



Student Absenteeism in Secondary Education, Absenteeism-Related School Practices and Recommended Policies

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Abstract

This research has been conducted to determine student absenteeism in secondary education, issue-related school practices and recommended policies to eliminate this problem. This research is a mixed study designed according to both quantitative and qualitative research approach. In the research, data were collected from 625 students, 6 managers and 5 guidance counselors. Research data were obtained through the semi-structured interview form and the Discussion Scale of the Reasons of Discontinuity developed by Özbaş (2010). While quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analyses and multiple regression analysis, quantitative data was analyzed by content analysis. In the study, it has been understood that causes of absenteeism are significant predictors of duration of absenteeism, these causes all together explain 22% of the change in duration of absenteeism. It has been revealed that various practices are applied in schools in addition to those specified in the legislation with a view to reduce absenteeism, but these applied strategies are not very effective on participants. It is understood that there exists a need for more comprehensive and professional practices that will eliminate the causes of absenteeism and in this context, participants have made suggestions such as making school center of attraction, modulation of curriculum and reducing academic hours, increasing compatibility of school programs with the central test, scheduling field selection to an earlier period and struggling with absenteeism before it becomes a habit.

Keywords

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Introduction

Education is a process with both individualistic and social returns. Based on this fact, countries have constantly extended the duration of compulsory education. In Turkey, with "the Primary Education and Training Law no 6287" adopted on March 30, 2012 also called as 4+4+4 system, compulsory education was increased to 12 years, and the secondary education was taken into the scope of compulsory education. However, as in many countries, in Turkey, there are many students who can not attend regular training for various reasons during when schools are open to education.

While, in daily life, student absenteeism is referred to as skipping school, cutting class, playing truant, in the literature, it is defined as absenteeism from school without any valid excuses (Stoll, 1990;

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Webber, 2004) or student's absenteeism to the school with or without excuse (Kearney, 2008). Absenteeism is student's failure in carrying out learning activities at school by skipping school; then, this situation leads to students' lack of learning experiences. The factors playing a role in the emergence and continuation of absenteeism are listed in the literature as lack of social support, boredom, lack of interest fields in school, unnecessary lectures and punishments (Starr, 2002; De Kalb, 1999). In addition, many educators have shown as the basic reasons of absenteeism habit such as inability to make friends, being unable to find a cause for school attendance, nonsustaining school environment, adverse weather conditions, transportation and health problems (Teasley, 2004) and unrelated parents and irregular family life (McCray, 2006; Starr, 2002). Incapability of training programs, unqualified educational activities, weakness of teacher-student relations and the impact of peer groups are shown among the reasons for this situation (Reid, 1999). In studies conducted in Turkey, school absenteeism was found associated with unhappiness at school, peer pressure and bullying, school, environment, family and social circle, also academic concerns (Altinkurt, 2008; Kadı, 2000; Ministry of National Education [MEB], 2013).

Whatever the underlying reasons of absenteeism are, it can be said that absenteeism is one of the biggest problems limiting the right to education and affecting the future of the young negatively. Indeed, many studies at national and international level demonstrate a positive relationship between student success and school attendance at all levels of education (Altinkurt, 2008; DeSocio et al., 2007; Eastman, 1998; Education Reform Initiative [ERG], 2015; Ford ve Sutphen, 1996; Lavy, 2010; Reid, 2003) and, in particular, indicate that socioeconomically disadvantaged students are affected by the loss of teaching duration (Bray, 2006).

Absenteeism not only affects student's success but also shapes their subsequent lives. Students' progress, entering the university, career potentials (De Kalb, 1999) and improvement of their self-esteem are also affected by this situation (Reid, 1999). There exists a high correlation between absenteeism and truancy behaviors such as inclination to crime, drug abuse, participation in youth gangs, theft and violence (Aydn, 2003; Barlow & Fleischer, 2011; Mueller & Giacomazzi, 2006). It is reported that absenteeism in the long run makes students disadvantageous in becoming a productive person and students with the habit of school absenteeism have increased tendency to leave school (DeSocio *et al.*, 2007; ERG, 2015; Hunt et al., 2002; Lloyd, Tawila, Clark, & Mensch, 2003; Pehlivan, 2006; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009) and most of the students will drop out of school in the end (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009). It is stated that school dropout brings along huge burden in financial terms for countries, for example, school dropouts cost about 260 billion dollars annually in the United States (Byer and Kuhn, 2007).

In that case, school absenteeism can be considered as the first indication of student's choosing the wrong path and then as the start of future problems. It can be said that the problem with broader extensions than school affects students, their families and the society they belong (De Kalb, 1999; Heilbrunn, 2007). Therefore, it can be seen that countries make an endeavor to minimize the level of student absenteeism. In Turkey, it is possible to give examples in this context such as Progressive Absenteeism Management (ADEY) implemented in the 2011-2012 academic year and changes applied in the Ministry of Education Secondary School Institutions Directive. With ADEY, early identification and evaluation of absenteeism risk and conducting individualized interventions were intended. However, the application has been stopped by the decision of the State Council in August 2013 (Danıřtay Kararı, 2013). These changes to the regulations, on the other hand, have limited the previous absenteeism period of 45 days to 30 days including 10 days without any excuse and added provisions to reduce absenteeism (MEB, 2006). Of course, these steps will help to reduce dropout from the educational system without a diploma as the continuation of absenteeism problem. However, are these arrangements implemented towards increasing all students' attendance to school sufficient? Except these arrangements, what sort of strategies is used by the school managements and what sort of policies should be implemented? Searching answers to these questions is very important in Turkey. Because, according to national and international reports, student absenteeism is quite high in Turkey. In one of these reports, it has been determined that students only 7% of the 180 school days could not be utilized

because of unexcused student absenteeism in Turkey as of 2011-2012 (ERG, 2015). In another report, it was indicated that more than half of 15-year-old group students in Turkey (53.1%) do not attend school at least one day in every two weeks, 44.3% of them do not attend some courses in a school day; 43.1% of them are late for school (Anıl, Özer Özkan, & Demir, 2015). In PISA 2015 report, it was reported that student absenteeism showed an improvement of 3.3% compared to PISA 2012, however, there was an increase in behaviors of skipping some courses (0.3%) and being late for school (2.8%) (Taş, Arıcı, Ozarkan, & Özgürlük, 2016). On the other hand, in Secondary Education Monitoring and Assessment Report published by MEB in 2013, it was reported that overall absenteeism rate was 32.7% in Turkey as of 2012-2013 academic year (Polat, Özoğlu, Yıldız, & Canbolat, 2013). According to data included in Ministry of Education 2015-2019 Strategic Plan, 34.8% of student had an absenteeism over 20 days in 2014 (MEB, 2015). In another study in which e-school data was used, it was indicated that rate of 10 days and longer absenteeism was higher in Turkey (ERG, 2015). Besides, according to 2016 Academic Year Secondary Education Monitoring and Assessment Report, more than half of teachers (56%) considers student absenteeism among the most significant problems in their schools (MEB, 2016).

In this regard, it is considered that studies conducted towards producing solutions to the problem of student absenteeism will contribute to the social development and progress indirectly along with its direct contribution to the educational system. However, analyzing studies conducted on the issue at the national level, it can be seen that mainly these studies focus on the causes of absenteeism and many of these studies are carried out towards the primary education level (Bakış, Börkan, Levent, Pelek, & Dereli, 2014; ERG, 2015; Kadı, 2000; Karataş, 2003; Özbaş, 2010; Özkanal & Arıkan, 2011; Yıldız & Kula, 2011). It can be understood that, in some of studies conducted on the secondary education level (Altınkurt, 2008; Pehlivan, 2006; Öztekin, 2013; Sakıncı, 2013), suggestions towards reducing absenteeism are given. For all these reasons, in the research, it has been aimed to determine student absenteeism in secondary education, school practices oriented towards this issue and suggested policies. In line with the general objective, the following questions are tried to be solved.

- 1) What is the impact of causes of absenteeism on the duration of absenteeism in the secondary education?
- 2) What kind of strategies are used in schools to reduce student absenteeism in the secondary education?
- 3) What kind of policies do school managers and guidance counselors suggest to reduce student absenteeism in secondary education?

Method

Research Model

This research is a mixed study designed according to both quantitative and qualitative research approach (Mixed Method). According to Creswell (2012), the aim of mixed method is to ensure better understanding of such a complex phenomenon with a more holistic approach. While this method searches for an answer to the research question, it allows researchers to use multiple approaches rather than limiting their options. In this respect, it is not a restrictive research method but an extenders and creative type of research method. In the study in which a single method, this method allows to answer research questions in a more effective and wider sense and to make qualitative and quantitative data more powerful and solid by means of revealing difference perceptions and opinions that may be unnoticed. Consequently, it strengthens advantageous aspects of both data collection tools (as cited in Gökçek, 2015).

Study Group

The research population consists of 4982 secondary education students attending secondary education school in Burdur city center, school managers and guidance counselors in these schools as of 2015-2016 academic year. Since reaching the research population will lead to financial and time constraints, secondary education schools were divided into clusters based on high school base points such as low, middle and high by means multi-stage sampling method. Then, two schools from each group were included in the research by means of random sampling method. For the quantitative aspects of the study, the aim was to reach 535 students with a sampling error of 4% (Anderson, 1990 as cited in

Balci, 2006). For this, a classroom from each grade was taken within the scope of the study among all schools. In the study, 20% more scales than the sample size was distributed. Some students did not provide feedback and thus a total of 625 students were accessed in the study. However, due to missing data, 531 of them was taken into scale analysis. In this context, study group of the research consists of 346 (65.2%) female and 185 (34.8%) male secondary education students. Of students included in the study group, 211 (39.74%) attend Anatolian high school, 149 (28.06%) attend Science and Social Sciences high school and 171 (32.20%) attend Vocational high school. 145 of students (27.30%) attend the ninth grade; 128 of them (24.10%) attend the tenth grade; 136 (25.61%) of them attend the eleventh grade; 121 of them (22.79%) attend the twelfth grade.

The study group covering the qualitative dimension of the research consists of managers or assistant managers and guidance counselors of schools surveyed. In this context, 4 managers, 2 assistant managers and 5 guidance counselors were reached. While all managers in the study group are males, 2 of guidance counselors are males and 3 of them are females. Ages of managers and teachers range from 26 to 49 and their seniority ranges from 4 to 24 years. Except one participant, seniority of other participants was higher than 10 years.

Data Collection Instrument

In the study, two different measurement tools have been employed. The first tool is the "Discussion Scale of the Reasons of Discontinuity" developed by Özbaş (2010). The 26-item scale consists of six dimensions. There are 5 items in family dimension of the scale, 9 items in student dimension, 4 items in school dimension, 3 items in classroom dimension, 2 items in natural conditions dimension and 3 items in peer dimension. Reliability of the scale was calculated as .908 by Özbaş. In this study, alpha reliability coefficient of the scale was calculated as .857. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient for subscales are calculated as .663 in family dimension, .797 in student dimension, .837 in school dimension, .790 in class dimensions, .769 in peer dimension, .603 in natural conditions dimension and .769 in friends dimension. The fact that reliability coefficient is .60 and higher, it is considered sufficient in general in terms of reliability (Kalaycı, 2009).

The second among data used in the research was obtained through semi-structured interview. During the process of developing a semi-structured interview form, related literature was scanned, and a question pool was established by analyzing data collection tools used in similar studies. Established items have been submitted for reviews of education science and assessment-evaluation experts. In this way, it was controlled whether items were sufficient in terms of scope and form, and some items were eliminated based on reviews, in some items, necessary corrections were applied from the point of statements and expression. A preliminary application has been applied with prepared questions for a manager and guidance counselor who are not included in the study group and questions leading to similar answers were combined to create the final structure of the interview form.

Implementation of Data Collecting Application

In the research, the scale in which quantitative data are collected was applied by the researcher to students included in the study in their classrooms at the end of fall semester of 2015-2016 academic year. Before starting the implementation, the researcher has made necessary explanations about the scale and the application process. By contacting school managers and guidance counselors, related information have been provided to them, and a meeting request has been made to collect qualitative data. Interviews were conducted on the specified day and time in managers' and guidance counselors' rooms. Each meeting lasted approximately 40 minutes. During meetings, voice recorders were used with the permission from participants to avoid missing data and time losses and to increase reliability and accuracy of the research.

Data Analysis

In the study, descriptive and multiple regression analysis were used in the analysis of quantitative data. Thus, at first it was checked whether there were multiple connectedness among predictive variables with a view to increase reliability of regression analysis. For this purpose, binary correlations between independent variables were analyzed and it has been understood that there is not high degree of correlation between predictor variables (Correlation coefficient <.70). Besides, tolerance

values, variance magnification factor (VIF) and condition index (CI) were analyzed. Since tolerance values of predictor variables are higher than .20 and VIF values are higher than 10 and CI values are lower than 30, values are considered to meet the multi-linearity assumption (Büyüköztürk, 2010). In the regression analysis, extreme values may impair the harmony of model with the theoretical model. Therefore, prior to regression analysis, Mahalanobis distances were calculated, and since number of samples were over 500 and predictor variables were over 5, values of 25 and higher were considered to be extreme values (Field, 2005). Participants exceeding this limit values were not included in the analyses and multiple regression analysis was performed on 503 participants. Significance status was evaluated according to $p < 0.05$ level.

Data obtained from managers and guidance counselors with semi-structured interview were analyzed by the content analysis. Within the framework of content analysis, firstly interviews were recorded, and audio recordings were converted into texts. After taking necessary measures regarding the fact that text files are correct and complete, text files were sent to participants whose views were consulted as per the ethics of research via e-mail. Participants were requested to read transcript of the interview carefully and to apply partial changes deemed as necessary in a different color and to resubmit corrected text files to the researcher. Texts resubmitted by participants and previous versions were compared, and it was observed that participants had applied some minor edits as per rules of syntax and spelling rules. Texts obtained as a result of these processes were read by the researcher, and by considering the related literature, concepts and concept sets in interview texts were determined in context of purpose of the research and its sub-objectives, and codes were generated to constitute a meaningful whole from these sets. Then a field expert was hired to determine codes and themes independently. By determining codes and themes with disagreement, another field expert was consulted regarding the situation. Based on the expert opinion, a secondary reading was carried out by the researchers, and codes and themes were put into their final form. Frequency of the code on which code the participants' answers corresponded was accepted as "one", and this process was repeated for all participants' answers. In this way, frequency (f) and percentage (%) values for the distribution of codes were calculated. In cases where it was necessary in the interpretation of the findings, opinions of participants were quoted. To ensure the confidentiality, participants were indicated by the abbreviations such as (M) for managers, (G) for guidance counselors, and each participant was given a number.

Results

In this part of the research, primarily the effect of causes of absenteeism causes of absenteeism on duration of absenteeism among students, then practices implemented by school administrations and policy suggestions towards reducing student absenteeism were included.

Effect of Absenteeism Causes on the Duration of Absenteeism

The first question of the research is given as "what is the impact of absenteeism causes on the duration of absenteeism?". The results obtained for the solution of this problem are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Effect of Absenteeism Causes on the Duration of Absenteeism

Variable	B	Ss	β	t	p	Binary r	Partial r
Fixed	1.557	.995		1.565	.118		
School-based reasons	.171	.540	.021	.317	.751	.345	.014
Peer-based causes	1.380	.430	.179	3.206	.001	.369	.142
Natural conditions based causes	-1.375	.669	-.104	-2.057	.040	.116	-.092
Family-based causes	-2.335	.871	-.126	-2.681	.008	.086	-.119
Student-based causes	4.982	.934	.378	5.334	.000	.411	.233
Classroom-based causes	.338	.550	.034	.615	.539	.310	.028

Analyzing the Table 1, it can be seen that causes of absenteeism are significant predictors ($R = .465$ $G2 = .216$) of absenteeism duration ($F(6-497) = 22.883$, $p < .01$). These variables all together explain about 22% of the change in the duration of absenteeism. Considering beta values, it has been understood that student-based causes are the most effective factor the absence of time causes stemming from the students as the most influential factor ($\beta = .378$), and they are followed by friends-based ($\beta = .179$), family-based ($\beta = .126$), natural conditions based ($\beta = .104$), grade-based ($\beta = .034$) and school-based ($\beta = .021$) factors. Analyzing the t-test results regarding significance of regression coefficients, it can be seen that causes based on friend, family and natural conditions are significant predictor of the duration of absenteeism ($p < .05$). Other factors have significant effect on the duration of absenteeism. Analyzing the binary and partial correlations between predictor variables and the predictor variable, it can be seen that there is a positive and moderate relationship between the duration of absenteeism and students ($r = 0.41$), friends ($r = 0.37$), school ($r = 0.32$) and grade ($r = 0.31$) based causes of absenteeism, but analyzing the other variables, the relationship between these predictor variables and the predicted variable falls down. According to the regression analysis results, the regression analysis predicting the duration of absenteeism is given below.

Duration of absenteeism = $(.171 * \text{School}) + (1.380 * \text{Friends}) - (1.375 * \text{Natural conditions}) - (2.335 * \text{Family}) + (4.982 * \text{Students}) + (338 * \text{Grade})$

Strategies Implemented in Schools to Reduce Absenteeism

Participants were asked "What kind of strategies are implemented in your school to reduce absenteeism?". As a result of content analysis, themes and codes related to the question are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes and Codes Related to Strategies Implemented in School to Reduce Student Absenteeism

Theme	Codes	Participants Presenting Opinion	f	%
Reducing Absenteeism Oriented Applied Strategies	Early parent information	M1, M2, M3	3	27
	Limiting late arrival excuse papers	M1, M5	2	18
	Informing parents and students about why absenteeism should not be done	M1, M3, M5, G1, G2, G4	6	55
	Having interviews with parents and students	M1, M3, M4, M6, G1, G4, R5	6	55
	Struggling with learned helplessness	M1, G1, G4	3	27
	Students' requirement to explain the reason for absenteeism	G4, M3, M5	3	27
	Using absenteeism as criterion in awarding	M3	1	9
	Making home visits	G4, M6, M4	3	27

Analyzing Table 2, additional practices have been applied in addition to those implemented in accordance with the legislation to reduce absenteeism in schools. These strategies include quickly informing the parents at the end of first lesson ($n = 3$), limiting late arrival excuse papers ($n = 2$), informing parents and students about absenteeism ($n = 6$), having interviews with parents and students ($n = 6$), struggling with learned helplessness ($n = 3$), students' requirement to explain the reason for absenteeism ($n = 3$), using absenteeism as criterion in awarding ($n = 1$) and making home visits ($n = 3$). Sample opinions of some participants regarding early informing parents and limiting late arrival excuse papers are given below.

“Some parents do not subscribe to 8383. Even considering that they subscribe, related messages are sent to the parents in the evening. Messages are immediately sent to parents at the end of first lesson to limit absenteeism with 1-2 course hours and to prevent extending absenteeism to the whole day.” (M1).

“At the end of the first course, parents of random 3-4 students are called. This application established the perception of immediate information to parents among students.” (M5).

“We limit granting late arrival excuse papers with the first 5 minutes of course, and students are allowed to take this paper only 3 times a year.” (M1).

Expressions from participants who inform that they conduct information to parents and students about why students should not be absent from school and they struggle with learned helplessness to reduce absenteeism are given below.

“We often share the cost of absenteeism as learned academically through scientific data to students and parents.” (M1).

“Practices are carried out towards students establishing targets of their own and strengthening their targets. For example, we prepare colorful card related to their targets and stick these cards to areas they can easily notice. Moreover, we invite people graduated from our high school and take a place in society by getting free of difficult conditions, and introduce these people with our students. Where was the school located in live of these people? Such questions are answered in these interviews.” (G1).

Opinions of some participants regarding practices such as students’ requirement to explain the reason for absenteeism and making home visits are given below.

“At the end of day, names of absent students from each class are given to the related assistant manager. The next day, students are not allowed to enter the class freely. Student submits the cause for his/her absenteeism to the assistant manager in the first absenteeism in a month, to the head assistant in the second incident, and to the manager in the third incident. As the management level increases for which the student makes a statement, deterrence increases.” (M3).

“A commission consisting of a manager, guidance counselor and class master is established for students with high level of absenteeism, and we make home visits by taking our cake and pastry. Thus, both parents and student consider school as important for them, besides, they understand its seriousness and behave more sensitively.” (M6).

Opinions of some participants regarding practices in schools to reduce student absenteeism such as parent-student interviews and using absenteeism as criterion in awarding are given below.

“In our school, one of the criteria we consider while giving awards is the duration of absenteeism. The student with the least absenteeism receives an award. For example, 3 students visiting Switzerland were in such status.” (M3).

“Our management and guidance counselors especially interview with student with chronic absenteeism. Families of such students are invited to school. However, in these meetings, rather than judging, speeches are made regarding what can be done to eliminate the causes of absenteeism and why absenteeism should not be made.” (G4).

Qualification of Practices Implemented in School to Reduce Absenteeism

Katılımcılara “Okulunuzda öğrenci devamsızlığını azaltmak amacıyla yapılan uygulamaları yeterli buluyor musunuz? Neden? sorusu yöneltilmiştir. Analiz sonucunda, katılımcıların bu uygulamaları kısmen yeterli veya yetersiz bulduğu anlaşılmıştır. Soruyla ilgili temalar ve kodlar Tablo 3’te verilmiştir.

Table 3. Themes and Codes related to Efficiency of Practices Implemented towards Decreasing Student Absenteeism

Theme	Codes	Participants Presenting Opinion	f	%
Efficiency of school practices towards absenteeism	Partially efficient	M1, M2, M3, M4, M6, G1, G5	7	64
	Insufficient	M5, G2, G3, G4	4	36

Analyzing Table 3, it is understood that majority of participants found strategies used to reduce absenteeism in schools as partially sufficient (n=7) and some of them found these practices as insufficient. Examples of participant opinions regarding why they think in this way are given below.

“If you ask whether our school-based practices are useful, it can say that they are not very deterrent and we could not proceed much. You can offer partial solutions, you cannot afford to comprehensive implementation.” (M6).

“School practices remain superficial. There is a need for more extensive practices that will eliminate the causes of absenteeism. However, school have limited field of activity in this context. For instance, how will it be possible to make schools center of attraction or keep students in school during exam periods?” (A5).

Recommended Policies Towards Decreasing Student Absenteeism

Finally in the research, the participants were asked “What are the policies you recommend in reducing student absenteeism?” . Themes and codes related to this question are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Themes and Codes related to Suggestions towards Reducing Student Absenteeism

Theme	Codes	Participants Presenting Opinion	f	%
Suggestions towards decreasing absenteeism	Employing qualified and undaunted teachers	M1, M3, G2	3	27
	Consistency should be ensured between the curriculum and transition from secondary to high education	M1, M4, M5, M6, G1, G3, G4	7	64
	Field selection should be done earlier	G1, M1, M5	3	27
	Guidance counselor norm should be changed	G1, G3	2	18
	Schools must become the center of attraction	M1, M4, M5, M6, G1, G3, G4, G5	8	73
	The curriculum should be relieved/class hours should be reduced	M3, M4, M5, G1, G3	5	46
	Absenteeism should be prevented from becoming a habit	M4, G1, G4, G5	4	36
	Family psychologists should be established	G1	1	9
	School-business program in vocational schools should be amended	M4	1	9
	Transition to open high school should be reevaluated	G4	1	9

Analyzing Table 3, it can be understood that participants have made many suggestions for the future to reduce student absenteeism. In this context, while most of participants made suggestions such as making schools center of attraction (n = 8), ensuring consistency between the curriculum and

transition from secondary to high education (n = 7) while others made suggestions such as relieving curriculum/reducing class hours (n = 5), the prevention of absenteeism becoming a habit (n = 4), early selection of fields (n = 3). In addition to these, suggestions such as changing guidance counselor norm (n=2), employment of qualified and undaunted teachers (n=3), establishing family psychologists (n=1), and reconsidering transition to open high school (n=1) were also presented.

Examples of participants' opinions about suggestions including making schools center of attraction and ensuring consistency between the curriculum and transition from secondary to high education are as follows:

"Transition between stages causes student to perceive some sources as unnecessary. Course-based absenteeism emerges. Other than this, long-term absences are generally observed during period closer to the central exams. Next think you see is that the student does not visit school for one or one and a half months. I think if integration between the program and the exam, absenteeism will be reduced." (G4).

"When it comes to school, students think of an ordinary canteen, a classroom consisting of four walls, desks ad table without internet and nowhere to receive prints. We should transform our into place where student can spend time enjoying the sports and activities. Rather than just an environment where students are limited with timetables, we should transform schools into centers of attraction where they will find something from life and where they will come eagerly not from necessity." (G5).

Examples of participants' opinions about suggestions including relieving curriculum and reducing class hours, employing qualified and undaunted teachers are summarized below.

"To reduce absenteeism, we need qualified teachers who are dedicated and undaunted and who love their work. Sometimes teachers do not think about what they can do; they immediately hold the parents responsible for problems. When we offer doing something, we face with reactions such as: what is the use of guidance service? will I also deal with this situation? I can give lecture if student is not absent..." (M1).

"Course load should be reduced. Before lunchtime basic courses should be carried out, and afternoon should be spared to cultural activities. Rather than trying to make each school equipped in every sense, schools should come to the fore with their different aspects. While there are courts, football etc. fields and teachers to provide such training in one school, another school may have swimming pool, and another one may include very equipped laboratory or music room. Student should be able to participate any activities that he/she likes in the school where the activity is provided. Thus, each school will not have to establish a music room, gym. Not only are resources used effectively, but also quality of these places also rises. While some students develop projects, others play football, basketball at a professional level. One students may learn to play an instrument while another one makes designs etc." (G1).

Examples of participants' opinions about suggestions including preventing absenteeism to become a habit and changing guidance counselor norm are as follows.

"In the secondary education, a guidance counselor norm is granted per 500 students. Guide classroom teachers also attend class until evening, besides their field domination is also questionable. Therefore, in schools, rather than preventive measures, interventions for chronic absentee students are applied. However, measures should be taken before absenteeism becomes a habit. Therefore, guidance counselor norm of schools should be revised." (G3).

"By conducting field selection during the 10th grade, students attend courses outside their interest for two years before the 10th grade. Consequently, absenteeism towards

these courses becomes a factor alienating students from the school. Although this application is implemented because of curriculum intensity of the 9th grade, I think it should be reviewed and field selection should be conducted earlier during secondary education." (G1).

"Absenteeism is not a situation emerging suddenly. Foundations of this problem are based on the elementary school. Right at these stages, student's perception of the school should be shaped. Early interventions should be made before absenteeism becomes habitual, at this stage, the situation becomes chronic. It is not easy to get results." (G5).

Examples of participants' opinions about suggestions including establishing family psychologists, reconsidering school and business practices and transition to open high school are given below.

"Family psychologists such as family medicine system should be established. Most students and families are poor in terms of coping with stress and problem solving skills. Psychologists in the public health directorate are not open to public, and you cannot visit psychologists in hospitals without a referral. When such a formation is implemented, a field as support for family and student can be established. Problems can be solved without ossification." (G1).

"We have students who cannot come to school for 2-3 months because of health problems etc. This situation distances student from the school. However, students should benefit from the open high school education regardless of registration period etc. until causes disappear." (G4).

"Especially in vocational schools, students only attend school for two days and away from school for five days including weekends. This long gap distances student from the school. Students' days of business working should not be combined together or with the weekend." (M4).

Discussion

In this study, it has been understood that causes of absenteeism are significant predictors of duration of absenteeism, these causes all together explain 22% of the change in duration of absenteeism. However, it can be observed that the most effective factors on the duration of students' absenteeism are student-based causes and these are followed by peer-based causes. Considering propositions included in the student-based causes dimensions, it can be understood that students are mainly absent from school due to their weak feelings of school attachment. In other words, it can be said that situations related to belonging to school such as dislike in school and courses, thinking of dropping school, inability to adjust to school, lack of expectation related to education and lack of learning enthusiasm are prominent in terms of student absenteeism. Similarly, Pehlivan (2006) also reported that causes of absenteeism among high school students were closely associated with the feeling of belonging to school. In studies, it has been reported that rate of school absenteeism decreases among students with high level of belonging to school (Cemalcilar, 2010), students with low belonging to school spend time with their peers outside school more (Hupfeld, 2007). While there are studies available that have similar findings, in the field literature, factors based on families are the most important determinants of school absenteeism (Aküzüm, Yavaş, Tan, & Uçar, 2015; Bülbül, 2012; Diyu, 2001; Eastman, 1998; ERG, 2015; Hoşgörür & Polat, 2015; Özbaş, 2010; Romero & Lee, 2007; Yavuzer, 1996). In this group, household income comes to forefront as well (ERG, 2015; Romero & Lee, 2007). However, nearly all of these studies reaching such findings have been conducted towards the primary education level. As noted by Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006), the high school is the period when students gets away from family control and become more free. At least, they do not have anybody who takes them from school. In this case, it can be said that, although family continues to follow and give warnings during the secondary education, these warnings are very weak compared to monitoring and warning system in

the previous group, and students feel more independent. In addition, students with absenteeism during primary education because of familial causes are likely to enroll for open high school. Considering these two conditions, it can be expected that absenteeism trend connected to peer and student-based factors will rise in the secondary education. Based on the findings of this research, it can be said that factors outside of school are more decisive in the duration of absenteeism in the secondary education. However, although one of causes of absenteeism comes to forefront, it can be said that causes of absenteeism are not single and independent but intertwined with each other in an interaction. In other words, it can be stated that absenteeism may occur due to multiple factors (Seeley & MacGillivray, 2006), therefore, there is a need for effective multi-dimensional practices towards preventing student absenteeism (Dynarski et al., 2008; Jones & Lovrich, 2011; Smink & Reimer, 2005).

Another finding of the study is that there are very different practices in schools towards reducing absenteeism in addition to those specified in the legislation. In this context, one of practices implemented in schools is to explain causes of absenteeism to students and their families. For this, generally parent-student meetings and home visits are carried out. If analyzed in general, among the mostly preferred practices in school towards reducing absenteeism, there are effective communication with parents and information towards increasing their sensitivity on the issue. Many studies draw attention to the importance of cooperation with the family in the fight against absenteeism (Pehlivan, 2006; Henry, 2007; Seeley & MacGillivray, 2006; Railsback, 2004). It is emphasized that strong communication between school-student-parent and close relationships strengthen students' and parents' bonds with the school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Seeley & MacGillivray, 2006). Outside this application that will connect students and their families to school emotionally, it is suggested to make an agreement between school and absent student and his/her family, and with this agreement, student will be limited to leave school often (Railsback, 2004).

Another application implemented in school in this context is to inform parents at the end of the first lesson about the absenteeism to prevent the spread of absenteeism to the whole day. According to the participants, informing parents at the end of the first lesson will not cause an improvement about absenteeism of that day. In addition, instant informations are aimed to create the impression of school as a close follower among parents and students and to ensure that they will be more sensitive on the issue. As stated in the report prepared by Cumbo and Burden (2012), speaking with the family and the student immediately after absenteeism may be a deterrent. Students should be exposed to question such as why she/he was absent, where she/he went, so that repetition tendency decreases.

Another application implemented in this context in secondary education is to assist students in determining their own future goals and setting a target, to help in take goals and to make attempts to deal with learned helplessness. According to researches, students who can not find the answer to the question of why they should be in school and who consider education and training as insignificant for them are absent from school at least for 2-3 days every month (Rivers, 2010). Aimlessness and hopelessness for future reduces student's expectations towards school and subsequently this fact increases their absenteeism and also results in complete break away from school (Aküzüm *et al.*, 2015; Henry, 2007; Pehlivan, 2006, Teasley, 2004). In this regard, it is considered that such practices towards increasing students' intrinsic motivation may be important in decreasing absenteeism.

Though not common, another application implemented to reduce absenteeism in schools is to consider the duration of absenteeism in awarding. In some researches, the importance of being praised and awarding at every opportunity is emphasized for students without any problems about attending school (Cumbo & Burden, 2012; Pehlivan, 2006; Railsback, 2004). However, these awards should be meaningful for the students so as to establish awareness among other students as well with halo effect.

Another finding of the research is that strategies used in schools to reduce absenteeism are not very effective since they consist of personal efforts that will provide individualistic solution-oriented and instant solutions and there is a need for more comprehensive and professional practices that will eliminate the causes of absenteeism. Studies prove this fact by indicating that an effective response in

absenteeism can be realized with a powerful central willpower and broad social participation (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox, 2010; Railsback, 2004; Rivers, 2010). Reviewing these opinions, it is mentioned that prevention efforts connecting the masses of students will require a higher source of funding from school budgets and primarily legal basis for the implementation of these practices will be required. In this context, the first suggestions proposed by participants is to make school a center of attraction. For this, diversification of educational activities, making physical improvements in schools and increasing free time for students in school are suggested (Sakınç, 2013). Because, according to them, school atmosphere failed in being attractive and educational to students, the limitations imposed by the school on students are the main reasons of absenteeism. Infrastructure incompetences and inadequacy in social, cultural and sports activities, and even entrance-exit and playtime hours play an important role in absenteeism (Başar, 2001). In short, an environment not comfortable for students is recognized as one of the most powerful factor pushing out of school (Wells, 1990). This case is shown as the main reason for absenteeism in studies conducted in this sense and improvements in this regard are suggested to struggle with absenteeism (Aküzüm et al., 2015; ERG, 2015).

In the study, another suggestion towards reducing the absenteeism is to relieving curriculum and reducing class hours. Participants draw attention to the fact that long school days causes frustration in addition to tiredness among students and they suggest that basic courses should be carried out in the morning and activities attracting student's attention should be carried out in the afternoon. Analyzing participant opinions, it is understood that some steps have been taken in recent years, especially in the secondary education, elective courses have been diversified and number of weekly course hours have been increased significantly. However, it is emphasized that students do not have discretion in determination of elective courses. According to studies, the primary factor taken into consideration in determination of elective courses is facilities of the school (MEB, 2008). About 65% of the students indicate that elective courses are determined by school managements (Kamburoğlu, 2009). These two cases demonstrate that student requests in elective courses are not very decisive. In order to prevent facing such situations, participants have suggested that primarily strengths of each school should be determined and such aspects of schools should be improved more, then students should be able to select any courses they want from the school in their city and join any activities they want. In this way, it is considered that students will not have to take any elective courses in accordance with school facilities or parents' expectations, and they will enjoy their time in school and spend more time, therefore, their connection with the school emotionally will increase. In addition, participants express that limited country resources will be used more effectively. However, to realize this suggestion, primarily it is necessary to establish a powerful coordination among school at town level and investments should be made towards highlighting strong aspects of each school. As a matter of fact in the field literature, the importance of improving education and curriculum has been emphasized in making schools more interesting for students (Bridgeland et al., 2006), the importance of programs to improve social skills has been emphasized (Balfanz et al., 2010).

The participants think that many absenteeism causes will disappear if YGS and LYS compatibility is increased and field selection is carried out earlier during the secondary education. Therefore, it is emphasized that missed courses will be considered as losses and practices such as taking fake medical reports will be prevented. Otherwise, it is indicated that long term student absenteeism with a view to benefit from some supporting application or to solve more tests under the name of preparation for the exam will be considered normal by parents and students. Findings related to fact that %50 of senior students are in intense absenteeism to study for exams during the last period of school (ERG, 2013) and students do not feel the need for going school when there are courses they consider as useless in life (Bridgeland et al., 2006) attest this result of the research. Similar suggestions are also included in similar studies on the subject (Pehlivan, 2006; Sakınç, 2013; Yıldız & Kula, 2011).

Another suggestion offered in the research is towards struggling with absenteeism before it becomes a habit. According to the participants, if a student does not understand the importance of absenteeism in primary education, she/he will carry the same habit to the secondary education and as

in every habit, it will become difficult to struggle with absenteeism. Also in reports on the subject, it has been determined that absenteeism begins during primary school (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007), risk of absenteeism increases with the age (Bell, Rosen, & Dynlacht, 1994; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; ERG, 2015; Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Klima, Miller, & Nunlist, 2009). It is reported that this increase related to age rises especially among students with absenteeism for more than 20 days. For instance, it has been understood that a student with 25 days of absenteeism in the 6th grade tends to have 29 days of absenteeism in the 7th grade and 33 days in the 8th grade (ERG, 2015). Therefore, it is stated that early steps taken have great importance in the prevention of absenteeism habit (Easen, Clark, & Wootten, 1997; Learnmouth, 1995), if this habit cannot be prevented, in the long run, negative outcomes such as inclination to crime, starting harmful habits and unemployment will emerge (Reid, 1999). In some studies conducted on the subject, efficient utilization of systems that will ensure taking early measures is offered as a policy option to be considered (ERG, 2015; Railsback, 2004).

Another finding of the study is the fact that guidance services in school should be strengthened from the point of both quantity and quality to reduce absenteeism and to solve this issue before becoming a school dropout point. In this respect, participants have suggested reviewing of guidance counselor norm in schools and not to assign guidance counselors to central offices, otherwise, they have emphasized that it will not be possible to make interventions effectively and correctly. In studies conducted on the subject, it is emphasized that students with weak attendance to school are generally hopeless and alienated students; therefore, guidance counselors are very important in the struggle with absenteeism, and the importance of personal guidance conducted with a good designed program has been emphasized (Aküzüm et al., 2015; Bayhan & Dalgıç, 2012; DeSocio et al., 2007; Pehlivan, 2006; Sakiç, 2013).

In the study, another suggestion proposed towards reducing student absenteeism is related to employment of qualified and undaunted teachers. It can be said that TALIS 2008 data have embodied this proposal. In the report, it is reported that students tend to be less absent in schools where teachers do not arrive school late and come to school as prepared. In schools where student absenteeism is experienced intensely, one fifth of teachers thinks that some students cannot be reached and improvement cannot be achieved despite trying hard (ERG, 2015) and in general these teachers tend to blame parents in the event of absenteeism (Rivers, 2010). These findings can be interpreted as an indication of the need for a challenging and courageous teachers.

Participants believe that long-term absenteeism from school distracts the student from school. Therefore, these participants have suggested reevaluation of transition to open high school and implementation of the distribution of theoretical and business education in vocational high schools in a way not to distract students from school. Participants presenting opinion in this way have emphasized that students have to stay away from school from time to time because of health, accident and similar causes involuntarily. It is stated that this situation leading to breaking away from classmates and receiving training with smaller students will distract the student from school emotionally. Therefore, the need for legislations that will allow to benefit from open high schools and to return back to school in such situations preventing school attendance is emphasized. It is stated that students leaving school for five days of the week because of their business education in vocational school develops a standoff between student and school and these disengagements result in absenteeism. In this sense, it is suggested that implemented improvements will help to reduce absenteeism. Also in the literature, it is reported that long holidays increase absenteeism trend among students (Yıldız & Kula, 2011).

Conclusion and Suggestions

In the study, it has been concluded that school absenteeism in the secondary education generally emerges based of student's own or his/her peer circle. It is understood that, with a view to reduce absenteeism, other practices have been implemented in school in addition to those specified in the legislation, but, participants reach an agreement on the fact that these employed strategies are not very effective. It has been conclude that there is a need for more comprehensive and professional policies that will eliminate causes.

Judging from the results obtained in the study,

- 1) It can be suggested to ensure students to have positive feelings about school and to develop positive expectations towards education and to transform schools into a center in which extracurricular sportive and different club activities are carried out rather than a place of only education takes place. With a view to increase attractiveness of school in the eyes of students, various educational activities can be organized and attempts can be made to make school environment more fun.
- 2) Quality of school guidance practices should be increased for struggling with absenteeism. For this, reviewing of guidance counsellor norm at schools and strict following of guidance activities can be suggested.
- 3) Seminars can be organized towards increasing awareness among parents and students with regard to causes and cost of absenteeism.
- 4) Dissuasive attempts made by the school managements and teachers are considered insufficient towards decreasing absenteeism among students. Therefore, holistic and supportive initiatives should be implemented to carry out effective fight against absenteeism. With the support by the central organization and national education directorates, projects related to inspiring students towards school attendance can be created, and an effective school policy can be established.
- 5) Comprehensive campaigns may be developed to prevent parents from ignoring absenteeism and remaining silent against this situation; public spotlights can be prepared.

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