

Practicality of Free Activities in Elementary Schools: A Case Study in City of Kırıkkale

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Abstract: When leisure time is utilized in a conscious way, it is quite significant time period, which can provide individual and social benefits. However, educational deficiency toward leisure time causes waste of this time with activities with no any benefit and development of harmful behaviors such as drug and alcohol addictions and consumption. To save the society from these sorts of adverse effects of leisure time, it is essential to develop habits regarding leisure time at early ages. In this context, Ministry of National Education (MNE) started leisure activity applications at primary school level starting with the educational year of 2010-2011. The purpose of the present study is to determine opinions of form teachers regarding practicability of free activities. The inquiry developed by the researcher was applied to the 138 form teachers who were working across the elementary schools in the city of Kırıkkale; and evaluations were conducted based on arithmetic averages of teachers. Ultimately, it was determined that although there were benefits and acquisitions, free activities applications have not been applied relevant to its main purpose. The major reason for this were lack of sufficient opportunities, literature resources which may guide teachers, insufficient support from both internal and external areas of schools. Besides, it was determined that leisure activity course periods have been utilized to complete missing parts of the other courses. Additionally, it was determined that form teachers were in need of in-service-training regarding the course; at the same time they requested relevant course during their education in the university.

Key words: Leisure • Free activity • Education • Elementary school

INTRODUCTION

Leisure time is always important in every periods of life. Leisure time activities are important means to nourish the people's psychological, physical, social and even mental health; but physical activity need of humanbeing is very often neglected [1]. However, especially leisure time in the childhood is more important than the one in adult period since it has determining effect on the development of leisure time habits. In general, it is not easy to give education to the adults after their school periods, who present leisure time behaviors as much as children in their school period. But, it is undeniable that a well-structured leisure time education will provide significant contributions to their life in their adult period. Therefore it is important to give people correct leisure time habits during their childhood when their foundation of adulthood life is being structured.

If leisure time which can be defined as a residual time period in daily life after all requisite activities, can be utilized through correct activities, it will be beneficent from many individual and social angles. But, leisure time is time period in which harmful and adverse behaviors can be developed such as drug usage, alcohol consumption and vandalism [2-4]. Recently, it has been observed that crime involvement and smoking, alcohol addiction have fallen till childhood period. Data presented by the General Police Department showed that smoking starts from 9-10 years old, alcohol consumption starting from 12-14 ages. According to the report prepared by the Alcohol and Substituent Addiction Research and Treatment Center (AMATEM), exposure to the volatile substance starts from ages of 11-12, to drugs from ages of 16-17, to heroines from ages of 18-19 and to narcotics from ages of 16 [5]. While rate of increase in child-committed crimes was 10% in the U.S. and the world average was 20%, this figure was almost 40% in Turkey [6].

In addition to this fact, it was also seen that children under ten in the U.S. are spending 75.5% of their daily life in a stationary way by watching TV, playing PC games and making homework [7]. Parallel to the developments in the world, it is known that leisure time activities are channeled to the passive activities and this situation are the main cause of obesity, cardiac diseases and etc. health problem due to the participation of TV, personal computers, internet and etc. into our daily life in Turkey [8]. Therefore, it has been more important than ever to provide education for structured leisure time in the early time. It must be known that correct utilization from the leisure time protects children and youth to encounter with adverse incidents in their life; and even it can be used as a treatment mean for who indulged in these adverse conditions [7,9,10].

Changes in social life style have resulted in addition of leisure time education into the school curriculum. Addition of concept of leisure time education into the school environment will allow children to experience correct leisure time activities that they can use in their all life for the first time. Social talents and talents for overcoming tough situations which can be transferred to the other parts of the life are being formed along with these activities [4].

Furthermore, leisure time activities established appropriately around the school affect the academic success and increases performance in school grades. As children participate into the leisure time activities, their learning skills develop and progress which is eventually reflected by their school performances. For instance, students who were added environmental courses in their curriculum and who were applied environment-based learning technique have showed better results in standard test compared to the students from the conventional schools. Sample studies consisted of educational activities with environmental orientation as a basic point have been resulted with progress in terms of reading speed; improvement in math; best performance in science and social area; reduction in disciplinary issues within the classroom; providing better environment to the students in terms of equal opportunity [7].

On the other hand, MNE has been trying to take several precautions as well. To that end, Leisure Activity Applications has been started after the first year of the educational year of 2010-2011. This course was given five hours a week for the 1st, 2nd and the 3rd classes; and four hours for the 4th and 5th classes. The purpose of the course was that “by means of educatory and entertaining applications, to make students love their school more, to let them express themselves more easily, to let them feel more safe and happy, to assist them to socialize with other

friends by increasing their interactions with them; and to contribute their mental, physical, social and cultural developments” [11].

However, it is known that there are some issues has been experienced regarding practicability of leisure activity applications and this situation has been supported by several studies [2,12]. It is seen that an application in which the responsible teacher experiences issues cannot possibly be efficient. However, leisure time activities have significant place in education. Especially activity types that are structured and provided to the early age groups would eventually contribute their adulthood life and support them in every aspect of their future.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The universe of the study was consisted of form teachers who were working in the city Kırkkale during the education year of 2011-2012. Totally 138 form teacher were included in sampling group. An inquiry method was used to collect required data. Through the open-ended questions regarding leisure activity applications, 30 form teachers were asked to express their opinions. Along with their opinions, inquiry questions were created. There were 37 representations in the inquiry concerning practicability of leisure activity course, which were in the form of five-point Likert scale.

Reliability study regarding the inquiry was conducted over 45 form teachers who were not included in our sampling group. The Cronbach's Alpha value was determined as .824. Collected data was interpreted by means of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 20 statistical package; and arithmetic average analyses (X) were conducted for the given answers. When average of the respondents' agreement level with the representation was in the range of 1.00-1.79, it was “totally disagree”; in the range of 1.80-2.59, “little bit agree”; in the range of 2.60-3.39, it was “partially/midlevel agree”; in the range of 3.40-4.19, it was “much agree”; and in the range of 4.20-5.00, it was “very much agree”.

RESULTS

As it can be seen from the table 1, about free activities, form teachers “little bit agree” with the availability of the resources to apply leisure activity course in their schools such as representations of “socio-economic condition of students are sufficient for free activities which requires economic availability, sufficiency of school opportunities for free activities, having facilities to implement sport activities, having

Table 1: Teachers' Point of View Regarding Opportunities in Free activities

	N	\bar{x}	SD
Opportunities at school are sufficient	138	2.42	0.958
We have opportunities to carry out cultural activities	137	2.23	0.985
We have opportunities to carry out sport activities	138	2.17	0.978
Students' socio-economic conditions are appropriate for activities which require economic burden	137	2.12	1.065
We have opportunities to carry out art activities	138	1.96	0.955

Table 2: Teachers' Opinions Regarding Supporting Leisure Activity Applications

	N	\bar{x}	SD
Cooperation with other teachers from various branches	136	2.89	1.146
Administrative support	137	2.74	1.052
Cooperation with counseling service	132	2.70	1.254
Family support	138	2.38	1.095
Support from neighboring organizations	135	2.03	1.065

Table 3: Teachers' Activity Preferences During Leisure Time Classes

	N	\bar{x}	SD
Completing missing subjects of other courses	137	3.07	1.173
Preferring activities in which they can easily keep students under control	137	3.00	1.029
Whatever students prefer	137	2.65	1.038
Totally free time	134	1.82	0.857

Table 4: Teachers' Opinion Regarding Reasons Adversely Affecting Application of Free activities

	N	\bar{x}	SD
Individual differences among students rarify courses	138	3.51	
Since content of the core courses are quite difficult, leisure time is spent for these courses	137	3.10	1.178
Teachers' attitude toward leisure activity class	136	3.04	1.352
Lack sufficient literature source concerning free activities	138	2.86	1.206
Families' attitude toward leisure activity class	138	2.65	1.188
Regulations on free activities are appropriate to the conditions in our country	136	2.28	0.979
Regulations on free activities are appropriate to the conditions in our school	138	2.22	1.030
There is sufficient amount of materials for free activities in our school	138	2.16	1.069
MEB has sufficient regulation concerning free activities	137	2.08	1.029

Table 5: Form teachers' Self-Evaluation Regarding Free activities

	N	\bar{x}	SD
I conduct free activities pursuant to their intention.	138	3.14	0.940
I took in-service-training course regarding free activities.	134	1.84	1.205
I took course in university regarding free activities.	133	1.60	1.104
A course concerning free activities must be offered at universities.	137	3.55	1.194
In-service-training course regarding free activities must be opened.	137	2.87	1.403

facilities to perform art activities, having facilities to perform cultural activities.” In this case, it can be said that available opportunities were not sufficient to apply leisure activity course. Results of the other studies regarding leisure activity applications support our finding that there were no sufficient opportunities for leisure activity applications [2,12].

As it can be seen from table 2, opinion of teachers concerning having sufficient support for leisure activity course was determined as “partially/midlevel agree” based

on the representations of “cooperation with other branch teachers, having administrative support, cooperation with counseling service”; and teachers’ agreement was determined as “little bit” concerning with the representations of “having support from families, having support from surrounding organizations.”

Namely, form teachers cannot find sufficient support to conduct free activities at the desired level. This situation can be interpreted as leisure activity applications depends usually on personal efforts and talents of form

teachers. When insufficient opportunities regarding leisure time activities are accompanied by lack of internal and external school support, it is seen impossible that these applications can reach to the described target.

As table 3 presents, teachers agree with the representations of “Completing missing subjects of other courses; Preferring activities in which they can easily keep students under control; Whatever students prefer” on the “partially/midlevel” while they agree with “Totally free time” on the “little bit” level.

Although MNE issued a certain directive not to hold make-up course during leisure activity course hours (<http://ttkb.meb.gov.tr>), it was determined that teachers tend towards completing missing course subjects during this course hours. While leisure activity applications were being included into the curriculum, although hours of Turkish, Maths and Social Study courses were reduced, their subject materials remained same. This condition can be reason why teachers were completing missing subjects during the leisure activity course time.

It is considered that the difference among students’ interests and wishes can be effective in preferences regarding activities in which students can be controlled. Especially, it seems impossible for a teacher to conduct various activities within a single crowded classroom alone. As it can be seen from table 4, position of “individual differences among students” in the first place supports this situation. It is also possible that condition of implementing “Whatever students prefer” was being used as mean to maintain control over the students.

Although it was minor, it can be deduced that teachers were not conducting any activity that may contribute students’ development in terms of leisure activity applications while they were leaving the students totally free during the leisure activity course.

From table 4, regarding the reasons effective in application of leisure activity course inadequately, “individual differences among students rarify the course” is seen as the most important factor. Teachers agree with this opinion on the “much” level. Teachers also agree on the “medium” level that “Due to the heavy content of the core courses, using the leisure activity course for core courses; attitude of teachers toward leisure activity course; lack of sufficient literature regarding free activities; attitude of families toward leisure activity course” factors are effective on ignoring implementing free activities during course hour.

Teachers agree with representations of “Regulations regarding free activities are appropriate to the conditions of our country; regulations regarding free activities are

appropriate to the school conditions; there are sufficient materials for free activities at school; and MNE has sufficient regulations about free activities” on the “little bit” level which means they think that conditions and regulations regarding free activities are insufficient.

As it can be seen from table 5, form teachers agree with the representation of “I conduct free activities pursuant to their intention” on the level of “partially/midlevel”. While teachers’ condition in terms of having in-service training about free activities was on the level of “little bit”; their condition regarding having course about leisure activity during their university education was “negative”. In the same way, they agree with the representation of “opening in-service training course” on the “medium” level; and with the representation of “opening courses on universities regarding free activities” on the “much” level. This situation indicates that current form teachers have insufficient knowledge about free activities and they need education about the subject.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study it was found out that leisure activity applications have not been conducted pursuant to their essential purpose. Among the primary reasons for this, insufficient conditions at schools; lack of internal and external support from schools; teachers suffer lack of knowledge concerning free activities; insufficient literature resource for guidance; and spending time reserved actually for free activities for completing missing subjects of other courses. The research carried out by Bozak [2] also supports the findings of this study.

Application of free activities pursuant to their essential purpose should not only be left to the from teachers’ individual efforts; all relevant teachers from various disciplines must contribute to the process. Students should not be allowed to perform a single activity; there must be arrangements to let them participate into various activities along with their interest and needs. Through a careful planning process, leisure activity applications can be scheduled together with other classes at the same hour; and then activities can be conducted with students from various classrooms jointly. Thus, potential contributions of these applications to the students’ social developments can be benefited.

It is also required to prepare literature resources to develop knowledge of form teachers regarding leisure activity applications and to expand their activity range. Furthermore, knowledge and skills of teachers currently

employed regarding leisure activity must be supported with in-service-training courses. Besides, adding leisure activity courses into curriculum of educational science departments will especially contribute form teachers' pre-service educations.

Internal and external resources of schools must be included in a careful and coordinated planning together with other organizations; game and sport areas, theater, shopping malls and etc. within the periphery of schools must be in the form which can be utilized for leisure activity applications. Support of local administrations can be achieved in regard to have access to facilities mentioned above and to provide public transport opportunities to schools.

When leisure activity applications depend only on form teachers' efforts and limited resources of schools, it is evident that the return on these initiatives will be limited as well. Schools have major potential for developing correct leisure time behaviors and transferring them to the adult period. Thus, to obtain designated acquisitions, leisure activity applications at schools must be object of a comprehensive and organized education as part of leisure time education.

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