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Effects of structured extracurricular facilities on students' academic and social development

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Abstract

Structured Extracurricular Activities (SEAs) are kinds of optional facilities designed and carried out inside or outside school within a plan after classes. Many students participate in them although they are not directly measured and related to their academic courses. Studies reveal that these activities are important positive contributors to formal programs, so in some countries they are integrated into formal programs. Therefore, this qualitatively study purposed to discover if they affect students' social and academic developments in Turkey. Results revealed that SEAs increased students' both social and academic achievements. It is suggested that school leaders organize them more professionally.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, behavior disorders among students have been reported recently that cause negative results at school. It usually ends up in dropping out of school, failure, negligence, and drug addiction. Therefore, new administrative approaches should be implemented prevent these negative behaviors instead of disciplinary administrative methods. In this respect, Structured Extracurricular Activities (SEAs) can be evaluated as co-curriculum facilities. SEAs are kinds of optional facilities (*e.g.: excursion, competitions, physical education, scouting, music, folklore, newspaper/journal preparation, shows, theatre, fashion shows, exhibitions, chess, tennis, basketball, fair and creative drama etc.*) designed and carried out inside or outside school within a plan after classes as as strategic tools that help diminish negative behaviors.

The history of SEAs dates back to 1930s. Previous studies focused on curricular activities and their effects on academic achievement. However, the effects of SEAs were neglected. Many studies conducted on sociology, sport psychology and adult development reveal that SEAs have positive impacts on student development and they are effective contributors to formal programs (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Holland & Andre, 1987; Fredericks & Eccles, 2006; Gilman et al, 2004). Many students take part in these activities although they are not measured and directly related to their academic courses. Since they are considered as important positive contributors to formal programs, they have been integrated into formal programs in some countries.

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2. Related Researches on SEAs

According to Powers et al., (2002), Tolley et al., (2005) typical activity programs attracted schools' daily attendance. In his study Llyeras (2008) revealed that SEAs were important. Mahoney&Cairns (1997) and Hirsch, (2000) showed that they had positive contribution to academic success. Some studies revealed SEAs had impacts on grades, exam results, and responsibility towards school, culture, socialization, motivation, positive attitudes towards school and educational eagerness (Cooper et al., 1999; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Dfes, 2005; Gerber, 1996; Darling et al., 2008; Larson, 2000, Cooper et al., 1999, Llyeras, 2008; Fujita (2006; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Shulruf et al., 2008; Reeves, 2008; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; McNeal, 1995; Youniss et al., 1997; Luthar et al., 2006). It was proved that students developed and learned some sort of skills and enjoyed them and they also developed school-family relations (Logan&Scarborough, 2008; Marsh, 1992; Barber et al., 2001; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Mahoney et al., 2001; Lewis, 2004; Wylie, 2005; Shulruf et al., 2008; Fredericks & Eccles, 2006). Eccles & Barber (1999) and Mahoney&Cairns (1997) stated that SEAs produced positive results in social relations, and critical educational skills and increased students' academic achievements between 2-11%. Similarly, Guest&Schneider (2003) found that while participation in sports activities improved children of poor families, it did not make any change in children of rich families. Some negative effects were also reported about SEAs. For example; Eccles&Barber (1999); Hansen et al., (2003); Smoll&Smith (1989); Gilman et al., (2004); Mahoney et al., (2004; 2001) revealed that badly-organized activities led upper level classes to alcohol use. Dishion et al (1999; Mahoney&Stattin, 2000) found that they led students to risk groups. However, they discovered positive results in well-organized ones. As far as Turkish Educational System is concerned, SEAs are organized with a regulation prepared by the Ministry of National Educational (MEB) to develop students' academic and social skills. These facilities are excursion, competitions, physical education, scouting, music, folklore, newspaper/journal preparation, shows, theatre, fashion shows, exhibitions and fair (REGA, 2008). For this reason, main concern of this study is to discover if these activities effect students' academic and social development. If so, in what way this occurs.

3. Research Methodology

This study was carried out qualitatively. These types of research studies are used to gain in-depth knowledge in a study (Denzin&Lincoln, 2005; Marshall&Rossman, 2006). Ethnographic designs, as Creswell (2002) described them, "are qualitative research procedures for describing, analyzing, and interpreting a culture-sharing group's shared patterns of behavior, beliefs, and language that develop over time" (p.481). As such, by using this research design and utilizing in-depth interviews, the study explored "culture-sharing" behaviors, beliefs, and language among students in Turkey. Students' views were obtained through interviews with semi-structured questions, as recommended by Bogdan&Biklen (1998), to "get the subjects to freely express their thoughts around particular topics" (p.3). The research has mainly sought answer to the following question: "*Does participating in SEAs affect you academically and socially?*" In this manner, *excursion, competitions, physical education, scouting, music, folklore, newspaper/journal preparation, shows, theatre, fashion shows, exhibitions, chess, tennis, basketball, fair and creative drama* classes were designed. In this process, the students were followed for one year and they were interviewed with semi structured questions.

3.1 Population and sample

The sampling was determined by purposive sampling method that was described as the best used with small numbers of individuals/groups which may well be sufficient for understanding human perceptions, problems, needs, behaviors and contexts, which are the main justification for a qualitative audience research. Purposive sampling is particularly relevant when the desired population for the study is rare or very difficult to locate and recruit for a study. The advantage of purpose sampling is that the researcher can use prior knowledge to choose respondents (Bailey, 1994, p.96). The participants were 20 students at an Anatolian High School in Istanbul, in 2010/2011 academic year in Turkey. The sampling consisted of 10 male, 10 female students; 7 of them are 16 years old, 7 are 17, and 6 students are 18 years old.

3.2 Data Collection and analysis

In the present study, the data were collected using the following procedure. First, in an e-mail the school principal was informed about the purpose of the study, and he was asked if he could provide students to participate

in this research by sharing their ideas about activities voluntarily. The principal and volunteer students were invited to take part in the research consented after being assured of the confidentiality of the data to be gathered from them. It was promised that their identities would be kept in secret and their names would not be mentioned in any part of the study or shared with anyone else. Second, an interview was planned on an agreed-upon day with those who accepted the invitation, and the participants were visited on that date. The interviews were both recorded and noted with their permission and each took approximately 50-60 minutes. To analyze the gathered data, the “content analysis” technique was used. This type of analysis usually aims to gather similar data on a topic and comment on it (Büyüköztürk et al., 2008; Mayring, 2000; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2000). The first step taken in the analysis of the data was the data organization procedures recommended by Bogdan & Biklen (1998). In organizing the data, the researcher revisited each interviewer and listened to each audiotape while reviewing the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the data. Each participant’s interview transcript was later analyzed according to the data analysis procedures described by Bogdan & Biklen (1998), which call for development of coding categories, mechanical sorting of the data, and analysis of the data within each coding category. Each participant’s interview was coded separately according to the participant’s views on SEAs as well as on various emerging themes and, later, on repeated themes among the interviews was grouped into coding categories. The students’ views were coded as *Interviewer 1 (INT.1)*, *Interviewer 2 (INT.2)*, *Interviewer 3 (INT.3)*. The constant comparative approach (Glaser, 1992) was used in the process of organizing and analyzing the data. The use of the constant comparative method results in the saturation of categories and the emergence of theory. The data were collected mainly with the following semi-structured questions: *Does participating in SEAs affect you academically and socially? Is there a change in your success in courses and academic facilities after SEAs? If so how? Is there a change in your success in social relations after SEAs? If so how? Is there a change in your behaviors positively after SEAs? If so what way? Is there a change in your behaviors negatively after SEAs? If so what way?*

3.3 Trustworthiness and rigor

Here, the interviewer played the role of facilitator and listener without leading the participants. Interviews have been widely used lately as they provide in-depth answers. The locations were chosen to avoid being affected by power relations. There are several limitations of this research. First, the sample was one of volunteers and they are not necessarily representative of other students. Secondly, the researcher was the main instrument of data analysis. The analyses and results are a product of the researcher’s interpretation of the data. This information may help the reader assess the validity of the findings for themselves. An exploratory study is the product of the researcher’s perspective, and it is recognized that a different researcher may identify different features of importance within the same data sets (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2002).

4. Findings

Perceptions of students on SEAs in Turkey were evaluated in this study, and a number of findings were obtained. According to the one student, *“SEAs are beneficial for us. We need a creative and plentiful atmosphere to grow up better, but there are always boring lessons like math, literature, geography. I attend to the theatre club and I have fun. I have learned new things and I feel much better than before (INT.5)”*. Another student commented, *“We have limited choices as students. However, I participated in the music club. Before joining that club, I was shy, and did not have much self-confidence. I have a lot of friends now and I am more popular. Therefore, I always want to go to school (INT.2)”*. A student revealed, *“I am at sports club. After the club, I am fitter, more relaxed and more popular. I have good relationships with my teachers and we get better results in my exams then. Now my family and I are happier (INT.11)”*. Another student claimed, *“I am at the chess club. I go to the club at weekends. Before that, we used to waste a lot of my time watching television or surfing on the net. Now, we share a lot of things together with 20 other students like playing together, going to the cinema (INT.15)”*. A student indicated, *“I attend to tennis club and I spend good time there. I have a lot of friends there. Before the club, I was reserved, later I became more sociable. There are a few activities at school. I hope they become more common. Of these activities, only sports and music club work well. For me but now school is more enjoyable (INT.4)”*. Another student conveyed, *“We are not satisfied with these activities, because there are a lot of clubs and they waste my time. Socially, they are good but distract me from my lessons (INT.13)”*. A student agreed with this idea, *“These activities are waste of time. Takes time but we have more serious exams to handle (INT.10)”*. Another student commented, *“These activities affect my*

school attendance. I go to school more regularly. I am more motivated and I have increased my grades. I am more popular among my teachers and friends and I am more confident. I have better relations with our teachers, friends and parents (INT.11).” Moreover, a student claimed, “At first I was completely opposed to them but my friends forced me to participate in the drama club. Now I am addicted to this club. I am happier there and school is an attractive place for me. We are all good and well-mannered students (INT.3)”. A student conveyed, “They make me feel better. They affect my academic achievement positively. My lessons are better now. I am also more sociable and now have more friends. They convert students’ negative attitudes into positive ones. I know many students who have changed in a good way after the music club (INT.1/INT.8).” A student alleged that, “It is very good to have SEAs at school. I attend journal preparation club and it makes me feel better and more sociable. It changes me in a positive way both socially and academically (INT. 18)”. Another student affirmed that, “If I weren’t in this club, I would be worse. I changed in a positive way. If I did not join this club I would be doing risky things to reveal my energy. I am affected socially more by SEAs (INT.2).”

5. Discussion

Students’ views on SEAs were evaluated in this study, and a number of results were obtained. According to results, SEAs were significant for their academic and social skills. They stated that after SEAs, their grades got better gradually. This is supported by Eccles & Barber (1999), Fujita (2006), Shulruf et al (2008), Sheridan&Gutkin, (2000) and Luthar et al (2006). This might stem from self-confidence and good feelings gained from these activities. A further result revealed that SEAs improved their social skills more than their academic skills relatively. This result is also supported by Cooper et al (1999), Logan&Scarborough (2008), Eccles & Barber (1999), Marsh & Kleitman (2002), Dfes (2005), Gerber (1996), Lewis (2004), Wylie (2005) and Darling et al (2008). This may stem from the relations built during these activities. According to another result, most students wanted their schools to organize these activities more professionally. This is probably because of observed positive results of the SEAs. A further result revealed that students had some concerns considering them as a waste of time causing negligence of their basic responsibilities. This is supported by Eccles & Barber (1999), Dishion et al (1999), Mahoney et al (2004; 2001), Hansen et al (2003), Smoll&Smith (1989), Gilman et al, (2004). This result may be because of pressure placed on both themselves and their families in getting a place at a university.

6. Conclusion

Results of this study revealed that SEAs increased students’ both social and academic achievements. Many students participate in SEAs although they are not directly measured and related to their academic courses. Studies reveal that these activities are important positive contributors to formal programs, so in some countries they are integrated into formal programs. Another thing is that SEAs can help administrators to make school more attractive and peaceful. Enriching SEAs depends on economic power. However, when cost of student failures, dropouts, absenteeism is analyzed financially, organizing them costs cheaper than the cost negative results cause. Therefore, function and current situation of SEAs should be reconsidered. It is recommended that administrators should organize them to increase students’ academic and social development.

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