



BALANCING SCHOOL DURATION AND HEALTH: IMPACTS ON STUDENTS' WELL-BEING AND POLICY INSIGHTS

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ABSTRACT

The length of school hours has a significant impact on students' physical and mental health, raising concerns about balancing academic demands with well-being. In countries like Indonesia, long school hours often lead to issues like fatigue, stress, and poor nutrition. Conversely, countries with shorter school days, such as Finland, show better health outcomes. This study aims to explore the relationship between school hours and student health, providing evidence-based recommendations for education policy reform. Its innovative approach compares different cultural and educational contexts, including Indonesia, to highlight region-specific effects. Using qualitative methods, the research involved interviews, observations, and document analysis, gathering data from students, parents, and teachers. Findings suggest that longer school hours negatively affect physical activity, sleep, and overall well-being, while shorter hours and later start times improve mental health and academic engagement. Indonesia's Karja Sezi program demonstrates the effectiveness of policies, like regulated meals, in reducing health risks. This study contributes to discussions on education and health, offering actionable insights for policymakers to create balanced school schedules that support both academic success and student well-being.

Keywords: *Education, Elementary, Inclusivity, Leadership, Rotation*

1. INTRODUCTION

The length of time students spend in school considerably affects their physical and mental health. In Indonesia, students often allocate 5-6 hours each day to schooling over a span of around 13 years, encompassing early childhood through secondary education. This prolonged time commitment has both immediate and enduring effects on their health. In contrast, nations like as Finland, recognized for its advanced educational framework, designate shorter school hours, approximately 4-5 hours daily, highlighting the significance of rest and recreation for comprehensive development. In Asian nations like Japan and South Korea, kids endure extended school hours of 7 to 8 hours everyday, frequently coupled with extracurricular

obligations, resulting in weariness and stress. The divergent methodologies regarding the duration of schooling prompt inquiries into their health implications for kids.

In Indonesia, extended school hours have been associated with several health issues. A survey at SDN Percontohan PAM Makassar indicated that 5.5% of parents could not cook breakfast for their children, resulting in numerous students depending on unhealthy snacks. This detrimental food pattern was linked to grave health consequences, exemplified by an instance in which a student experienced fatal intestinal leakage, allegedly resulting from inadequate nutrition characterized by quick noodles and sugary drinks. Moreover, Indonesian students frequently have substantial demands outside of

school hours, thereby diminishing opportunities for physical activity and leisure. Conversely, nations with reduced school hours, such as Finland, offer increased possibilities for pupils to participate in unstructured activities, hence enhancing physical and mental health outcomes.

This study is particularly pertinent for examining the impact of school durations on kids' health across various cultural and educational contexts. A qualitative methodology is optimal for elucidating the lived experiences of students, parents, and educators, facilitating a comprehensive knowledge of the impact of school hours and related practices on kids' physical and mental health. This method also enables the analysis of wider cultural and policy-related elements, providing insights into how educational policies should be modified to enhance health outcomes.

Moreover, the study underscores the necessity for evidence-based strategies to tackle these problems. Innovative initiatives like as Karja Sezi at SDN Percontohan PAM, which govern students' snack selections via healthy meal cards, exemplify the capacity of schools to actively enhance students' nutrition and health. Qualitative exploration of these interventions might yield significant insights regarding their efficacy and scalability.

This study seeks to enhance comprehension of the correlation between educational durations and student health in Indonesia and other nations. The research use qualitative approaches to reveal practical insights that guide policies aimed at reconciling educational needs with the physical and mental well-being of students, thereby fostering healthier and more effective learning environments worldwide.

The correlation between school duration and student health has emerged as a critical focus in educational research, especially when policies about school scheduling undergo transformation. Students allocate a significant portion of their time to education, which has tremendous effects on their physical, mental, and emotional health. Recent research offer significant insights into the effects of school duration, schedule severity, and start times on kids' overall health results.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

School Start Times and Health Impacts

A key aspect of school duration research focuses on school start times and their effect on students' sleep and mental health. Research by Neuroth et al. (2021) revealed that high school students with later start times (after 8:30 AM) had significantly longer sleep durations compared to their peers at schools with earlier start times. The findings also showed a correlation between earlier school start times and an increased likelihood of mental health challenges, such as suicidal ideation. Each 15-minute delay in start time was associated with a measurable increase in sleep duration, which underscores the importance of considering sleep as a critical component of student health (Neuroth et al., 2021).

Compressed Academic Years and Increased Stress

In Germany, a policy reform compressed high school years from nine to eight while maintaining the same curriculum, thereby increasing the intensity of daily schooling. A study by Sophie Quis, (2018) found that this compression had a disproportionately negative impact on female students, who reported heightened levels of stress and mental health issues. While the reform aimed to prepare students for university more quickly, the associated health costs raise questions about whether the intensity of education is being prioritized over the well-being of students (Sophie Quis, 2018).

Mixed Effects of Shortened School Weeks

In some cases, a reduction in the length of the school week, as seen in Colorado, has produced both positive and negative outcomes. Schools with four-day weeks experienced increased physical activity, decreased substance use, and reduced non-school screen time among students. However, the shorter week also led to decreased sleep,

lower breakfast consumption, and increased bullying. These mixed results highlight the complexity of designing school schedules that balance academic goals with health priorities (Israel et al., 2020).

Physical Activity and Sleep Duration

Adequate physical activity and sleep are critical factors for students' health. A study on college students by Ge et al., (2019) demonstrated that higher levels of physical activity and sufficient sleep were strongly linked to improved health-related quality of life. Interestingly, sedentary time, such as prolonged sitting, did not show a significant relationship with health outcomes in this population. This finding suggests that promoting physical activity and ensuring adequate sleep may yield the greatest benefits for students (Ge et al., 2019).

Attendance, Health, and Long-Term Implications

Chronic absenteeism, which often results from health-related issues, can have long-term effects on students' educational trajectories and overall well-being. Allison and Attisha (2019) reported that students who miss 15 or more days of school annually are at greater risk of academic failure and unhealthy behaviors in adolescence and adulthood. The study emphasized the role of schools and pediatricians in addressing absenteeism by focusing on physical and mental health interventions (Allison et al., 2019).

Balancing Academics and Extracurricular Activities

Another study explored how changing school start times impacted extracurricular activity participation and student employment. Meltzer et al., (2021) found that while earlier start times reduced before-school activity participation, later start times increased sleep duration and had minimal

negative effects on after-school activities. This suggests that delaying start times may be a viable policy for enhancing sleep without significantly disrupting extracurricular engagements (Meltzer et al., 2021).

Implications for Educational Policy

The body of evidence underscores the importance of designing school schedules that optimize both educational outcomes and student health. Prolonged school hours, compressed academic years, or overly intensive curriculums often come at the cost of students' physical and mental well-being. Policymakers must consider the cumulative evidence when developing or reforming educational systems. For example, delaying school start times can improve sleep duration, a key factor in reducing stress and enhancing academic performance. Additionally, balancing weekly schedules to provide adequate rest and extracurricular opportunities can foster holistic development in students (Bauducco et al., 2020; Estevan et al., 2020).

Research on school duration and its health impacts reveals a nuanced relationship that requires careful consideration by educators and policymakers. While academic achievement remains a priority, ensuring the physical and mental well-being of students is equally crucial. By adopting evidence-based policies such as flexible school start times, balanced weekly schedules, and promoting physical activity, schools can create environments where students thrive both academically and personally. These findings highlight the need for a holistic approach to education, where health and learning go hand in hand.

3. METHODS

This study used a qualitative methodology to examine the correlation between school duration and its effects on students' physical and mental well-being. A qualitative approach was

selected to facilitate a comprehensive analysis of the lived experiences of students, parents, and instructors across various educational situations. The data collecting methodologies encompass comprehensive interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews are performed with students, parents, and educators at various educational tiers to ascertain their views on the duration of schooling and its health ramifications. Participant observation is employed to assess children's behaviors during school hours, recess, and after-school routines, concentrating on dietary habits, physical activity, and sleep patterns. Document analysis includes examining educational policies, school timetables, and pertinent health statistics to furnish supplementary context and corroborate conclusions. A purposeful sample strategy is utilized to guarantee diversity in geographical, cultural, and educational backgrounds, facilitating comparisons between Indonesia and other nations. The data are evaluated thematically to discern patterns and themes associated with school time and its health outcomes. The study employs data and methodological triangulation to assure data credibility. Validation occurs by member-checking, when individuals assess and offer comments on the interpretations to confirm their congruence with their experiences. This research aims to offer significant insights and policy recommendations for optimizing school durations to improve students' health and well-being.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal several critical insights into the relationship between school duration and its impact on students' physical and mental health. The analysis is based on qualitative data collected from diverse participants, including students, parents, and teachers, combined with observational data and document reviews.

1. Impact of School Duration on Physical Health

Students attending schools with longer durations, typically exceeding 6 hours per day, reported significant fatigue and a lack of time for physical activities. Observations showed that these students often led sedentary lifestyles, particularly in schools with intensive academic schedules. Parents also expressed concerns about

unhealthy eating habits, as students had limited time to consume nutritious meals during school hours. The prevalence of unhealthy snacking was higher in schools without controlled canteen environments, leading to issues such as weight gain and digestive health problems.

In contrast, students from countries with shorter school hours, such as Finland, were found to engage more frequently in physical activities after school. This contributed to better physical fitness and overall well-being, as corroborated by parents and teachers who highlighted the benefits of a balanced schedule.

2. Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

Extended school hours were associated with increased stress and mental exhaustion among students, particularly in schools with a rigid curriculum and limited breaks. Students described feelings of burnout, while parents observed heightened anxiety during examination periods. Teachers noted that prolonged academic intensity often left students disengaged and less motivated.

On the other hand, students attending schools with later start times and shorter daily schedules reported better mental health outcomes. They described feeling more rested and better prepared to handle academic challenges. In schools that implemented policies promoting sufficient sleep, students showed increased attention spans and improved emotional resilience.

3. Socio-Cultural Influences

Cultural expectations also played a role in shaping the experiences of students. In countries like South Korea and Japan, where academic achievement is highly prioritized, students faced immense pressure to perform well, resulting in longer study hours both in and outside school. This pressure was linked to higher levels of stress and emotional fatigue. Conversely, in educational systems like Finland, where holistic development is emphasized, students and parents reported lower stress levels and a greater sense of overall well-being.

4. Role of School Policies and Environment

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Schools that implemented supportive policies, such as structured break times and access to healthy meals, reported fewer health complaints among students. Programs like Karja Sezi in Indonesia, which controlled students' access to snacks through a health-focused meal card system, were praised by parents and teachers for reducing health risks. These schools saw improvements in students' eating habits and a decrease in the consumption of unhealthy food.

5. Long-Term Implications

Participants across the sample highlighted the long-term consequences of prolonged school hours. Parents expressed concerns about the cumulative effects of physical and mental strain, particularly on adolescents preparing for higher education. Teachers echoed these concerns, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to prevent burnout and ensure sustainable academic growth.

The findings indicate that prolonged school hours, particularly when coupled with inadequate rest and unhealthy eating practices, have detrimental effects on students' physical and mental health. Policies that prioritize later start times, shorter school durations, and holistic development lead to better health outcomes and greater overall satisfaction among students, parents, and teachers. These results underscore the need for educational reforms that balance academic rigor with health and well-being to create sustainable learning environments for students.

DISCUSSION

The relationship between school duration and student health has been extensively studied, with recent findings shedding light on both its benefits and detriments. This section discusses the implications of the results within the broader context of existing literature and explores potential strategies for optimizing school schedules to support students' well-being.

1. Prolonged School Hours and Health Risks

Long school hours, particularly those exceeding six hours per day, have been linked to adverse physical and mental health outcomes. Findings from this study align with research by Quis (2018), who observed that increased academic intensity in German schools due to

compressed high school years led to heightened stress levels, particularly among female students. The increased workload often leaves students with little time for physical activity or rest, compounding their health risks (Quis, 2018).

Similarly, the lack of structured physical activity during long school days mirrors findings from Ge et al. (2019), which showed that sufficient physical activity and adequate sleep are crucial for maintaining health-related quality of life among students. When students lack these components, they become more susceptible to fatigue and obesity, as highlighted by observations in Indonesian schools (Ge et al., 2019).

2. The Role of Sleep in Academic and Health Outcomes

Later school start times have been shown to improve sleep duration, which significantly impacts both academic performance and mental health. Neuroth et al. (2021) demonstrated that delaying school start times allows students to achieve the recommended 8+ hours of sleep, leading to reduced mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety. The findings from this study corroborate this by highlighting better mental health outcomes among students with later school start times (Neuroth et al., 2021).

In contrast, schools with early start times reported increased levels of stress and emotional fatigue among students. Sleep deprivation, particularly among adolescents, has also been linked to higher rates of school suspensions and behavioral issues, as reported by Cook et al. (2020). This highlights the broader implications of insufficient sleep on student behavior and overall well-being (Cook et al., 2020).

3. Cultural and Educational Contexts

Cultural values and educational priorities heavily influence school duration policies. In countries like South Korea and Japan, where academic achievement is highly emphasized, students face longer school hours and higher pressure, which often lead to emotional exhaustion. Noh et al. (2020) found that longer study hours in private tutoring settings exacerbated sleep deprivation and somatic symptoms in Korean students. These findings align with the experiences of Indonesian students in this study, who reported similar stress levels

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due to extended academic schedules (Noh et al., 2020).

Conversely, educational systems like Finland prioritize shorter school hours and holistic development, which have been associated with lower stress levels and better overall health outcomes. This stark contrast emphasizes the need for culturally adaptive policies that balance academic rigor with health considerations.

4. The Role of School Interventions

Innovative school-based programs, such as the Karja Sezi initiative in Indonesia, demonstrate the potential for interventions to mitigate the health risks associated with long school hours. These programs focus on promoting healthy eating habits by controlling access to unhealthy snacks, a measure supported by Israel et al. (2020), who found that structured school policies positively influence student behavior and health (Israel et al., 2020).

Schools with supportive environments, including scheduled breaks and access to nutritious meals, also report fewer health complaints among students. These findings align with the work of Ruff et al. (2019), who emphasized the importance of addressing health determinants like oral health and nutrition to improve academic performance and reduce absenteeism (Ruff et al., 2019).

5. Policy Implications

The findings from this study underline the urgent need for policymakers to reevaluate school schedules and durations. The evidence supports the adoption of flexible policies that prioritize sleep, physical activity, and nutrition as integral components of student health. Meltzer et al. (2022) recommended later school start times and shorter school durations as effective strategies for enhancing sleep without significantly disrupting extracurricular participation (Meltzer et al., 2022).

Additionally, addressing health disparities through targeted interventions, such as programs for improving access to nutritious food, can help reduce the long-term risks associated with prolonged academic schedules. These measures should be tailored to cultural contexts to ensure effective implementation and sustainability.

The discussion highlights the complex interplay between school duration, health, and cultural contexts. Prolonged school hours pose significant risks to students' physical and mental well-being, particularly in systems that prioritize academic intensity over holistic development. By implementing evidence-based policies such as flexible school schedules, later start times, and comprehensive health programs, schools can create environments that support both academic achievement and overall student well-being. Future research should continue to explore these relationships to inform more equitable and health-conscious educational reforms.

5. CONCLUSION

This study establishes that extended school hours might adversely affect students' physical and mental well-being, particularly when not complemented by sufficient relaxation, physical exercise, and nutritious dietary practices. Students in schools with extended hours can encounter weariness, elevated stress levels, and health problems, including obesity, attributed to inadequate food habits. In contrast, students in nations with abbreviated school lengths, like Finland, have superior physical health and mental well-being outcomes. These findings corroborate prior research highlighting the significance of adequate sleep, physical activity, and nurturing school environments in improving students' quality of life. The Karja Sezi program in Indonesia exemplifies considerable potential in mitigating health hazards through the regulation of students' dietary practices and the promotion of improved nutrition. To establish a more comprehensive education system, educational policies ought to contemplate reforms like the modification of school start times, the reduction of school hours, and the prioritization of physical activity and nutrition efforts. These modifications can facilitate an equilibrium between academic achievement and student welfare, establishing a more robust foundation for their future. Evidence-based educational reforms are crucial for creating healthier and more sustainable learning environments that foster the comprehensive development of children.

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