

# Opinions of Teachers and Parents about Time Spent by Students at School, Lesson Hours, Break Times, Holidays and School Terms\*

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## Abstract

Amount of time spent at school is one of the mostly discussed educational matters. The present study was carried out to put forward the relationship between the time spent at school and learning acquisitions. In the study, 52 parents living in Bursa and 59 teachers were asked for their opinions. According to the data, while nearly half of the parents found the annual periods of academic years insufficient, nearly half of the participant teachers found it sufficient. More than half of the teachers thought that daily lesson hours and the length of a lesson hour were enough but the length of semester holidays and the numbers of academic terms were insufficient. From the results, it appeared that the parents and teachers held different opinions with respect to the time spent by students.

## Key Words

School Period, Lesson Hour, School Terms, Semester Holiday.

In today's world, students at school are expected to have more knowledge and skills, but only some of these expectations are met (Karip, 2007; Kavak, 2010; Türk & Ünsal, 2007). For this reason, it can be stated that researchers have started to monitor and inquire the time spent at school (Blazer, 2008). This situation has led people to talk about making

some reforms (Pittman, Cox, & Burchfiel, 1986). Although reform suggestions have been generally related to increasing time spent at school or rearranging time spent at school (Hossler, Stage, & Gallagher, 1988; O'Brien, 2006), there have been opinions relating to the sufficiency of the time currently in effect and time spent at school should be used efficiently (Burton, 2007; Moore & Funkhouser, 1990; Pennington, 2006; Silva, 2007; Wrobel, 1999).

Opinions about this matter can be discussed in two groups. According to Berliner (1990), time spent on learning is one of the basic determinants of the amount of learning. For example, increasing time spent at school might be useful for children needing more time (Blazer, 2008; Evans & Bechtel, 1997; Hossler et al., 1988; Karweit, 1985; Levin, 1984; Moore & Funkhouser, 1990). Moreover, when time spent at school is increased, teachers can allot more time to planning works and professional development activities (Coppole, Yane, Levin, & Cohen, 1992). This situation might provide teachers with the opportunity to create different educational strategies for students with different learning styles (O'Brien, 2006).

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According to the proponents of the increased school time, more time spent at school might contribute more to the learning of rural area children (Blazer, 2008; Evans & Bechtel, 1997) and that of low income students who cannot afford leaning activities (Pennington, 2006; Silva, 2007; Smith, 2000), help working mothers (Blazer, 2008) and might prevent students in underdeveloped areas from falling victim to crimes, violence or harassment or committing crimes (Evans & Bechtel).

According to the proponents of the increased school time, if the present school day is used efficiently, there is no need to make additions to the school day, for resources are limited (Blazer, 2008). Apart from these, changing school calendar might affect school and work environments in a negative way (Glass, 2002; Pennington, 2006; Silva, 2007). According to Hossler et al. (1988), teachers want to leave schools applying the increased school day. Besides this, there might appear problems such as additional waging as well (Silva).

Some parents report that when school time is lengthened their children cannot find time to relax (Burton, 2007; Wrobel, 1999). For the lengthened day application limits the participation in social activities performed as a family (Pennington, 2007; Wrobel).

The opponents of the lengthened school year or day suggest financial reasons as well (Evans & Bechtel, 1997). This situation can be seen as an obstacle before the lengthening of school time (Aranson, Zimmerman, & Carlos, 1999). A study made by Glass (2002) can be given as an example for this situation. According to the findings of a study made by Faberman and Kaplan (2005), expenses of the schools applying the lengthened school day increase as well. At the same time, there is not a person to be able to answer fully the question of how much it will cost to lengthen the school day (Dinkes, 2007; Silva, 2007). For some research studies have shown that the application of the lengthened school day does not appear to meet costs completely compared to other reforms (Funkhouser, Humphrey, Pantan, & Rosenthal, 1995)

Despite all these objections, it has been observed that when time spent by students on learning activities is increased so does the amount of learning (Kane, 1994; Walberg & Frederick, 1993; Wiley & Hamischfeger, 1974). This is achieved through good management of school time (Aronson et al., 1999). However, it is difficult to state that this opinion is always true (Copple et al., 1992; Nelson, 1990). For this reason, the best thing to do is to arrange time well (Levin, 1984).

Like in every country, in Turkey too, politicians and educational administrators make a lot of attempts to increase the effectiveness of education

and education institutions. However, when international exam results are examined, Turkish students are observed to become unsuccessful (Karip, 2007; Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı [MEB], 2010; Uzun, Bütüner, & Yiğit, 2010). At national level, too, the situation is the same (Tekişik, 2009).

Although there are many studies made on education in Turkey, those made on time spent by students at school, lesson hours and break times, semester holidays and school terms and effects of these on learning are observed to be few in number. For this reason, an investigation into annual school time, lesson hours, break times, semester holidays and school terms can be evaluated as an attempt to increase student success and contribute to the effectiveness of education in Turkey.

### Relationships between Time Spent at School and Student Success

It can be stated that "time" occupies an important place in students' school learnings (Caldwell, William, & Graeber, 1982). However, when studies looking at relationships between the application of school day lengthening and realization level of program objectives are examined, it is difficult to state that they share a common view (Pittman et al., 1986). According to Worthen and Zstray (1994), there is not a direct relationship between time and success. However, according to Adelman, Haslam, and Pringle (1996), lengthening the school time is a weak strategy. It can be stated that Karweit (1987) shares the same opinion. For the length of a normal school day or year does not give any idea about how much time is allotted to learning (Beaton et al., 1996; Hossler et al., 1988; Karweit, 1987). However, Cotton (1989) does not share the same opinion.

### Academic Calendar

To increase the amount of learning at school, we can mention many suggestions such as lengthening the school year or daily lesson hours, making summer school application prevalent or developing academic calendar (Ari, 2004; Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996). It is observed that for centuries academic calendars have been still made based on the traditional agriculture society life style (Davies & Kerry, 1999). However, in today's communication society, it is not possible to meet learning needs through the academic calendar of the traditional agriculture society (Sharp, 2000).

Due to increase in expectations from education, we can mention many suggestions regarding the distribution of school terms and holidays within a year. The application of "whole year round schooling" can be given as an example for this situation (Ballinger,

1995; Davies & Kerry, 1999). Due to increase in expectations from school in recent years, parents are observed to behave more sensitively regarding time which their children spend at school. We can mention the presence of a perception regarding the fact that there are too many holidays in Turkey. However, in Turkey, the number of working days at schools under administration of the Ministry of National Education is about 180 and the semester holiday is taken in the month of January or February and the summer holiday is taken starting from the end of the school year (MEB, 2003). Studies show that there is not a shared opinion among researchers, parents and teachers regarding the time spent at school (Blazer, 2008; Silva, 2007). However, every expects more learning from the school (Arı, 2004, 2005).

### Purpose

This study was carried out to contribute to the use of the time allotted to learning and relaxing at school more effectively by putting forward the opinions of parents and teachers regarding the time spent by students at school and learning acquisitions.

## Method

### Research Design

This study is a descriptive study employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

### Universe and Sampling

The working group of the study is composed of student parents (52) and teachers (59) working at primary and high schools located within the borders of the Osmangazi district of the province of Bursa.

### Instrument

In the study, a semi-structured interview form was used with the aim of determining the opinions of parents and teachers with respect to the time spent by students at school, break times given, holidays taken throughout a year and terms of instruction..

In order to test the validity of the interview form used in the study, interviewed 25 parents and 30 teachers prior to the study. The answers given to the questions included in the interview form were analyzed by transforming into themes suitable for the qualitative research processes. The data obtained in the pilot study were primarily subjected to the validity and reliability studies suitable for the qualitative research processes (İftar & Tekin, 1997).

To determine the relationship between the opinions of parents and teachers regarding the themes, correlations were examined. According to the themes, a significantly high relationship ranging between  $r = .661 - .965$  was observed between the opinions of the teachers and parents.

The suitability of the opinions about the themes obtained from the pilot study data for the factor analysis was tested with the Barlett's Test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin KMO Sampling Adequacy Test (Albayrak, 2006; Büyüköztürk, 2005). In the reliability study made to determine the internal consistency of the interview form used in the study, item-total correlations and Cronbach- $\alpha$  coefficient were calculated. When the fact that the calculated Cronbach- $\alpha$  coefficient was .94 and the item total correlations varied between 0.674-0.884 is taken into consideration, the discriminating power of the items can be said to be "very good" (Baykul, 2000). The explanation percentage of the factor for the variance was calculated to be 81.41%. Based on this data, the interview form used can be accepted as one-factor form (Büyüköztürk; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). According to these results, it can be stated that the interview form used in this study has an acceptable validity and reliability for the study.

### Process

The preliminary interviews were held with the participants of the study and the aims of the study were explained to them. Some of the parents having participated in the study were interviewed at their homes and others were interviewed at the places which they had determined; the interviews with the teachers were held at the schools where they worked. In the interviews, the participants were asked the questions prepared beforehand and they were asked to state their opinions about the questions. Some of the interviews were recorded with a recording device upon the permission of the participants and others were recorded by taking notes. Although the standard time application had been planned in the interviews, it could not be conformed to every time. Especially the interviews held at homes sometimes took an hour. However, the interviews held with the teachers took 15 minutes on the average. While the interviews with the teachers were held during the spring term of the 2010 educational year, those held with the parents were started in the first week of May in 2010 and continued until 15th August 2010.

The answers obtained from the interviews held with those having participated in the study were coded and analyzed through the content analysis technique. The answers belonging to 52 parents and 59 teachers were coded and their frequencies and percentages were calculated.

### Findings

In this section, there are findings putting forward the opinions of the parents and the teachers about the number of annual schooling days, daily lesson hours, duration of a lesson, daily relaxing time and break times, holidays, summer holiday, semester holiday and educational terms.

#### Opinions of Parents and Teachers regarding the Number of Annual Schooling Days

About half of the parents participating in the study (48,1%) state that the number of the annual schooling days, which is currently in effect, is insufficient. However, a considerable number of the parents (32,7%) hold the opinion that the number of the annual schooling days is sufficient. Contrary to the parents, about half of the teachers (49,2%) find the number of the annual schooling days sufficient.

#### Opinions of Parents and Teachers regarding Daily Lesson Hours, Duration of a Lesson, Daily Relaxing and Break Times

When the opinions of the parents about daily lesson hours, duration of a lesson and daily relaxing and break times are examined, it is observed that while 44,2% of the parents think that the number of daily lesson hours is high, a quarter of them think that the number of daily lesson hours is sufficient. While a considerable number of the parents (42,3%) find the duration of a lesson sufficient, half of the parents (50%) find the relaxing time insufficient and about half of them (46,2%) find the break times between lessons insufficient. Contrary to the parents, more than half of the teachers (55,9%) find the number of daily lesson hours sufficient and again more than half of them (61,1%) find the duration of a lesson hour sufficient. However, a great majority of the teachers (55,9%), like the parents, hold the opinion that the daily relaxing times of the students is not sufficient.

#### Opinions of Parents and Teachers regarding Summer Holiday, Semester Holiday and Number of Terms

According to the findings of the study, while 55,8% of the parents find the duration of the summer holiday sufficient, 53,8% of them find the duration of the semester holiday sufficient and 50% of them find the number of terms sufficient, a considerable number of them think that the holidays are too many in number. While a great majority of the teachers (44,1%) find the number of holidays is sufficient, more than half of them find the duration of the semester holiday and the number of terms insufficient.

According to these results, the participants put forward their opinions about the summer holiday, duration of break times, daily relaxing times based on their being parents or teachers. Moving from here, it can be stated that while the opinions of the participants about the summer holiday, the duration of break times and daily relaxing times changed according to their positions, their opinions about the number of annual schooling days, holidays, daily lesson hours and terms of instruction did not change according to their positions.

### Discussion

When the relevant studies are examined, it seems impossible to mention about a shared opinion about the lengthening of the time spent at school. That the participant parents and teachers share the same idea about the time spent by students at school supports this judgment.

The matter of the extending the time spent at school can be taken from different perspectives. For example, the opinions of the proponents of the extended school time might yield positive results for disadvantageous groups. However, whether the time currently in effect is used effectively or not appears before us as an important question. Results of many studies show that time spent at school should be used effectively (Burton, 2007; Levin, 1984; Pennington, 2006; Silva, 2007; Wrobel, 1999).

When the relevant literature is examined, we can mention many studies investigating into relationships between achievements obtained in international exams and amounts of time spent by students at school. However, it might not be a good idea to make an evaluation every time about relationship between time spent at school and achievement by looking at results obtained in international exams. For international TIMMS and PISA results show that there is not a clear relationship between time spent by students at school and their achievements. For this reason, it will be more appropriate to take the matter of time together with variables affecting student achievement and look at how time spent by students at school is used.

When studies investigating into how school time is used are examined, it is observed that a great amount of time is spent on non-instructional activities (Copple et al., 1992; Hossler et al., 1988; Kane, 1994; Walberg & Frederick, 1993). By looking at these factors, it can be seen clearly that the net amount of time allotted to instruction in classrooms change within the frame of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of factors (Aronson et al., 1999; Karweit, 1987). On the other hand, even if more time is spent at school, extra time spent at school

does not mean anything unless instructional activities directed toward learning are developed. When contemporary learning-teaching methods are used (on time and correct feedback, starting to teach from the readiness level of the student and active participation of the teacher in the learning-teaching process, etc.), additional time can affect achievement to a considerable degree. For when additional time is combined with effective teaching methods and effective contents, it becomes a powerful tool developing academic performance (Moore & Funkhouser, 1990).

Another matter to which researchers agree is that arrangements relating to total instructional time are necessary but these arrangements do not guarantee increased success. At times outside those specified as school times, too, there are many ways of increasing the amount of learning. For example, time spent outside school can be used in making instructional time functional. Parents' involving in this process can be evaluated as another of these ways. For student achievement increases when families become aware of what their children do at school and provide them with support (Denham & Lieberman, 1980). Another factor is how students evaluate their free times. For effective evaluation of free times might make positive contributions to learning outputs (Coople et al., 1992).

Putting forward the idea that additional time should not be the extra of the time currently in effect but should be an opportunity to learn more might be an effective method to promote learning. Moreover, teachers might arrange activities suitable for the level of each student, use learning activities to achieve high achievement and provide objective feedback (Wynne & Stuck, 1982). Beyond all of them, teachers might start and finish lessons on time to increase amount of learning, shorten transition time between activities and manage time effectively by minimizing time wasted and continuously monitoring learning (Ellis, 1984). Instruction time can be lengthened by adding days, hours to school year or rearranging hours within a day. However, what is essential is how students use this time. For this reason, we can mention about the necessity of taking measures to remove learning difficulties of students and develop teachers' classroom management skills.

When the results of the study made by Arı (2004) are examined, it is observed that 80% of the teachers are not satisfied with the two-term instructional year but hold the opinion that an instructional year composed of three terms with two semester holiday between will be more appropriate. Based on the findings of the study, the "year round school" application can be made or the number of terms can be rearranged annually according to geographical conditions to make more contribution to stu-

dents' increasing their amount of learning within an academic year. For in today's Turkey, there are still children made to work in agriculture, industry and trade. For example, according to the results of the "Child Workforce Survey" carried out in 2006, 5,9% of the 6-17 aged children in Turkey are made to work. 68,5% of the working children do not continue their education for various reasons. 40,9% of the working children work in the agricultural branch of industry and 43,8% of them work as wageless family worker. That 1721 of 3780 children belonging to families coming to the province of Adana as seasonal workers are made to work as agricultural laborers can be evaluated as an important example in terms of putting forward the situation (Özdener, 2010). For this reason, rearranging academic calendar for children at disadvantageous position might contribute not only to their benefiting more from educational possibilities but also to the effectiveness of education.

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