only in terms of academic outcomes but also by incorporating their social, cultural, and structural dimensions.

This study aims to identify key problem areas highlighted in the literature by examining research on migrant girls' access to education in the Web of Science database, using defined criteria. In this context, the study aims to thematically classify the fundamental barriers migrant girls face in their educational processes and to systematically evaluate current research trends.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What methods were used to investigate the problems faced by migrant female students in their educational journey?

¹ Gürcan Şevket Avcioğlu, "Türkiye'de Akademik Göç Çalışmaları: Göç Literatürü Taraması", *NOSYON: Uluslararası Toplum ve Kültür Çalışmaları Dergisi* 4 (2020), 77.

² Başak Düzel- Sıla Alış, "Türkiye'de Uluslararası Düzensiz Göç Gerçeğinde Refakatsiz Göçmen Çocukların Durumu ve Başlıca Risklerin Değerlendirilmesi", *Asia Minor Studies* 6/AGP Sempozyum Özel Sayısı 1 (2018), 267.

2. What problems faced by migrant female students in their educational journey have been investigated in the literature?

3. What are the factors contributing to school dropout among migrant girls, as identified in the literature?

1. Theoretical framework

Throughout history, individuals and communities have migrated from their homes to different regions for various reasons, including economic, social, political, geographical, and environmental factors, as well as wars, natural disasters, and security issues. In this respect, migration is recognised as one of the oldest social phenomena in human history. Migration is the process by which individuals relocate from their place of residence to another location due to economic, political, or environmental factors. This relocation can occur at both the international and domestic levels.³ Similarly, migration is defined as a social and cultural process of relocation that encompasses the movement of individuals or communities to another settlement area, either temporarily or permanently, influenced by economic, political, environmental, and personal factors.⁴ From a sociological perspective, migration is regarded not merely as a spatial movement but also as a significant indicator of social mobility and social change.⁵ In this context, the sociology of migration seeks to explain the underlying causes of migration, migrants' adaptation processes, and the transformations migration brings about in both source and destination societies. From a social perspective, migration is a significant phenomenon that brings together geographically and culturally distinct communities and fosters mutual interaction.⁶ This process of interaction can, in some cases, yield positive outcomes that support integration and cohesion, whilst in others it may lead to tensions and othering due to socio-cultural differences. In this context, migrant children are among the groups most adversely affected by the migration process, and it is observed that these children face various negative consequences both physically and psychologically.⁷

The multidimensional effects of the migration process on migrant children are particularly evident in education. In a sociological context, education, as a universal social institution, helps ensure the continuity of society and transmits social norms, values, and behavioural patterns to new generations.⁸ However, when migrant children enter the education system, they may face various challenges, including language barriers, unfamiliarity with

³ Yusuf Adıgüzel, *Göç Sosyolojisi* (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2024).

⁴ Cemal Yalçın, *Göç Sosyolojisi* (Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık, 2004).

⁵ Halis Başel, *Sosyal Politika Açısından İç Göçler: Sivas'tan İstanbul'a Göç Örneği* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2003).

⁶ Mim Sertaç Tümtaş - Cem Ergun, "Göçün Toplumsal ve Mekânsal Yapı Üzerindeki Etkileri", *Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi* 21/4 (2016), 1347-1359.

⁷ Selda Polat- Nurdan Evliyaoğlu, "Göçmen Çocuklar", *Türkiye Klinikleri Pediatrik Bilimler* 4/6 (2008), 52-55.

⁸ Nevin Güngör Ergun, "Eğitim", *Sosyoloji*, ed. Esra Ebru Sağlam vd. (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2018), 294-320.

the education system, discrimination, and difficulties in adapting.⁹ In particular, the losses and traumatic experiences encountered during the forced migration process can negatively affect children's educational and social adaptation processes. Furthermore, parents' low socio-economic status and limited proficiency in the host country's language make it difficult for children to participate in educational processes and to adapt to school.¹⁰ This situation hinders migrant students' equal access to educational opportunities and may lead to a deepening of educational inequality. Consequently, migrant children are considered to be among the disadvantaged groups in terms of academic achievement, school adjustment, and access to educational opportunities. In particular, disadvantages such as forced migration, poverty, and social exclusion further hinder girls' access to education and place them in a more vulnerable position within educational processes.¹¹

Gender emerges as a key explanatory factor in understanding the educational experiences of migrant girls. Individuals sustain their lives by conforming to the roles, attitudes, behaviours, and norms defined by the societies in which they live. In this context, societies assign different roles to women and men and expect individuals to exhibit behaviours consistent with these roles. The concept of gender also highlights the differences in the social roles and behavioural patterns attributed to women and men.¹² When the relationship between migration and education is assessed from a gender perspective, it becomes apparent that the negative effects of the migration process on girls are more pronounced. Migrant girls face not only the disadvantages arising from their migrant status but also gender-based inequalities. Gender-based barriers such as families' attitudes towards education, domestic responsibilities, care obligations, and early marriage can hinder girls' access to education and their ability to continue their educational journey.¹³

The educational experiences of migrant girls cannot be explained solely by gender-based inequalities. Social exclusion, discrimination, and cultural differences are also key factors affecting these students' educational journeys. The concept of social exclusion refers to individuals being deprived of social interaction, marginalised, and facing difficulties in social integration due to social, economic, and cultural differences within the society in which they live.¹⁴ Social exclusion can weaken migrant girls' sense of belonging in the school environment and negatively affect their participation in educational processes.

⁹ Âdem Doğan- Aylin Avcıoğlu, "Kapsayıcı Eğitimin Yadsınamaz Gerçeği: Göçmen Çocukların Eğitim Sorunlarının İncelenmesi", *Van Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* 19/3 (2022), 987-1015.

¹⁰ Hüseyin Buğra Karaman-Sefa Bulut, "Göçmen Çocuk ve Ergenlerin Eğitim Engelleri, Psikolojik Sorunları ve Çözüm Önerileri Üzerine Bir Araştırma", *Sosyal Politika Çalışmaları Dergisi* (2018), 393-412.

¹¹ Fevziye Sayılan, *Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Eğitim: Olanaklar ve Sınırları* (Ankara: Dipnot Yayınları, 2012).

¹² Robert William Connell, *Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve İktidar* (İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 2017).

¹³ Marianne Hattar-Pollara, "Barriers to Education of Syrian Refugee Girls in Jordan: Gender-Based Threats and Challenges", *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 51/3 (2019), 241-251; Promise Zvavahera vd. "Gendered Barriers to Education for Refugee Girls in Tongogara Camp, Zimbabwe", *Perspectives in Education* 43/2 (2025), 69-83.

¹⁴ Saniye Dedeoğlu-Çisel Ekiz Gökmen, *Göç ve Sosyal Dışlanma* (Ankara: Eflatun Basım Dağıtım Yayıncılık, 2011); Çağlar Solak- Mert Teközel, "Sosyal Dışlanma Olgusu Üzerine Genel Bir İnceleme", *Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 17/4 (2019), 293-315.

In particular, language differences, cultural adaptation issues, discriminatory attitudes, the burden of domestic chores, and early marriage render migrant girls' educational experiences more vulnerable. Consequently, social exclusion and discrimination are regarded as one of the key barriers to migrant girls' access to education.

Although there are numerous studies in literature addressing the educational experiences of migrant children, it is evident that there are only a limited number of studies that comprehensively assess the challenges faced by migrant girls in accessing education using a systematic literature review methodology. Whilst existing research largely focuses on specific countries, sample groups, or individual problem areas, there remains a need for synthesis studies that address the educational experiences of migrant girls in a multidimensional manner. In this context, the key problem areas highlighted in the existing literature are summarized in Table 1, and the present study aims to evaluate these themes comprehensively using a systematic approach.

Table 1. Issues Encountered in Migrant Girls' Access to Education in the Literature

Factor	Effect
Language barrier	Difficulty in understanding lessons/lectures, adaptation problems
Poverty / financial pressure	Child labour, inability to cover school expenses
Early marriage	Early school dropout, registration/ID issues
Domestic workload	Absenteeism, limited time for homework/studying
Safety and risk of harassment	Families keep girls at home, restricting access to school

2. Method

This study was designed as a systematic literature review, conducted in accordance with predefined search and inclusion criteria, to identify the challenges migrant girls face in accessing education. Systematic reviews are research methods that involve searching for, evaluating, and synthesising existing research on a specific topic in accordance with predefined criteria.¹⁵ Systematic reviews contribute to the comprehensive evaluation of the existing body of knowledge, the identification of research trends, and the determination of knowledge gaps in the literature.¹⁶

¹⁵ Mark Petticrew - Helen Roberts, *Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide* (John Wiley & Sons, 2008).

¹⁶ Toby Lasserson et al., «Searching for and Selecting Studies.» *Cochrane handbook for systematic Reviews of Interventions* (2019), 67–107.

This systematic literature review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, which were developed to ensure that systematic reviews are reported transparently and in a standardized manner (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA 2020 flowchart was used as the basis for the processes of identifying, screening, assessing eligibility, and including studies in the analysis.

Within the scope of this study, research studies in the Web of Science database that met the specified criteria were examined to identify emerging trends and problem areas in the literature regarding migrant and refugee girls’ access to education.

2.1. Data Source and Search Strategy

The Web of Science Core Collection is a reliable database that comprehensively indexes high-quality scientific publications across various disciplines and is widely used globally. For this reason, a systematic literature review was carried out using the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection database as part of this study. The search was based on the subject field (TS: Topic) filter, and studies on the educational processes of these groups were targeted using the keywords “refugee girl”, “migrant girl”, “immigrant girl” and “refugee female student”. In this context, the concept of education was expanded to include the terms “education”, “school*”, “schooling”, “educational access” and “educational attainment”. The research was limited to the period from 2015 to 3 June 2026; only articles were considered. To strengthen the study’s disciplinary focus, publications in the “Education and Educational Research”, “Sociology”, “Social Work”, “Political Science”, “Migration Studies”, and “International Relations” categories were filtered. Furthermore, only studies published in English were included in the sample. The dataset obtained in accordance with these criteria enabled a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the academic literature on the educational experiences of refugee, migrant, and asylum-seeking girls. The search strategies used are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Search Strategy and Inclusion Criteria.

Parameter	Web of Science (WoS)
Database	WoS Core Collection
Search Field	TS (Topic)
Search Terms	TS=(“refugee girl*” OR “migrant girl*” OR “immigrant girl*” OR “refugee female student”) AND TS=(education OR school* OR schooling OR “educational access” OR “educational attainment”) AND PY=(2015-2026) AND DT=(Article) AND WC=(“Education Educational Research” OR Sociology OR “Social Work” OR “Political Science” OR “Migration Studies” OR “International Relations”) AND LA=(English)

Time span	2015– 03 June 2026
Document type	Article
Language	English

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

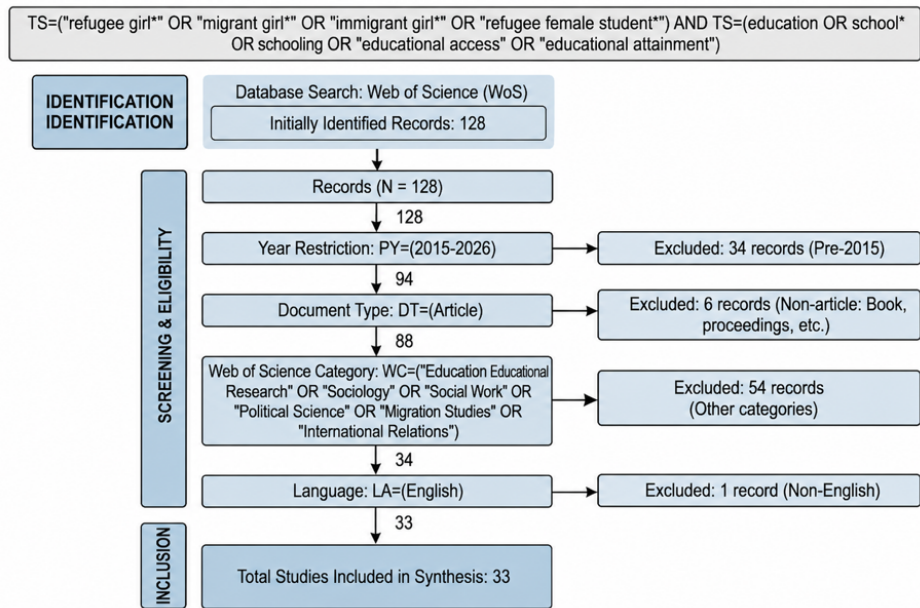


Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram for the systematic literature review process. The search was conducted in the Web of Science database using keywords focusing on the educational experiences of migrant and refugee girls, and a total of 128 publications were identified in the initial stage. Subsequently, a series of filtering steps was applied in line with the study's objective and inclusion criteria.

In the first screening stage, the publication year was restricted to the 2015–2026 range to ensure the review covered current literature, and 34 studies that did not meet this criterion were excluded. Consequently, the dataset was reduced to 94 publications. In the second stage, a document-type filter was applied to include only articles; 6 publications—comprising book chapters, conference papers, and reviews—were excluded, reducing the number of studies to 88. In the third stage, in line with the research's theoretical and disciplinary focus, the categories “Education and Educational Research,” “Sociology,” “Social Work,” “Political Science,” “Migration Studies,” and “International Relations” were selected; 54 studies outside these fields were removed from the dataset. Consequently, the number of publications under consideration fell to 34. In the final stage, only studies published in English were included, and one publication that did not meet the language criterion was excluded.

Following the application of all inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 33 articles that were found to be consistent with the study’s objectives and inclusion criteria were included in the final analysis. These studies were systematically reviewed to identify the challenges migrant and refugee girls face in accessing education and to highlight the key themes emerging from the literature.

2.2. Data Analysis

The 33 articles obtained as part of the research were analysed using a document analysis method within a qualitative research approach. Document analysis is a method for systematically analysing written materials relevant to the research topic.¹⁷ In research based on document analysis, visual documents, such as films and photographs, are also evaluated as data sources alongside written documents, such as diaries and journals.¹⁸

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. In the first stage, the titles, abstracts, findings and conclusion sections of the studies were examined in detail; statements regarding the problems migrant girls face in accessing education were identified. Subsequently, similar content was grouped into codes, which were then classified into themes based on their common characteristics. An inductive approach was adopted to develop themes.

As a result of the analysis, the most frequently highlighted problem areas in the literature were language barriers, gender-based inequalities, economic deprivation, school drop-out processes, and discrimination and social exclusion. The themes identified are presented in detail in the study’s findings section.

3. Results

Table 3. Studies Included in the Analysis

No.	Author(s) (Year)	Title	Country	Method
1.	Tokunaga (2016)	<i>‘We dominate the basement!’: How Asian American girls construct a borderland community</i>	USA	Qualitative
2.	Kiramba et al. (2020)	<i>Navigating multiple worlds of Ghanaian-born immigrant adolescent girls in US urban schools</i>	USA	Qualitative
3.	Dollmann (2017)	<i>Positive choices for all? SES- and gender-specific premia of immigrants at educational transitions</i>	Germany	Quantitative

¹⁷ David Scott- Marlene Morrison, *Key Ideas in Educational Research* (A&C Black, 2005) ; Cem Güney Özveren, “Liderlik Kuramları Özetinde Bir Doküman İncelemesi: Son Kale Filminin Analizi”, *İş İe Davranış Dergisi*, 6/2 (2021), 65-75.

¹⁸ John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods* (Sage Publications, 2003) ; Sharan B. Merriam, *Nitel araştırma: Desen ve Uygulama İçin Bir Rehber* (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2015).

4.	Khamis (2023)	<i>Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Among Syrian Refugee Girls: Risk and Protective Factors</i>	Lebanon and Jordan	Quantitative
5.	Park (2016)	<i>Going Global and Getting Graphic: Critical Multicultural Citizenship Education in an Afterschool Program for Immigrant and Refugee Girls</i>	USA	Qualitative
6.	Lee (2019)	<i>Invite Their Languages In: Community-Based Literacy Practices with Multilingual African Immigrant Girls in New York City</i>	USA	Qualitative
7.	Tilzey et al. (2025)	<i>"We're all about being together as a family": Community sports program fosters academic achievement, resilience, and coping skills among newcomer immigrant girls.</i>	USA	Mixed Methods
8.	Bešić et al. (2020)	<i>Attitudes towards inclusion of refugee girls with and without disabilities in Austrian primary schools</i>	Austria	Quantitative
9.	Kyei-Gyamfi (2026)	<i>Unpacking Work-Related and Sexual Exploitation of Migrant Girls in Ghana's Urban Markets</i>	Ghana	Mixed Methods
10.	Hailu et al. (2026)	<i>Collective dreaming: Black girl refugees from Burundi and their aspirations for STEM college education</i>	USA	Qualitative
11.	Lohbeck (2023)	<i>Competence and affect self-concepts of elementary school children – Do gender and immigration background play a role?</i>	Germany	Quantitative
12.	Son (2020)	<i>Critical literacy practices with bilingual immigrant children: Multicultural book club in an out-of-school context</i>	USA	Qualitative
13.	Boza & Arribas (2018)	<i>Inclusion of Immigrant Girls and Beliefs of Physical Education Teachers</i>	Spain	Quantitative
14.	Mäkelä & Kalalahti (2020)	<i>Facing Uncertainty yet Feeling Confident: Teenage Migrant Girls' Agencies in Upper Secondary School Transitions</i>	Finland	Qualitative
15.	Presler-Marshall et al. (2025)	<i>Child marriage in contexts of forced displacement: Exploring drivers and decision-making in Jordan through a gender and generational lens</i>	Jordan	Mixed Methods

16.	Rifà-Valls & Empain (2020)	<i>In-betweenness in moving images: Six experimental tactics of video-ethnography to narrate South Asian immigrant girls' subjectivities</i>	Spain	Video Ethnography
17.	Boza & Arribas (2023)	<i>Teaching for Immigrant Girls' Inclusion: Social Justice Physical Education Teachers' Involvement With School Stakeholders</i>	Spain	Qualitative
18.	Karaçay et al. (2025)	<i>Inequality in participation in shadow education in mathematics in Europe: An intersectional perspective</i>	Europe	Quantitative
19.	Cushing & Carter (2022)	<i>Using young adult fiction to interrogate raciolinguistic ideologies in schools</i>	United Kingdom	Qualitative
20.	Mughal et al. (2016)	<i>Longitudinal effects of a two-generation preschool programme on receptive language skill in low-income Canadian children to age 10 years</i>	Canada	Quantitative
21.	Chronaki et al. (2016)	<i>Number words in 'her' language, dialogism and identity-work: The case of little Mariah</i>	Greece	Qualitative
22.	Ray (2022)	<i>School as a hostile institution: How Black and immigrant girls of colour experience the classroom</i>	USA	Qualitative
23.	Kennedy et al. (2019)	<i>Refugee Youth's Identity Expressions and Multimodal Literacy Practices in a Third Space</i>	USA	Qualitative
24.	Barnes et al. (2024)	<i>Education in times of restriction: An examination of refugee girls' and young women's access to learning during COVID-19 school closures in Pakistan</i>	Pakistan	Mixed Methods
25.	Lee & Oi (2021)	<i>From lost identity to identity grafting: The second-generation migrant workers in Beijing</i>	China	Qualitative
26.	Shepherd (2024)	<i>Teachers' perspectives and practices relating to refugee girls: A mixed-methods multidisciplinary survey</i>	United Kingdom	Mixed Methods
27.	Lleixà & Nieva (2020)	<i>The social inclusion of immigrant girls in and through physical education: Perceptions and decisions of physical education teachers</i>	Spain	Qualitative

28.	Kolano & Davila (2019)	<i>Transformative Learning of Refugee Girls Within a Community Youth Organisation Serving Southeast Asians in North Carolina</i>	USA	Qualitative
29.	Forestier et al. (2025)	<i>What is transformed, resisted, or strengthened in physical education in school contexts? Analysing the dispositional plasticity of a female migrant student</i>	France	Qualitative
30.	Okwako (2015)	<i>Conceptualising smartness: Using social and cultural capital to explain academic achievement among a group of African immigrant girls</i>	USA	Qualitative
31.	Lee & Azzarito (2020)	<i>Creating Thirdspace Physical Culture for, With, and About Recent Immigrant Girls: Instagram as a Space of Marginalisation and Resistance</i>	USA	Not specified
32.	Afolalu (2024)	<i>I'm Still Nigerian: Navigating Race Through Digital Literacies</i>	USA	Qualitative
33.	Leitão et al. (2023)	<i>Safe and Empowered Communities: Ending FGM Investing in Migrant Women's Lifelong Learning</i>	Not specified	Not specified

Table 3. presents information on the authors, publication years, study titles, countries where the studies were conducted, and the research methods of the 33 studies included in the systematic review. It is observed that the majority of the studies examined were conducted in the USA, whilst research from various other countries, including Germany, Spain, the UK, Jordan, Pakistan, Finland, Austria, France, Canada, China, and Ghana, also contributed to the literature. From a methodological perspective, qualitative studies predominate; however, quantitative, mixed-methods, and video-ethnographic studies also address the educational experiences of migrant girls from various perspectives. This diversity demonstrates that the body of knowledge regarding the educational processes of migrant girls has been shaped through different contexts and methodological approaches.

Figure 2. Number of Publications and Citations From 2015 to 3 June 2026. Source: Web of Science.

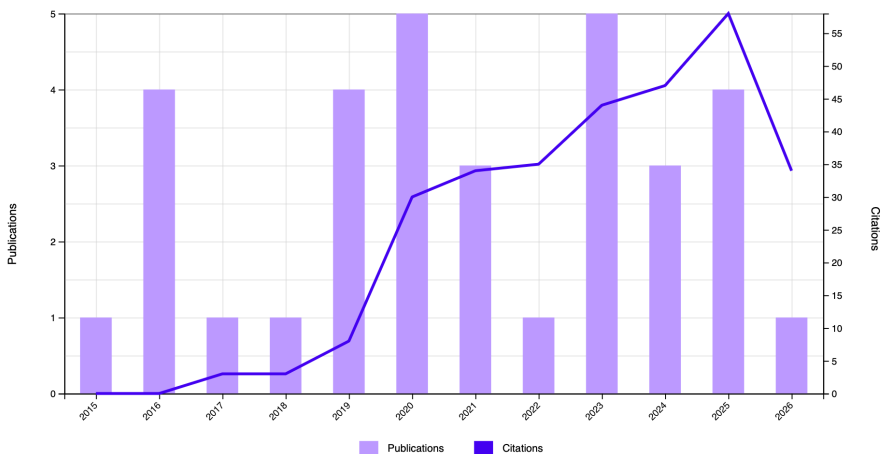


Figure 2 presents the distribution of publications and citations by year for the studies included in the analysis. An examination of the graph reveals that academic research on the education of migrant and refugee girls has increased, particularly since 2019. The highest number of publications was recorded in 2020 and 2023. As for citation counts, there is a generally rising trend over the years, with the highest level in 2025. These findings indicate that migrant girls' access to education has received increasing attention in the academic literature in recent years and that this research area has become increasingly visible.

Migrant girls, who are forced to navigate between two cultures in their daily lives—namely, the culture of the host country at school and the culture of the country they left behind at home—either create a buffer zone in response to this situation or are overwhelmed by this challenge. Indeed, migrant girls who strive to alleviate the stress they experience can create a buffer against the difficulties they face by getting to know different cultures and forming a heterogeneous group.¹⁹ Unfortunately, however, this is not the case for all migrants. Migrant girls caught between two cultures find that their cultural backgrounds make it difficult for them to participate in class activities and damage their peer relationships.²⁰

Migrant girls striving to strike a balance between two cultures may face not only difficulties in cultural adaptation, but also discrimination arising from these differences becoming apparent in the school environment. Pupils who experience cross-cultural communication issues with teachers and peers are subjected to racial and ethnic discrimination.

¹⁹ Tomoko Tokunaga, «'We Dominate the Basement!': How Asian American Girls Construct a Borderland Community», *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 29/9 (2016), 1097.

²⁰ Lydia Kananu Kiramba et al., «Navigating Multiple Worlds of Ghanaian-Born Immigrant Adolescent Girls in US Urban Schools», *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 77 (2020), 55.

Consequently, this situation leads to migrant pupils being excluded from the classroom, being teased, and experiencing peer conflict. Migrant pupils are confronted with experiences of language-based discrimination and exclusion within school environments. The perception that certain speech patterns are 'standard' and more acceptable marginalises students. Migrant students state that negative attitudes towards their language use weaken their sense of belonging and negatively impact their school experiences.²¹ Teachers' negative attitudes towards migrant students in the school environment can pave the way for other students to develop similar behaviours, thereby contributing to an increase in tendencies towards discrimination and exclusion of migrant students.²²

One of the major sources of experiences of discrimination and exclusion is language differences. Students who are not sufficiently proficient in the host country's language may find it difficult to communicate with their teachers and peers. This situation can lead to experiences of language-based discrimination and exclusion.²³ Furthermore, situations such as inadequate language skills and discrimination encountered by migrant students early in their educational lives can lead to their dropping out of school. Parents seeking to improve their children's educational attainment, and migrant students wishing to develop their language skills and advance their education, may find themselves a year behind their peers after completing a year of schooling.²⁴ The exclusion and belonging issues caused by language differences can render the educational experiences of migrant girls even more vulnerable. It is noted that students place importance on learning the dominant language as a sign of belonging to their community and social acceptance; however, they may experience bullying and marginalisation due to linguistic differences. Conversely, the creation of inclusive learning environments where students can express their cultural and linguistic identities is considered a key factor in supporting students' adaptation to school and participation in educational processes.²⁵ In addition, the challenges faced by migrant girls in their educational journeys are not limited to linguistic and academic barriers but also entail various psychosocial risks.

The uncertainty arising from the migration experience can harm the mental health of migrant girls, particularly when combined with gender-based vulnerabilities. Moreover, due to the combination of migration and gender-based risk factors, girls remain vulnerable

²¹ Ian Cushing - Anthony Carter, «Using Young Adult Fiction to Interrogate Raciolinguistic Ideologies in Schools», *Literacy* 56/2 (2022), 106-119.

²² Ranita Ray, «School as a Hostile Institution: How Black and Immigrant Girls of Colour Experience the Classroom», *Gender & Society* 36/1 (2022), 104-105.

²³ Crystal Chen Lee, «Invite their Languages in: Community-Based Literacy Practices with Multilingual African Immigrant Girls in New York City», *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 21/2 (2019), 1-22.

²⁴ Marja-Liisa Mäkelä - Mira Kalalahti, «Facing Uncertainty Yet Feeling Confident: Teenage Migrant Girls' Agencies in Upper Secondary School Transitions», *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 64/1 (2020), 118-134.

²⁵ Laura M. Kennedy et al., «Refugee Youth's Identity Expressions and Multimodal Literacy Practices in a Third Space», *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 33/1 (2019), 56-70

to integration difficulties in the country to which they have migrated.²⁶ Migrant girls are more likely to experience psychological issues such as anxiety and depression compared to boys.²⁷ In addition to their mental health, the physical violence, sexual abuse and limited access to specialised support services to which migrant girls are exposed place them at greater psychosocial risk and lead to various adjustment problems. In a 2026 article, Kyei-Gyamfi studied a group of migrant girls aged 10–17, known as Kayayei in Ghana, who predominantly come from the northern regions. The Kayayei migrant girls, who work as porters in markets, struggle with housing and poverty on the one hand, whilst battling sexual exploitation on the other. Given their challenging life experiences and their doubly disadvantaged situation, the likelihood of these migrant girls having a positive school experience is also very low.²⁸ Sexual exploitation and poverty affect migrant girls' educational lives, their social integration, and their future lives.²⁹ In addition to psychosocial risks, gender-based practices are also among the key factors threatening the continuity of migrant girls' education.

Another problem faced by migrant girls in their educational lives is early marriage. A study conducted by Presler-Marshall and colleagues (2025) in Jordan, within the context of forced displacement, revealed that early marriage is one of the key factors negatively affecting the educational lives of migrant girls. According to the research findings, economic hardship, gender norms, families' security concerns and beliefs that girls need to be 'protected' are among the main factors influencing decisions regarding early marriage. It has been established that a significant proportion of girls married at a young age experience interruptions to their education or see it come to a complete halt. This situation leads to migrant girls being cut off from education and limits their future educational and employment opportunities.³⁰

In addition to gender-based practices, economic deprivation and structural inequalities that emerge during times of crisis also hinder migrant girls' access to education. A study by Barnes et al. (2024) examining the educational experiences of Afghan refugee girls living in Pakistan during the COVID-19 pandemic found that inequalities in access to technological tools during the period of distance learning, an increase in unpaid domestic workload,

²⁶ Sarah E. Tilzey et al., «We are All About Being Together as a Family”: Community Sports Program Fosters Newcomer Immigrant Girls' Academic Achievement, Resilience, and Coping.» *American Journal of Community Psychology* 75/3–4 (2025), 187.

²⁷ Eva M. Klein et al., «The Relationship between Acculturation and Mental Health of 1st Generation Immigrant Youth in a Representative School Survey: Does Gender Matter?», *Child and adolescent psychiatry and mental health* 14/29 (2020), 1–10.

²⁸ Sylvester Kyei-Gyamfi, «Unpacking Work-Related and Sexual Exploitation of Migrant Girls in Ghana's Urban Markets», *Child Abuse Review* 35/2 (2026), 2.

²⁹ Naeemah Abrahams et al., «Worldwide Prevalence of Non-Partner Sexual Violence: A Systematic Review.» *The Lancet* 383/9929 (2014), 1648–1654.

³⁰ Elizabeth Presler-Marshall et al., «Child Marriage in Contexts of Forced Displacement: Exploring Drivers and Decision-Making in Jordan Through a Gender and Generational Lens», *Frontiers in Sociology* 10 (2025).

gender-based disparities in access to digital tools, and a lack of institutional support hurt educational processes. It is emphasised that gender-based inequalities in access to digital tools further exacerbate existing gaps in educational opportunity.³¹ These findings highlight that, during times of crisis, migrant girls' access to their right to education becomes more vulnerable due to multifaceted barriers, underscoring the importance of supportive policies for this group.

When assessed as a whole, it is evident that the issues affecting migrant girls' access to education and their participation in educational processes are multifaceted. Language barriers, discrimination, difficulties with cultural adaptation, psychosocial risks, economic deprivation, gender-based practices, and digital inequalities arising during times of crisis render migrant girls' educational experiences more vulnerable. When these findings are considered together, it is evident that migrant girls' educational experiences are shaped by multi-layered disadvantages arising from the intersection of cultural, linguistic, psychosocial, and structural factors.

Conclusion

This systematic review has revealed that migrant girls' access to education and their retention in education are shaped by multidimensional barriers arising at the intersection of migration experiences and gender. The fact that the majority of the 33 studies examined used qualitative methods indicates a trend in the literature towards a deeper understanding of migrant girls' lives, experiences, and coping strategies. However, quantitative and mixed-methods studies in the literature have examined the educational experiences of migrant girls using different methodological approaches.

Research findings indicate that factors such as language barriers, difficulties with cultural adaptation, issues of belonging and identity, discrimination and exclusion, peer bullying, psychosocial risks, gender-based inequalities, economic deprivation, and early marriage negatively affect the educational processes of migrant girls. In particular, language deficiencies and a discriminatory school climate weaken students' sense of belonging to school, whilst economic hardships, families' security concerns, and traditional gender norms emerge as the primary structural barriers threatening educational continuity. Furthermore, digital inequalities that have deepened during periods of crisis such as the pandemic, alongside increased domestic responsibilities, have made existing disadvantages more visible. These findings highlight that the educational experiences of migrant girls cannot be assessed solely in terms of academic performance and underscore the importance of addressing their social, cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions collectively.

³¹ Katrina Barnes, et al. «Education in Times of Restriction: An Examination of Refugee Girls' and Young Women's Access to Learning During COVID-19 School Closures in Pakistan», *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 23/1 (2024), 115–133.

Consequently, the educational experiences of migrant girls are affected by the structural disadvantages arising from the intersection of migration status and gender. Therefore, policies aimed at supporting migrant girls' access to education and their retention must not be limited to academic support mechanisms alone; they must include comprehensive interventions such as language support, psychosocial services, financial support, gender-equality practices, and the development of an inclusive approach to education. However, this study has certain limitations. The study is restricted to peer-reviewed articles published in English and indexed in the Web of Science Core Collection database. Moreover, the review covers research published between 2015 and 2026, whilst book chapters, conference papers, and other publication types have been excluded from the assessment. Thus, the findings do not encompass studies found in different databases, languages, or other publication types. In future research, including Scopus and other international databases in the review, evaluating different publication types, and considering broader time frames could contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of the literature on migrant girls' access to education.

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