

Opinions of English Teachers about the Reasons for the Absenteeism of Primary School Students

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The aim of this study is to reveal the reasons for absenteeism of students in primary schools according to the views of English teachers. This research was designed with the qualitative research phenomenology pattern. The study group of this research consists of a total of 35 English teachers, 20 of whom are female and 15 are male. The data were collected with a semi-structured interview form and analyzed with descriptive analysis. In this study, financial problems emerged as the biggest factor causing students to be absent from school.

Keywords: Absenteeism, English Teacher, Students, Negative Attitudes

1. Introduction

In many of the countries in the world, every individual must take compulsory education at certain time intervals and in certain years. Generally, the schooling age of individuals is 5.5 – 6 and the compulsory education period ends when they are 17.5 – 18 years old. After this compulsory period, receiving a higher education depends on individuals' own wishes and their success in the relevant exams. One of the most important conditions for fulfilling the requirements of formal education activities carried out in schools is to ensure the access and attendance of students to school. The low number of absenteeism can be interpreted as students attending school willingly and that the teachers and administrators are being careful about students' attendance (Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2007). Even though the schooling age is determined as 5.5 – 6, it is observed that some students do not attend school, move away from school, cannot enter the education-teaching framework, are absent or fall behind classes during the compulsory education period (Sakınç, 2013).

In recent years, student absenteeism has become one of the most serious problems in schools. Today, many students are at risk to continue their education for various reasons, even though they are enrolled in schools. One of the most important conditions in order to ensure that students benefit from educational activities at the highest level in accordance with their individual characteristics is to ensure their attendance at school. The most important reason that negatively affects this situation is absenteeism (Özbaş, 2010).

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There is no single reason for absenteeism, which is an undesirable student behavior. Absenteeism for school can be caused by many factors such as physical, psychological and social (Altinkurt, 2008). Although absenteeism is a symptom of a student's negative feelings towards school, only negative emotions are not a sufficient reason for absenteeism. The presence of many factors together or alone may cause the student to stay away from school or to be absent (Pehlivan, 2006).

Attitude consists of feelings, thoughts and behaviors related to an object (Aral, Bayram & Celik, 2017). However, these dimensions are not independent of each other. When an individual has a positive attitude towards a person or an object, s/he will be inclined to behave positively towards that person or object, to approach it, to show closeness, to support it and to help it. On the other hand, an individual with a negative attitude towards an object will tend to be indifferent to or move away from that object, criticize it, and even damage it (Uzun & Sağlam, 2006). Many factors such as the physical conditions of the school, the failure to organize school activities in a way that every child can participate in, the collection of difficult lessons in the same day and many management activities such as the authoritarian attitudes of school administrators cause absenteeism for school. Therefore, in order to ensure the attendance of children at the school, it is of great importance for the student to develop positive attitudes towards the school through a number of in-school activities (Özbaş, 2010).

When the Turkish literature is reviewed, there are many studies on the absenteeism of primary and secondary school students (Altinkurt, 2008; Danaoğlu, 2009; Küçüksüleymanoğlu, 2007; Öztürk, 2014; Sakiç, 2013). In the qualitative and quantitative studies conducted, the reasons for absenteeism of children in the primary school age group are mostly due to health status and family factors (İpek, 2018; Kadı, 2000; Özbaş, 2010; Star, 2011). When the results of the studies are examined, it is seen that the reasons for the absenteeism and negative attitude of secondary school students to school are similar. The most common causes of absenteeism were identified as insufficient social activities at school, negative attitudes of teachers towards them and negative health conditions (Adıgüzel & Karadaş, 2013; Girgin, 2016; Gökyer, 2012; Öztekin, 2013; Sönmez, 2009; Şanlı, Altun, Tan, 2015).

However, the changing situations in the world and countries day by day; can pose an obstacle for students to come to school and different reasons cause students to be absent from school. For this reason, it is important to reveal the reasons for students' absenteeism from an innovative perspective. With the research, examination and analysis of the reasons to be put forward, absenteeism from school will be prevented and a contribution to the literature will be provided.

The aim of this study is to reveal the reasons for absenteeism of students attending primary schools according to the views of English teachers. It will be tried to determine whether the opinions of the teachers participating in the study change with differences such as gender, professional experience, branch or socio-economic status of the place where the school is located.

2. Method

In this section, information about the research model, study group, measurement tools used in the research, collection and analyzing of the data are given.

2.1 Research Model

This research is designed with a qualitative research phenomenology pattern. “The phenomenology design focuses on phenomena that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding of. Phenomenology constitutes a suitable research ground for studies that aim to investigate facts that are not completely unfamiliar to us and that we cannot fully comprehend” (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

In this study, a qualitative research method was used. According to Patton (2002), qualitative research is a research process in which researchers try to understand the facts they are working on as they really are. Maxwell (1996) indicates that there are basically five ways to reach this goal: a) the participants in the research in which they live to ensure that they are understood depending on their own experience of the natural environment, b) participants in the research, environment variables, understanding of the impact of their actions, c) the identification of unintended effects belonging to the research phenomenon, d) within the researched phenomenon where understanding the process or action carried on, and finally, e) the presentation and understanding of causal explanations and links for patients.

In this study, the Case Study model was adopted as a research model. The most basic feature of a qualitative case study is an in-depth study of one or more situations. That is, various variables related to a state (environment, method, event, process, etc.) it is examined with a holistic approach. It focuses on how these situations are affected by what. Case studies are one of the most frequently used types of qualitative research (Shuttleworth, 2008). The most commonly used method in qualitative research is the interview method (Yıldırım, 2005).

2.2 Working Group

Purposeful sampling is a technique used for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). The study group of this research consists of a total of 35 English teachers, 20 of whom are female and 15 are male in Adana Province in the 2021-2022 academic year.

Table 1: Demographic information of the English teachers

Variables	Subvariables	Frequency
Gender	Man	15
	Woman	20
Seniority	1-5	2
	6-15	18
	16-25	11
	26 and over	4
Level of Education	Faculty of Education	32
	Faculty of Science and letters	3

2.3 Data Collection Tool

In this study, it is aimed to get the opinions of administrators and teachers about the reasons that cause students' absenteeism from school. Therefore, a semi-structured interview form was created to collect data in line with the purpose of the research. Then, short-term face-to-face interviews were conducted to explain their views. The semi-structured interview form consists of two parts. In the first part, there are questions about the personal information of the interviewed participants, whether they have students' absenteeism from school. In the second part, there are questions that reveal the experiences of students' absenteeism from school. These questions were prepared after analyzing the literature.

2.4 Analysis of Data

It was ensured that the questions created by the researcher were sufficient in revealing the opinions of 35 English teachers about students' absenteeism from school. The data obtained from the semi-structured interview form used in the research were examined and it was tried to reveal the thoughts of the teachers about students' absenteeism from school. The opinions stated by the teachers for each question were written and each teacher was named as a participant and written in the form as (K). Since not every teacher expressed an opinion for each question, the teachers who did not answer were not included in the system. "Descriptive analysis is used in the processing of data that does not require in-depth analysis. The data obtained in the descriptive analysis are summarized and interpreted according to previously determined themes" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

3. Results

In this part of the research, the findings created with the data obtained from the data collection tools are included. As it can be seen, some of the main reasons for students to be absent from school may be compulsory while some other reasons are only arbitrary. Some of the students not only are absent from school but also don't exhibit behaviors related to school (studying, reading books, doing homework, etc.). Some students cannot come to school because of compulsory reasons. These students need to be helped and the barriers that prevent them from coming to school should be eliminated.

In the study, teachers were asked "What are the reasons for students' absenteeism arising from teachers". The answers from the teachers are that the students are not cared about by the teachers, the teachers are not paying enough attention to the students, the teachers are authoritative and oppressive, the teachers are discriminating among the students, the teachers are humiliating students in front of their friends, they are not able to communicate sufficiently with students, they cannot ingratiate the lesson, and cannot motivate students. In addition, some of the answers given by the teachers to this question are listed as follows:

"Some teachers humiliate the student in the classroom environment due to insufficient classroom management. (T4)"

"If the student does not like the teacher (T9)"

"The teacher is oppressive and authoritarian. (T23)"

"The student is afraid of the teacher. (T33)"

“Students develop the behavior of not going to school when they don't do their homework correctly. (34)”.

“The communication environment between teachers and students does not develop decently. Because the aim of teachers is to implement the lessons. (T24)”

Teachers do not get the opportunity to guide students and investigate the reason for their absences. (29)”

In the study, teachers were asked "What are the family-related reasons for students' absenteeism". The answers from the teachers are about the cultural level of the families, their disregard for education, their reluctance to send their girls to school, financial reasons, unemployment, children having to work, the situation of children in divorced families, children' psychological disorders, being exposure to domestic violence, having a lot of children in the family etc. In addition, some of the answers from the teachers are listed below:

“Some families do not want to send their children to school. (T1)”

“In families with many children, there are those who cannot go to school because they have to take care of their younger siblings. (T7)”.

“They cannot come to school because they have to work in the field or in other jobs. (T15)”

“Families do not attach the necessary importance to education. (T22)”.

“In some families there are children who are subjected to violence. Children who are mentally depressed due to their broken families do not want to come to school. (T32)”.

In the study, teachers were asked "What are the individual reasons for student absenteeism?" The answers from the teachers are sorted as; the students are sick physically or psychologically, they don't like school, they don't want to get education, they worry about the future, their families don't give importance to education, the student has to work in a job, low academic achievement, etc. Some of the answers given by the teachers are listed below:

“Some of our students are unable to come to school due to their illness and treatment process. (T12)”

“Some students do not want to be in school. (T17)”

“Students who do not like school, who are exposed to peer bullying at school, who are bored at school and who do not do homework do not want to come to school. (T34)”

“Some students cannot come to school because they have to work or look after their siblings. (T32)”

“Children whose families have a negative view of education are reluctant to come to school. (T26)”

In the study, teachers were asked "What are the reasons for students' absenteeism arising from health problems". The answers from the teachers are that the children have chronic diseases, some children have psychological disorders, the children have various physical disabilities, the pandemic and allergic diseases, etc. are the reasons for the absenteeism of the students. In addition, some of the answers from the teachers are listed below:

“Children with disabilities are unwilling to come to school because they cannot act as they wish at school. In addition, children with disabilities, children undergoing cancer treatment and children who have undergone surgery cannot come to school. There were also students who did not come to school due to the pandemic and allergic disease. (T26) “

“There are those who cannot come to school due to a broken arm or leg, headache or stomachache. (T14)”

As it can be seen, students cannot come to school due to some ailments they have. Students have to stay away from school because of the long treatment process for some diseases, having to go to the hospital frequently, having drugs that are used constantly in chronic diseases, pandemic and allergic diseases. Therefore, according to the opinions of the teachers, it was recommended that the schools must be designed suitably for disabled students, so that they can use them more comfortably.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Among the components of the educational environment, there are many factors that interact directly or indirectly with students, teachers, administrators, servants, school, family, environment and education. Among these components, it is the students who are almost at the most important point (Altinkurt, 2008; Sakiç, 2013). In fact, the main reason for education is to raise awareness of new generations. In other words, it is very important for students to become conscious, grow up, learn, take responsibility and be self-sufficient. Therefore, if those who need to receive education do not come to school for various reasons, are absent or cannot carry out learning activities; it will prevent the achievement of educational goals, albeit partially. These students, who exhibit undesirable behaviors at school or do not want to come to school for various reasons, gradually leave the school and have to end their education life (Örücü & Kaplan, 2001). Absenteeism can arise from a student's dissatisfaction with the conditions in the learning process and is accepted as an important factor that negatively affects the efficiency of the education process (Örücü & Kaplan, 2001).

In this study, it is observed that the most important factor that causes students to be absent from school is financial problems. Similarly, when the factors that cause the behaviors of not attending school are examined in the literature, it has been determined that the first reason for the absenteeism of secondary school students is family reasons, and then personal reasons, health related reasons and entourage related reasons followed respectively. İpek (2018) found a statistically significant relationship between the monthly income of the family and the reason for absenteeism from school.

It is known that the meaning ascribed by the family to education, their communication with the school, and their expectations from the school will have a positive effect on the student, thus reducing absenteeism (Şimşek, Uğurlu, & Usta, 2016). However, families with financial difficulties cannot take care of their

children properly, and for this reason, some children are forced to work. Separation of parents, insufficient economic situation of the family, neglect of the child education by the family, failure of the family to provide the necessary conditions for the child to attend school, failure of families to meet the school needs of their children and the family's desire for the child to contribute to the home economy by making use of their workforce, and the child's inability to prepare for school on time can be listed as familial factors causing absenteeism (Ulusoy et al2005; Ozbas, 2010). Öztekin (2013), on the other hand, stated that the family reasons are the least causes for high school students' absenteeism. In some studies, the health problems of the student and the fear of failure are the leading individual factors that cause absenteeism (Hoşgör and Polat, 2015; Tutar, 2002; İpek, 2018; Öztekin, 2013; Yıldız, 2011).

In parallel with the effect of familial factors on absenteeism, the enrourage of the students and their social environment can also play a role in absenteeism. For example, it is stated that students with friends who are unsuccessful, absent or not going to school, drug addicts or committing crimes are at the biggest risk (Özbaş, 2010).

In this study, ignoring students by teachers, showing insufficient interest in students by teachers, teachers' authoritarian and oppressive attitudes, discriminating between students, humiliating students in front of their friends, insufficient communication with the students, not being able to ingratiate the lesson, not being able to motivate the students are listed as the reasons for absenteeism. As it can be seen, students do not come to school and become alienated from school for some reasons such as teachers having difficulties in finding the opportunity to communicate with students or having difficulties in communicating with students etc. The student who does not like the school, lessons, teachers, administrators, servants, friends and is not willing to go to school due to other reasons, will first of all be absent. (Ozturk, 2014). While teachers' positive attitudes and behaviors in the classroom have a positive effect on students' school engagement; Factors such as the teacher's authoritarian attitude in the classroom, the inadequacy of communication with the students, asking a performance from the student that is over his/her abilities can cause undesirable behaviors such as absenteeism (Ataman, 2001).

Gökyer (2012), stated that the children expressed the existence of humiliating or humiliating behaviors of their teachers and discriminatory practices in the classroom or within the school as the teacher-induced absenteeism reasons. The probability of students coming to class will increase in an environment where there is more communication with students, attention is paid to students, and lessons are popular. It can be said that the behavior of the teacher, who values the students, considers their needs and individual characteristics, and includes practices that make the students active in the classroom, has an effect on reducing absenteeism (Gömleksiz & Özdaş, 2013).

The student who doesn't want to go to school again and at every opportunity will have to repeat the grade and even as a result of this situation, the behavior of leaving the school will occur. Dropping out of school of a student; it will mean leaving education and training, not being able to complete compulsory education, not being able to obtain the necessary knowledge and skills, and wasting of the effort and money put forward for the training of students (Ozturk, 2014).

Knowing the underlying causes of the absenteeism problem and all kinds of measures that can be taken to eliminate these reasons; it will increase school attendance and consequently increase the number of

individuals who have received education in the country. For these reasons, it is very important to know the absence in schools, to know the number of students who are absent, to determine the regions where absenteeism is most common, and to know the reasons for absenteeism. Revealing these situations in a simple and impartial way will provide a good understanding of the problem. The conclusions and recommendations that can be reached after the information obtained from the study were made in this way. However, it can be thought that the changing working group and the data collection tool will make the results different.

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