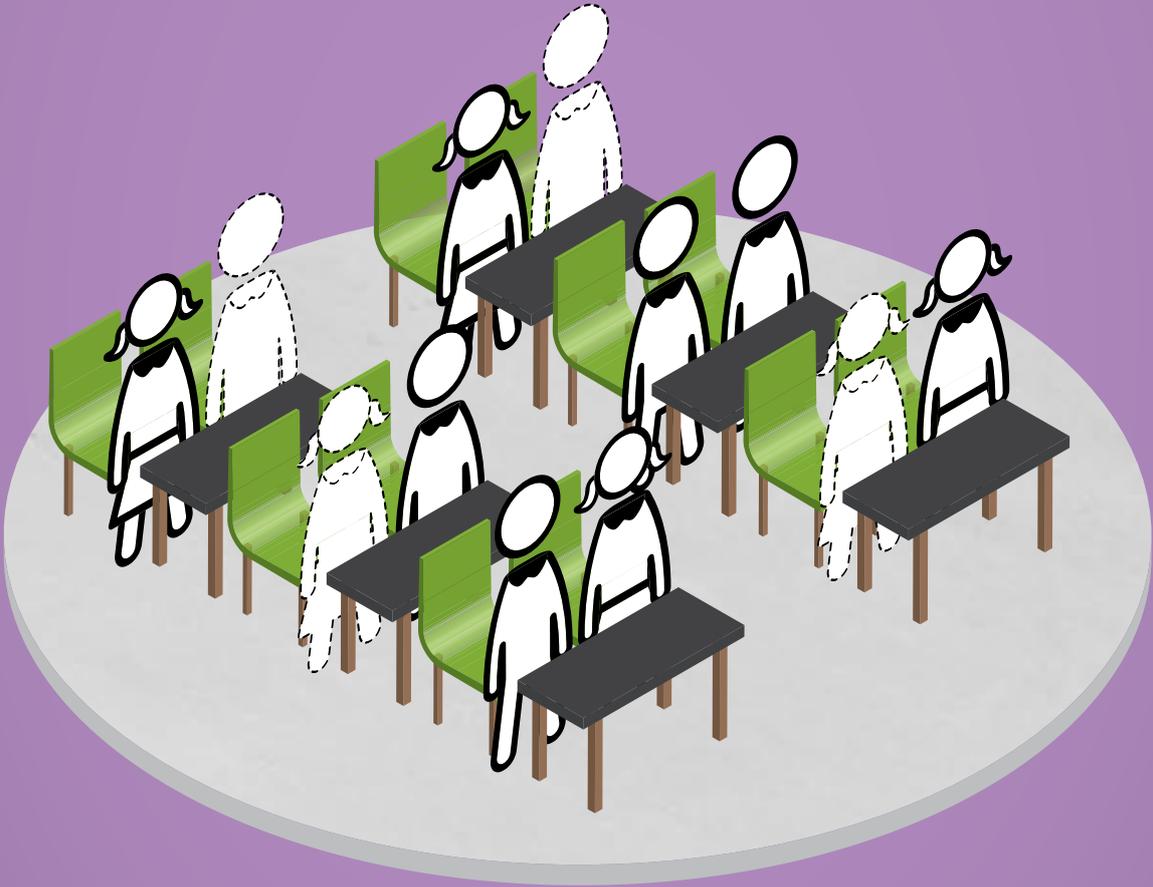


DETERMINANTS AND MONITORING OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE

POLICY ANALYSIS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS



The views expressed in this document are solely those of Education Reform Initiative and shall not be interpreted as the official views of UNICEF Turkey, or the Ministry of National Education.

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DETERMINANTS AND MONITORING OF STUDENT ATTENDANCE

POLICY ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



unicef

In accordance with the Program Cooperation Agreement, signed by UNICEF Turkey and Education Reform Initiative (ERI) in February 2011, research and policy development activities were initiated, in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) Directorate General of Basic Education.



In the **'Determinants of student absenteeism and its relation with the economic crisis'** research project, data that has been accumulated in the e-school database since 2007-2008 were econometrically analyzed. The analysis aimed to find out the social and economic determinants of student absenteeism. Another aim of this research was to present recommendations to MoNE on improving data collection and reporting processes for the e-school database.

The research on **'Determinants of transition from primary to secondary education'** aimed to identify the determinants of transition from primary to secondary education in year 2010-2011, by econometrically analyzing the e-school data. Another aim of this research was to develop policy recommendations by interviewing representatives from public institutions and non-governmental organizations in three cities.

The research on **'Financial management of primary education institutions,'** aimed to investigate the financial management systems of primary education institutions by analyzing data on public expenditure, by interviewing key actors in public institutions, and by conducting case studies in 15 schools. Another aim of this research was to develop models of management by examining international examples and by organizing workshops with stakeholders.

Research in these three fields were conducted by expert academies. Their reports were also evaluated by referees. Based on the research findings, three policy reports were drafted. Policy reports were written by ERI experts and were revised according to discussions in meetings with broad participation.

This document is one of the final products of concerted efforts by the MoNE Directorate General of Basic Education, UNICEF Turkey and ERI.

REPUBLIC OF TURKEY MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION

Primary responsibilities of Ministry of National Education include programming, executing, monitoring and auditing education and training services in Turkey; regulating and executing education and training-related services that Turkish citizens will receive abroad; responding to accommodation, nutrition and financial needs of youth in higher education; opening all kinds of formal and non-formal education institutions and authorizing the establishment of educational institutions except for the higher education level; and other duties stated in its law of establishment.



UNICEF TURKEY

The UNICEF Turkey carries out its activities on the basis of a Country Programme developed and undersigned in line with priorities set together with the Government of Turkey.

The UNICEF does not deliver direct services to children and adolescents in countries like Turkey that have large economies and strong institutions. Instead, it contributes to the development of policies regarding children and to the design and operation of mechanisms for implementing these policies. In this context, the UNICEF shares its international experience, engages in advocacy for change in legislation and systems, facilitates coordination and cooperation and extends technical assistance to its partners in developing replicable child-friendly models for delivering services and monitoring the progress achieved. Gathering and disseminating information for the realization of the rights of children and women, building awareness in related issues, supporting policy discussions and raising funds are all inseparable components of the Country Programme. To attain the targets set in the Country Programme, the UNICEF Turkey works with many governmental organizations and agencies, other international organizations, universities and research institutions and children themselves.



EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE

Education Reform Initiative (ERI) was launched in 2003 with the aim of improving education policy processes and outcomes in Turkey towards the ideal of "Quality Education for All" through research, advocacy and training. Policy recommendations developed by ERI aim at realizing all girls' and boys' right to and rights in education in Turkey and contributing to human, social and economic development of the country. ERI also attempts to serve as an example as to how policy dialogue should be conducted within a contemporary democratic framework by bringing together concerned civil society groups and relevant state agencies to catalyze an innovative collective thought process for education reform policy.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTERS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Focusing on unexcused student absenteeism, this policy report was prepared in 2012 based on the study of “Determinants of student absenteeism and its relation with the economic crisis” which was conducted within the Program Cooperation Agreement between UNICEF Turkey and Educational Reform Initiative (ERI) with collaboration of MoNE Directorate General for Primary Education. The report discusses the causes of student absenteeism and presents policy recommendations in order to improve student attendance in primary education and monitor better.

In general, an acceptable school year consists of 850 to 1000 hours or 180-220 school days. Yet, in many regions and particularly in lower-income areas of countries, only some of the officially prescribed instructional time can be used effectively. Research suggests that, all instructional time is valuable and using it efficiently is one of the determinants of educational achievement. Various researches undertaken on local, national and international scales suggest that there is a positive correlation between instructional time and educational achievement. Besides, the effects of instructional time are not limited to educational achievement. It's found out that when instructional time is decreased, student drop-out risk increases which has a greater impact on students with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds as they are much more sensitive to loss of instructional time.

One of the main causes of loss of instructional time is unexcused student absence. Students in grades 6-8 in Turkey are at least 14.5 points behind their peers on PISA as a result of unexcused absence. Nevertheless absenteeism varies across different students and school types. Unexcused absenteeism shows important degrees of variation across school types (public-private), residential areas, socio-economic status groups and school resources. In the light of a comprehensive background report which investigates a random sample of students collected from the e-school database, this policy report presents policy recommendations in order to early identify the high risk group students and how to prevent unexcused student absenteeism.

According to the background report, unexcused absenteeism in primary education escalated rapidly in 2007-2011. Average number of unexcused absences in the first 5 years of primary education was 3.2 days in 2007, but increased by more than 80%, to 5.8 days in 2011. On the other hand, unexcused absenteeism behavior is a much more severe problem in 6th-8th grades than 1st-5th. While it was, on average, 7.8 days in 2007, it rose to 11.6 days in 2011. In other words, 8 of the 180 days in a school year (7%) cannot be used effectively in Turkey due to unexcused student absenteeism.

There are severe differences across regions in terms of unexcused absenteeism in primary education: While average days of unjustified absence is 15.6 days in Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa regions, it is only 4.9 days in Trabzon, Ordu, Giresun, Rize, Artvin and Gümüşhane region. Therefore educational achievement gap across these regions is widening at least 13 points each year in terms of PISA scores which means unexcused absenteeism widens the achievement gap even further.

According to the report, poverty at the household level is the most important determinant of student absenteeism. Especially during periods of economic crisis, student absenteeism is increased significantly through changes in household income and students who have an absence record of more than 20 days are affected most severely by crisis.

Furthermore boys have higher days of absence than girls in both grade categories (1st-5th grades and 6th-8th grades). While the effect of gender on absenteeism is quite mild for 1st-5th graders, it increases significantly for 6th-8th grades especially for boys. The background report indicates that gender disparity in absenteeism may be linked to the difference between genders in the supply of child labor.

Students' educational achievement among their peers is closely related to absenteeism. The background report shows that students whose grade point averages are lower than the class average have a tendency for more absenteeism. Moreover, as the general achievement score on the SBS (Seviye Belirleme Sınavı) exam, an indicator of the academic development level of the student, increases his/her absenteeism decreases.

Settlement area also plays an important role over the student absenteeism. Student absenteeism is systematically more frequent in urban areas than it is in rural areas. What's more, being in the urban areas affects absenteeism more severely for children in 6th-8th grades than those in 1st-5th grades. The background report suggests that reason for more frequent absenteeism in urban areas might be the fact children may be substituting some of the instructional time in schools with time they spend in private tutorial centers which are much more widespread in urban areas. Another important finding on the settlement areas is that conditional educational aid (ŞEY) is more effective in decreasing student absence in rural areas compared to urban areas.

Considering the explanatory variables used in the background report, descriptive differences across regions does not differ significantly among students who have an absence record of 0-20 days per school year. On the other hand, for students who have an absence record of 20-90 days, region does still play an important role in determining absenteeism, in the light of explanatory variables. This means that unobserved factors across regions have impact on 20-90 days of absence.

Multiphase Management System for Absenteeism (ADEY) was launched in the 2011-2012 school year by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in order to mitigate absenteeism. Primary objectives of ADEY are to identify risks of absenteeism early, and to enable school stakeholders to implement individualized interventions and monitor absenteeism effectively. Among the methods and instruments to be used to reach these objectives are increasing awareness about the importance of regular attendance among school stakeholders, identifying basic rules and principles for monitoring absenteeism, identifying and continuously monitoring students who are at risk for high absenteeism and dropping out of school, implementing appropriate interventions against absenteeism, and improving collaboration among public agencies. However in August 2013, Turkish Council of State has decided to stop the execution of ADEY due to various reasons. Clearing away the grounds of this decision and putting ADEY back operational has an important role over the mitigate unexcused student absenteeism.

Findings indicating the relationship between economic crisis and absenteeism point out that early identification and interventions are essential for mitigate absenteeism. That's why ADEY has the potential of being one of the most important instruments to mitigate absenteeism with the right improvements. As ADEY has been recently launched, it is too early to comment on how successful it has been so far in monitoring absenteeism and fulfilling the needs of students. Impact assessment of ADEY would be very useful to see whether and to which extent ADEY can overcome problems which lead to absenteeism.

e-School database is the most important source feeding ADEY. In e-school, income data is collected through subjective criteria. If this data can be collected through objective criteria, the findings of analyses using income data could also be used to design generalized interventions. e-School can also host a warning system in order to enable ADEY early identify and intervene at risk students. Therefore, updating the data in e-school system regularly will help analyzing the impact of time dependant variables such as income over student absenteeism. Both student attendance and income should be monitored continuously so that warning systems can be developed through which at-risk students can be identified and early interventions can be undertaken. Such a warning system, on the other hand, should be based on a number of indicators. In addition to income, the warning system should be fed with a myriad of socio-economic indicators. Some of the data to develop these indicators is currently being collected through e-school. Yet, data loss is a problem obstructing the reliability of conclusions based on these data. For a reliable and robust data collection period, The Directorate General for Basic Education can designate October as the month of data collection which might be a good step forward. Question forms for data collection can be processed by optic scanners and a guide including information regarding questions and how to answer them can accompany the question forms.

Authorities in provinces and districts can control whether data is being collected as planned through a randomly selected sample of schools. A user-friendly format can be designed for reporting. Absenteeism can be defined as a ratio of days of absence to total number of days in which the school was active, and this ratio can be used as the basic indicator in reports. In addition, other indicators, especially the share of students who have an absence record of more than 20 days can be monitored by policy-makers across schools, districts and provinces.

Through implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations and some other minor changes in the e-school system (e.g. replacing manual data entry with drop-down menus, decreasing data loss), absenteeism and other educational outcomes can be closely monitored and reported. As a result, e-school can easily host a warning system in which students at risk can be identified and intervened during instances of economic crisis.

Another important finding of researches besides ADEY and e-school indicate that there is an inverse relationship between conditional educational aid (ŞEY) and absenteeism. Expanding conditional educational aid in rural areas can be a practical solution to decrease student absenteeism that is caused by poverty. Another policy step to be taken can thus be differentiation of the amount of conditional educational aid across

rural and urban areas (or regions/provinces) and across grades (setting a different amount for 1st-5th grades and 6th-8th grades). Increasing the amount for students in 6th-8th grades and/or in urban areas would very probably decrease absenteeism. On the other hand, independently from expanding the conditional educational aid program, there is also need for a mechanism which would ensure attendance of students who receive the aid. Furthermore, the impact assessment report finds that some households which are objectively entitled to conditional educational aid are not provided with sufficient information on the application and selection processes and conditions of the aid. Another step to increase the impact of conditional educational aid might be periodic efforts to inform potential households on application and selection processes.

In addition to household income and poverty, the background report suggests that there is a strong positive relationship between child labor and absenteeism. Forming a national database to identify students who go to school and work as seasonal agricultural laborers and children who had to drop out of school due to seasonal migratory labor would contribute to the solution of the problem. It is a good start that the Directorate General for Basic Education is working towards that aim.

Findings brought together in this policy report clearly show that student absenteeism has become a problem which cannot be ignored anymore. The problem is manifested in different degrees across genders, 1st-5th and 6th-8th grades, and across urban and rural areas. Nevertheless, the most disadvantaged group is children who live in low-income households and already are at high absence risk. Findings also suggest that the most disadvantaged group is also the group most vulnerable to the negative impacts of economic crises. As a result, mechanisms through which student attendance can be monitored closely and through which school administrators and teachers are enabled to undertake early interventions are the most important policy options.

INTRODUCTION

This policy report, focuses on the causes of student absenteeism and has been prepared as part of the study titled “Determinants of student absenteeism and its relation with the economic crisis” conducted in 2012 under the Programme Cooperation Agreement signed between UNICEF Turkey and Education Reform Initiative (ERI), in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education Directorate General of Basic Education (DGBE). It discusses the causes of student absenteeism and presents policy recommendations in order to improve student attendance in Turkish primary education and better monitoring.¹

CONCEPTUALIZING STUDENT ATTENDANCE AND ABSENTEEISM

Instruction takes place for a set amount of time in each country and international organizations suggest that, in general, an acceptable school year consists of 850 to 1000 hours or 180-220 school days. Yet, in many regions and particularly in lower-income areas of countries, only some of the officially prescribed instructional time can be used effectively.² Research suggests that, on the other hand, all instructional time is valuable and using it efficiently is one of the determinants of educational achievement.

Research undertaken in various parts of the world suggests that there is a positive correlation between instructional time and educational achievement. The scholarly literature dealing with this relationship is quite comprehensive. A study that surveyed 22 developed and 14 developing countries suggests that students who received 4.5 hours of instruction per week in mathematics obtained 10 additional points on the PISA exam than students who received 3.5 hours of instruction.³ An analysis which surveyed 100 research projects on the issue (undertaken in the USA) suggests that 88 of them reported a positive relationship.⁴ Another analysis of 14 similar studies undertaken in developing countries suggests that 12 of them reported positive results.⁵ Research conducted in Iran, India and Thailand also found that instructional time has a direct effect on achievement in science.⁶ In Chile and India, a similar instructional time effect is reported on the acquisition of literacy skills. More importantly, the latter studies suggest that the gains are substantially higher for socio-economically disadvantaged students.⁷ The effects of instructional time are not limited to achievement in mathematics, science or literacy, a study conducted in Egypt suggests that when instructional time is decreased, student drop-out risk increases.⁸ Last but not least, as students with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds usually lack the resources through which they can compensate for missed instructional time, they are much more sensitive to loss of instructional time.⁹

In sum, students who have less instructional time learn less, have lower educational achievement, have a higher risk of dropping out of school and leave the education system prematurely.

¹ This policy report is based on the findings of research. Both research and policy reports concluded in March 2012 and the report was presented in Ankara with the participants of stakeholders on April 4th, 2012. The Primary Education Law No. 6287 and Law Amending Certain Laws restructuring the primary education as two four-year stages as of primary school and secondary school went into effect on 11 April 2012.

² For instance, schools in Mali are open only for 70% of the allotted instructional time; similarly in Honduras, schools are open on 114 out of 200 formal school days. In the Dominican Republic, Pernambuco (Brazil), Ghana and Tunisia, the rates are, respectively, 65, 63, 39 and 78%.

³ Lavy, 2010.

⁴ Walberg & Fredrick, 1991.

⁵ Fuller, 1987.

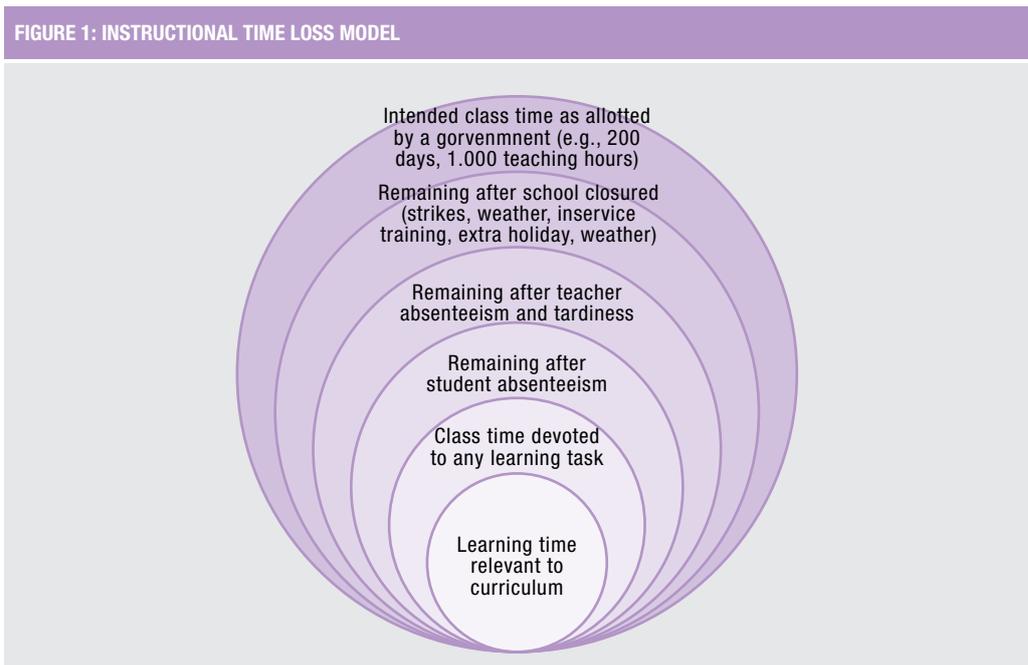
⁶ Heyneman & Loxley, 1983.

⁷ Abadzi, 2007; Lockheed et al., 1991.

⁸ Lloyd et al., 2003.

⁹ Bray, 2006.

This problem, loss of instructional time, naturally has various causes which may be related to each other. For instance, schools may be (unofficially) closed on formal school days, or start later and end earlier than official requirements. Some conditions of natural disasters or security might necessitate that the schools are closed (as exemplified by the incidents following the earthquake in Erciş and Van in 2011). Teachers may be busy with other activities when they are in school, or they might even not show up at all. Most importantly, however, students may be absent even when educational resources and settings are ready. These causes are roughly visualized in Figure 1.



Source: Adapted by ERI from Abadzi (2007).

Findings and recommendations in this report focus on absence as one of the determinants of the amount of instructional and learning time. It tries to explain, particularly, how and to which extent socio-economic variables affect attendance and absenteeism. The other variables presented in Figure 1 are only touched upon in this policy report. A study of all the possible determinants of instructional time would require a much more comprehensive data collection and analysis processes.

DOES STUDENT ATTENDANCE AFFECT LEARNING OUTCOMES IN TURKEY?

So far in Turkey, there has not been any large-scale scientific research which investigated the determinants of student attendance or the relationship between attendance and student achievement, and whose results were made public. Existing studies were conducted in one educational institution and with very small sample sizes.¹⁰

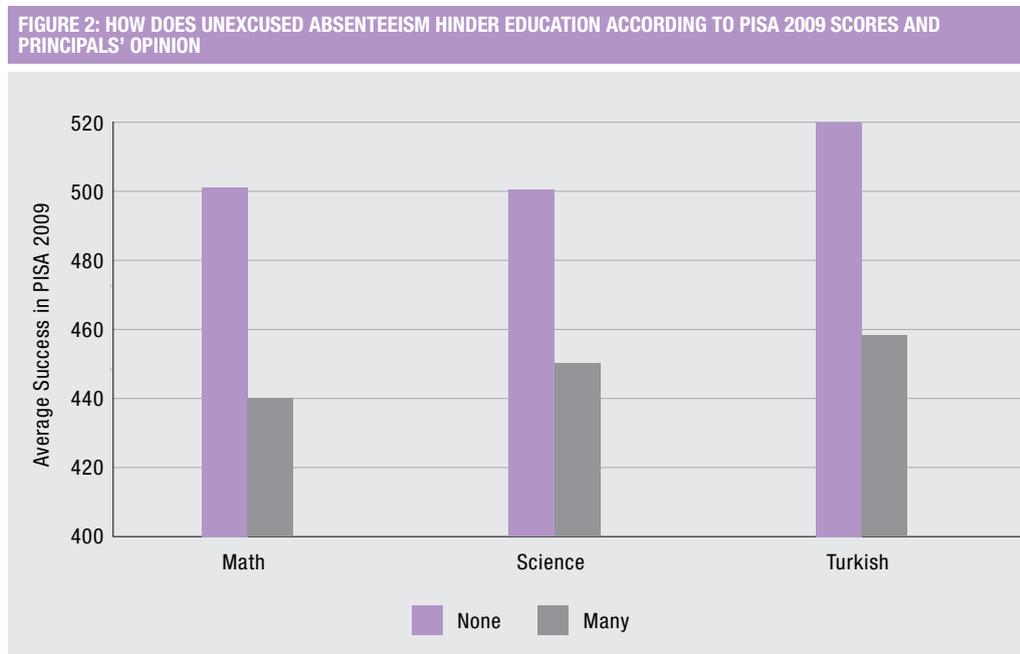
Yet, one can reach some conclusions regarding student attendance and its effects on learning outcomes through the PISA study in 2009, which surveyed 170 schools and approximately 5000 15-year students, and through the TALIS study,¹¹ which took place

¹⁰ Kütahya Atatürk Anatolian Technical High School and Vocational High School for Industries (Altinkurt, 2008), Esogu English Preparatory School (Özkanal et al., 2011), fourth grade students in a primary education school, public general high schools in Ankara (Pehlivan, 2006).

¹¹ TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) used a sample which is representative of teachers who teach at 6th, 7th and 8th grades in Turkey.

in 2008 with the participation of 200 schools and 4000 teachers. Both research projects were undertaken by the OECD.

Findings of PISA 2009 suggest that there is a very serious achievement gap between those schools in which principals report that student absenteeism impedes education a lot and those schools in which principals report that absenteeism does not impede education at all. In schools where absenteeism does not impede education, the average achievement of students is above 500 points (the OECD average) in all three subjects tested (Literacy, Mathematics and Science), whereas the average achievement is at least 40 points less than the OECD average in schools where absenteeism is a very serious barrier. In all subjects, the achievement gap between those two types of schools is the equivalent of one year of education in that subject. In Mathematics, the gap equals almost two years of education.



Source: Calculations undertaken by ERI by using PISA 2009 data.

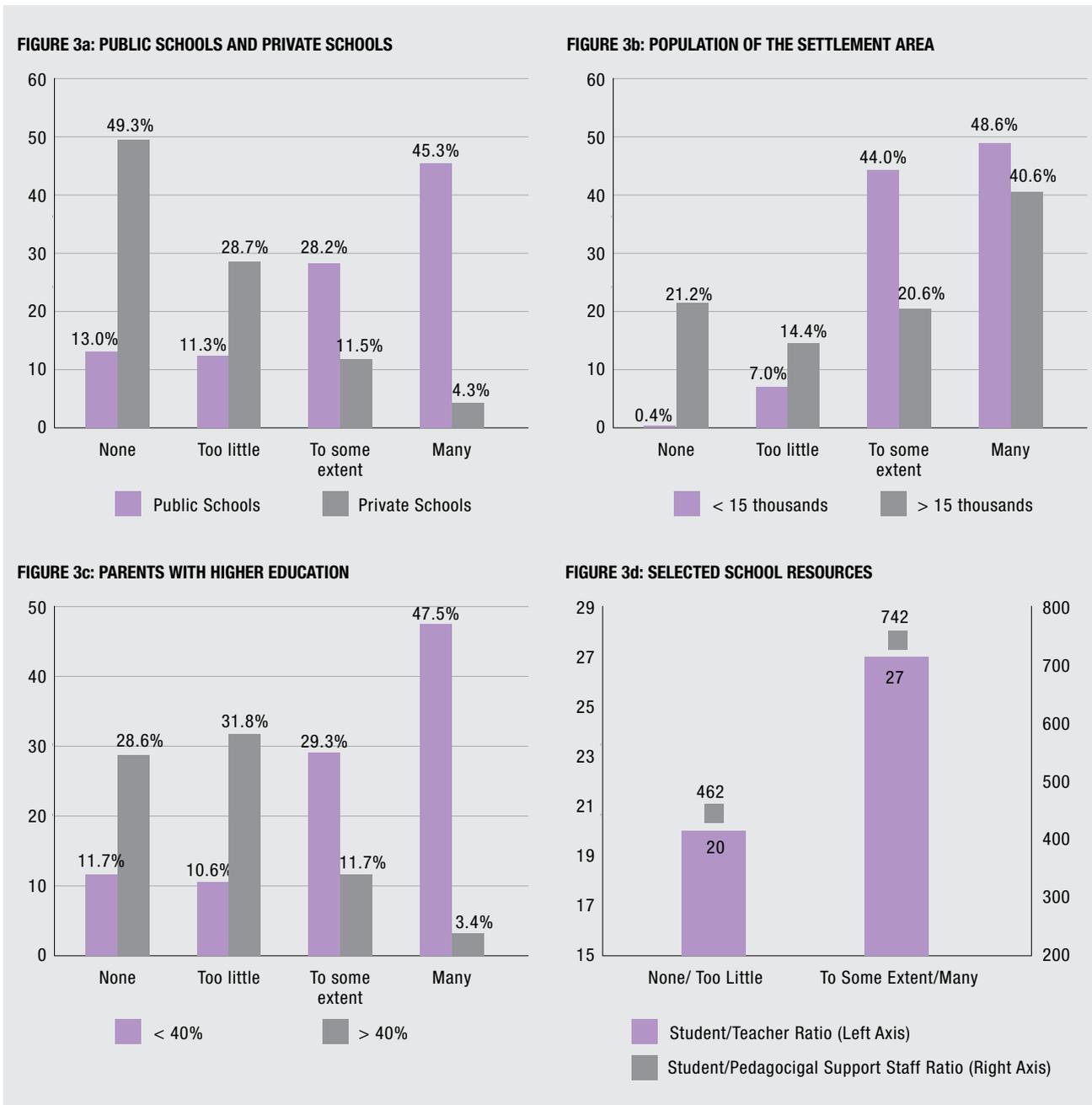
In addition, a rough calculation using the findings of international comparative studies suggests that students in grades 6-8 in Turkey are at least 14.5 points behind their peers on PISA as a result of unexcused absence.¹²

This rough calculation conveys only the minimum loss caused by absenteeism, because absenteeism is more frequent among socio-economically disadvantaged students for whom instructional time matters the most.

The TALIS findings enable researchers to compare the indicators of student absenteeism and other various educational indicators. Accordingly, 45.3% of public school principals interviewed by TALIS report that student absenteeism impedes education to an important extent, whereas only 4.3% of principals of private schools report the same (Figure 3).

¹² Findings of Lavy (2010) suggest that an extra hour of mathematics, science or reading increases learning outcomes in developing countries by 0.075 standard deviation points. Students in 6th to 8th grades lose 11.6 days out of 180 school days due to unexcused absences. In other words, 6.4% of instructional time for mathematics, science and reading is lost due to unexcused absence. An extra hour of instruction per week equals to 3.3% of increase in total instructional time. If students in 6th to 8th grades had not done any unexcused absences, they would have reached an achievement 0.145 standard deviation higher (6.4% * 3.3% = 0.075 standard deviations). In PISA, a standard deviation equals 100 points. Thus, they would have acquired an extra 14.5 points in PISA, if they had no unexcused absences (100 * 0.145 = 14.5 points).

FIGURE 3: HOW MUCH DOES STUDENT ABSENTEEISM IN THIS SCHOOL HINDER EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES? (REPORTED BY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS)



Source: Calculations undertaken by the ERI using TALIS 2008 dataset.

The negative effect of unexcused absenteeism on educational outcomes is relatively higher in regions which have populations less than 15,000 people. 93% of schools in those regions report that absenteeism affects education negatively to some or an important extent. In regions with populations over 15,000, the ratio is 62% (Figure 3b). In schools where less than 40% of parents are high school graduates, 48.4% report that unexcused absenteeism affects education to an important extent. For schools where more than 60% of parents are high school graduates, the ratio is 25%, and for schools in which more than 40% of parents are college graduates, the ratio is only 3.4% (Figure 3c). Moreover, student-to-teacher ratio, an important indicator of school

resources, is 26 in schools in which unexcused student absence hinders education to an important extent, but is 17% in schools where absenteeism does not affect education at all. These types of schools diverge from each other even in a more dramatic way in the indicator of student-to-pedagogical support personnel ratio (Figure 3d).

In sum, PISA and TALIS studies, which present data that allow for nation-wide conclusions suggest that absenteeism shows important degrees of variation across school types (public-private), residential areas, socio-economic status groups and school resources.

Although PISA 2009 and TALIS 2008 data suggest that schools in Turkey differ from each other widely in terms of student absenteeism, a descriptive presentation of data does not allow for causal arguments. To discuss the reasons of student absenteeism, we need datasets which are larger in scope, offer more details and monitor the same students over time, and investigations of these datasets through appropriate empirical methods. In the following sections of this report, determinants of student absenteeism are discussed on the basis of a background report which uses a proper dataset and methods appropriate for the research question.

BASIC DETERMINANTS OF ATTENDANCE AND ABSENTEEISM BEHAVIOR IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

BACKGROUND REPORT: SCOPE AND METHOD

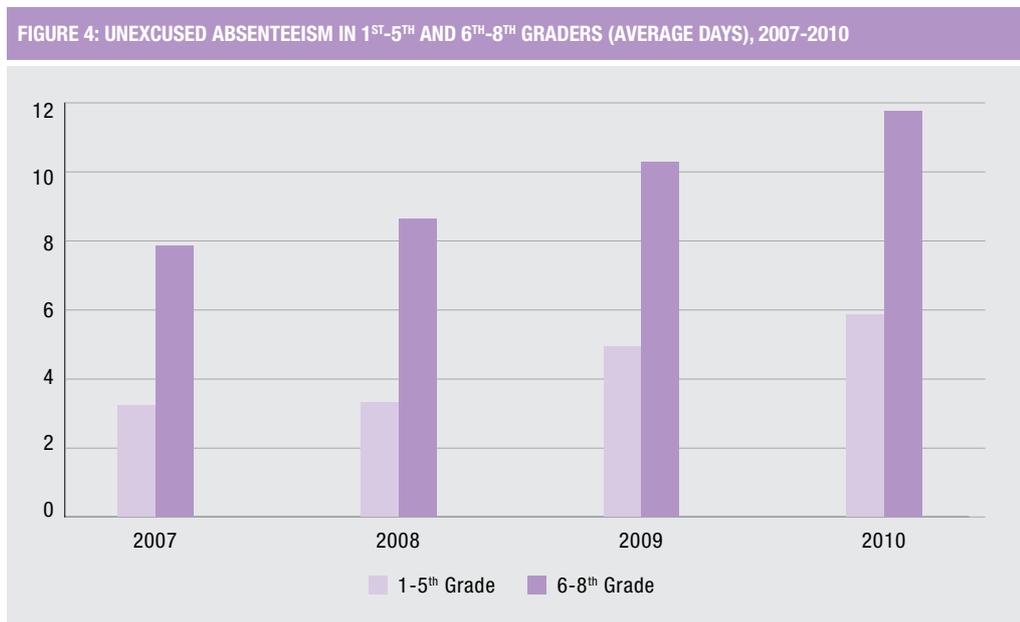
The information management system entitled “e-school” was launched by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in January 2007. As a result, a systematic process was introduced to collect information on students from their enrollment in school until their graduation. Today, e-school serves as an electronic registration system through which MoNE administers its records effectively and informs parents about the achievement (grades) and absenteeism of their children. Yet, the scope of data collected through e-school and the possibilities provided by the system enables policy-makers to use the e-school as an instrument more functional than a mere electronic registration system.

The background report titled “Determinants and monitoring of student attendance research report” uses data on 15 million students collected by the e-school system at the family, school and regional levels. The report analyzes the unexcused student absenteeism behavior as its dependent variable, by using independent variables such as the age of the student, gender, weighted grade point average, whether the student took the test for entrance to selective secondary education institutions (Seviye Belirlleme Sınavı, SBS), the income level of his/her family, whether he/she receives conditional educational aid, the grade point average of his/her home class, student-to-teacher ratio in his/her school, share of permanent teachers within all teachers in school, school type, region of the school and characteristics of the settlement area.

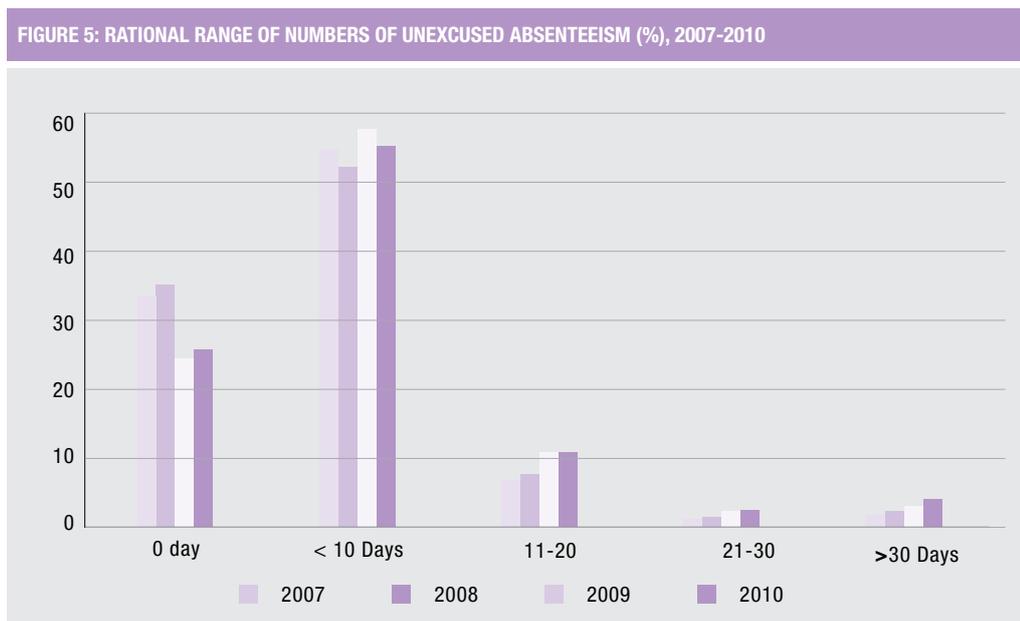
The report is composed of two separate statistical analyses which investigate the potential relationship between the above-mentioned factors and unexcused absences. The first analysis decomposes the composite effect of the independent variables on unexcused absenteeism using the 2009-2010 dataset for 1st-5th graders and 6th-8th graders separately. In the second analysis, using panel data on 6th-8th graders in four school years between 2007-2011, researchers investigate how the above-mentioned factors and the economic crisis affected the unexcused absenteeism of 6th-8th graders.

BACKGROUND REPORT: BASIC DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

Unexcused absenteeism in primary education escalated rapidly in recent years. Descriptive analysis of e-school data suggests that unexcused student absenteeism poses a serious problem both in absolute terms and as a trend. Accordingly, average number of unexcused absences in the first years of primary education was 3.2 days in 2007, but increased by more than 80%, to 5.8 days in 2011. Unexcused absenteeism behavior is a much more severe problem in 6th-8th grades. While it was, on average, 7.8 days in 2007, it rose to 11.6 days in 2011 (Figure 4).



Source: Börkan et al., 2014



Source: Börkan et al., 2014

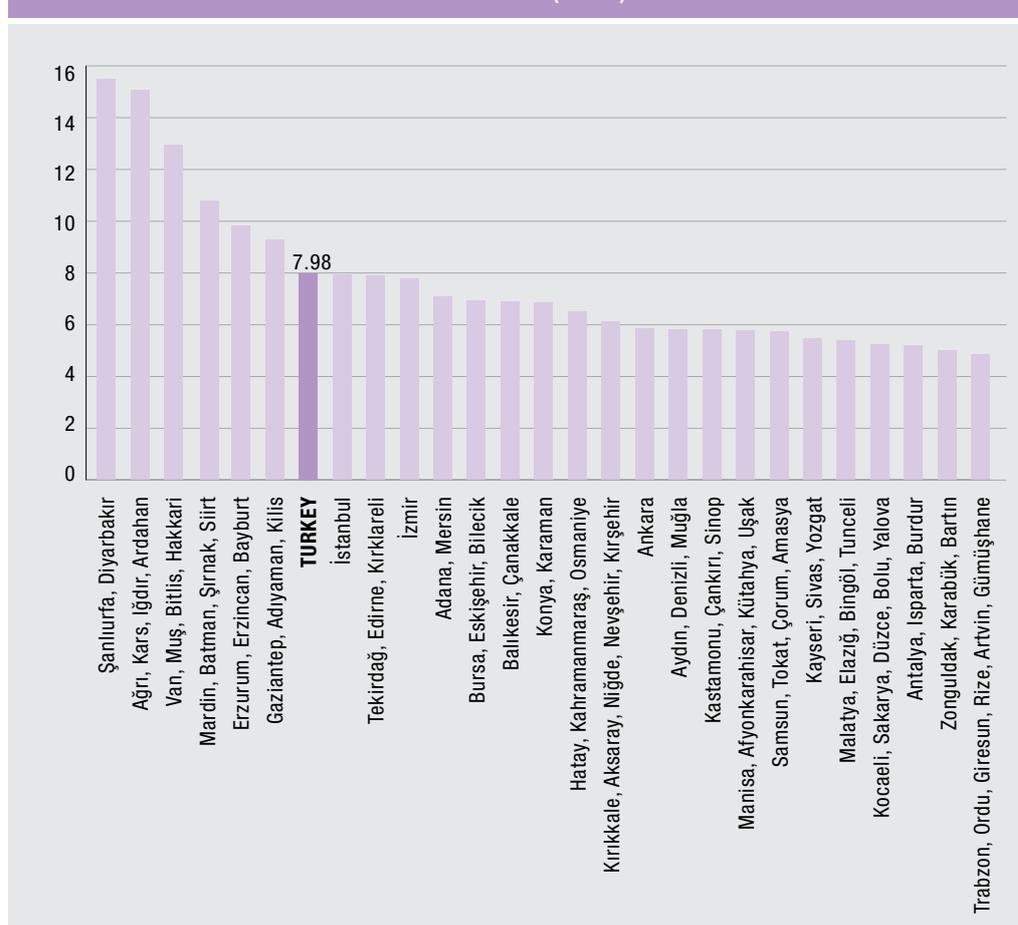
Descriptive analysis suggests that average days of unexcused absence increased over the years, in an escalating especially in 2009 and 2010. A simple graph which categorizes days of absence per school year displays that the share of students who had zero days of absence decreased dramatically in 2009 and 2010, relative to 2007 and 2008. Similarly, the share of students with 30 days of absence per school year increased fourfold from 2007 to 2010 (Figure 5).

Average days of absence per school year are quite close for girls and boys: In 2010-2011 school year, it was 7.83 for girls and 8.13 for boys.

There are severe differences across regions: While average days of unjustified absence is 15.6 days in Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa regions, it is only 4.9 days in Trabzon, Ordu, Giresun, Rize, Artvin and Gümüşhane region.

Student absenteeism is experienced much more severely in eastern and southeastern provinces of Turkey than the rest (Figure 6). As seasonal migration and agricultural labor is among basic economic activities in these regions, student absenteeism in these regions might be related to the supply of child labor. The fact that student absenteeism is lower in more industrialized provinces of the region (Malatya and

FIGURE 6: AVERAGE DAYS OF ABSENCE IN DIFFERENT REGIONS (NUTS II) IN 2010-2011 SCHOOL YEAR



Source: Börkan et al., 2014.

Elazığ) is not surprising. Last but not least, in regions where student absenteeism is most severely experienced, there is a gender disparity in which girls have higher levels of absenteeism. While the disparity might be regarded as minor, female students have higher number of days of absence in Northeastern, Central Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions.

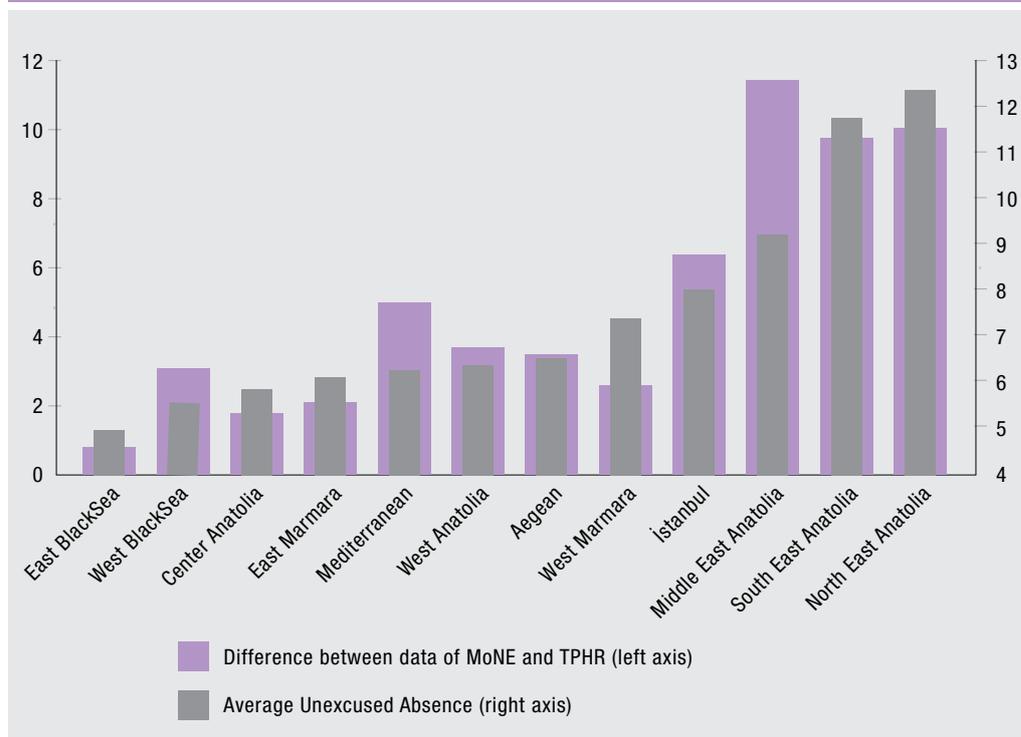
In sum, eight of the 180 days in a school year (7%) cannot be used effectively in Turkey due to unexcused student absenteeism. This phenomenon is much more widespread in eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey where student achievement in literacy, mathematics and science is considerably lower than the Turkish average. According to a rough calculation which uses average days of absence and estimations by Lavy (2010), 13 points of the gap in PISA scores between the achievement level of students in Şanlıurfa and Diyarbakır regions and that of students in Antalya, Burdur and Isparta regions can be attributed to absenteeism alone. In other words, absenteeism widens the achievement gap even further.

Absenteeism does not only decrease academic achievement, but in some cases it may also lead to permanent drop-outs.

Therefore, it is important to undertake research on the question of within which stage does student absenteeism lead to permanent drop-out. Yet, in the absence of relevant research, some preliminary and general findings can be reached on the relationship between student absenteeism and drop-outs using various education participation indicators. Regional enrollment ratios in primary education released by MoNE use administrative records as the source of information. As primary education is a legal obligation, these indicators assume that all students remain enrolled even if they started not to attend school. Thus, net enrollment ratios as released by MoNE can only show initial enrollment, which varies between 97 and 99% across regions. On the other hand, the Demographics and Health Survey (DHS) which was undertaken in 2008 and collected data from 10,525 households in a way that the dataset would be representative of nation as a whole, by rural and urban areas and by regions, provides the researchers with the perspective of the households rather than the administrative data. Accordingly, 15% of children in Central Eastern Anatolia between 6-13 years old (the age range for legally mandatory primary education) do not attend primary education. According to DHS data, the highest participation rate (97%) is in Eastern Marmara.¹³

The difference between the ratio reported by MoNE and the ratio using DHS data could represent the ratio of students who are not attending primary education, yet still enrolled in schools in administrative records. This ratio correlates quite highly with the average days of absence in regions. In regions where the average number of absent days is high, the ratio of students who are enrolled in yet not attending primary education is also high (Figure 7).

¹³ Hacettepe University
Institute for Population Studies,
2009.

FIGURE 7: DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MONE (2010-2011) AND DHS (2008) SCHOOLING DATA AND UNEXCUSED ABSENCE (2010-2011)

Source: Calculations by ERI based on MoNE data, DHS data and background report (MoNE, 2011; Hacettepe University Population Studies Institute, 2009 and Börkan et al., 2014).

DETERMINANTS OF ABSENTEEISM FOR 1ST-5TH AND 6TH-8TH GRADERS IN 2009-2010 SCHOOL YEAR

In order to analyze the factors that affect student attendance to school, the background report used a statistical method which took the nested structure (region-school-family-student) of the educational process and investigated how and to what extent these factors affect student absenteeism in the 2009-2010 school year.

Poverty at the household level is the most important determinant of student absenteeism.

The effect of parental educational level is quite limited when compared to the effect of household poverty. In cases of poverty, the risk of absenteeism may increase due to the insufficiency of resources required for continuous attendance, or due to life quality problems such as health, which may result from the lower levels of household income, or because of perceived necessity for children to work to provide the household with additional (even irregular) income. In the DHS 2008 dataset, out of the households that report that they undertake educational expenditures, 67% of those in urban areas and 72% in rural areas report that they have had hardships in educational expenditures in last 12 months. It is important to understand how conditional educational aid works in mitigating these hardships.

Student absenteeism is significantly different across genders.

When all other variables are held constant, boys have higher days of absence than girls in both grade categories (1st-5th grades and 6th-8th grades). Whether the student is active in the labor market is not a variable in the analysis, and therefore gender disparity in absenteeism may be reflecting the difference between genders in the supply of child labor. According to 2006 Child Labor Study, for children who are 6 to 14 years old and go to school the possibility of employment is more than two times higher among boys than it is among girls.¹⁴

Students whose grade point averages are lower than the home class average have a tendency for more absenteeism.

As home class average does not indicate an absolute academic achievement, this finding is not directly related to desired achievement levels in education. Yet, one could argue that students who are behind their home class peers in terms of grades benefit from school less, leading to more student absenteeism. This finding should also be interpreted within the larger context of the education system and whether there are mechanisms that could support students from disadvantaged background and/or need support for better academic achievement.

Findings from the background report suggest that conditional educational aid significantly decreases student absence in rural areas.

On the other hand, one problem that cannot be fully grasped from the findings of the background report deserves attention. Absenteeism data does not really capture whether the student was in school on a specific day, it rather captures whether school officials tracked them in the system as absent or present. As a result, if school officials do not want the student to lose conditional educational aid, they can track the student as present even if the student was absent. This problem may be experienced more intensively in rural areas as the relationship between school officials and parents may be closer in rural areas than it is in urban areas. Findings related to the effect of conditional educational aid should be interpreted taking this possibility into consideration.

Settlement area also plays an important role in the variation of student absenteeism.

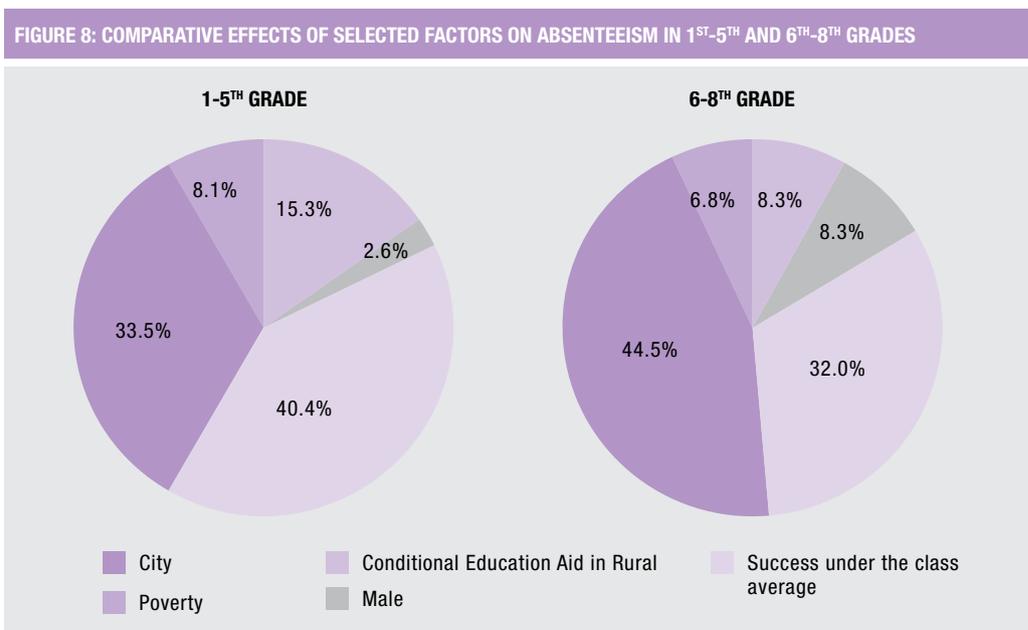
Student absenteeism is more frequent in urban areas than it is in rural areas. One of the reasons for this gap between urban and rural areas might be the fact that supply of child labor is more intensive in urban areas. According to 2006 Child Labor Study, children who are 6 to 14 years old and attend schools are employed largely in rural areas. Yet, between 1994 and 2006, school attendance and employment for

¹⁴ Turkstat, 2007.

6-14-year-old children decreased by more than 60% in rural areas but increased by 15% in urban areas. Another reason for more frequent absenteeism in urban areas might be the fact children may be substituting some of the instructional time in schools with time they spend in private tutorial centers to prepare for centralized, multiple-choice examinations required for transition to the upper level of education. As widely known, private tutoring centers are much more widespread in urban areas.

The effect of explanatory variables is significantly different in different subcategories of the analysis. This means that absenteeism in 1st-5th grades and absenteeism in 6th-8th grades are two different phenomena in terms of their basic characteristics and they should be analyzed and intervened separately.

While the effect of gender on absenteeism is quite mild for 1st-5th graders, it increases for 6th-8th graders and largely means boys are more likely to be absent. While absenteeism in 1st-5th grades can be largely explained by lower academic achievement in the home class, its effect decreases by approximately 20% in 6th-8th grades. Being in the urban areas affects absenteeism more severely for children in 6th-8th grades than those in 1st-5th grades. Lastly, while poverty increases absenteeism for both groups similarly, in rural areas conditional educational aid decreases absenteeism in 1st-5th grades more effectively. Conditional educational aid is relatively less useful for 6th-8th graders. All these findings give the impression that, for male students, expected returns of education decrease as opposed to returns of absenteeism, as they get older.



Source: Presentation of ERI based on Börkan et al. 2014.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ABSENTEEISM: ANALYSIS OF 2007-2011 PANEL DATA FOR 6TH-8TH GRADERS

The part of the background report in which determinants of student absenteeism in 2009-2010 school year are analyzed, focuses only on one cross-section of time. As students are not monitored throughout time, the findings do not allow us to comment on the economic crisis and student absenteeism. Furthermore, as coefficients for explanatory variables are estimated based on only one cross-section, their accuracy may be subject to questioning. To overcome these problems, in the background report, determinants of student absenteeism in four school years between 2007 and 2011 are analyzed by using different explanatory variables and observing students throughout time. The following section summarizes findings of this analysis.

The e-school data for the years ranging from 2007 to 2011 provides crucial opportunities since it is a time series data (2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2010-2011) which includes a cross section (students). First, the time series enables the researchers to analyze the relationship between the economic crisis and student attendance. In addition, this type of data, since the students are monitored throughout time, avoids the possibility that unobserved characteristics affect estimations. For instance, if it is estimated that child's early childhood experiences affect attendance, a statistical analysis which uses only one time section cannot take into consideration this unobservable effect and therefore the accuracy of estimated coefficients for explanatory variables used are questionable. Yet, if the same child can be observed over a number of points in time, the effects of variables whose effect does not change over time such as early childhood experiences can be kept out of the statistical analysis. This statistical method is named panel data analysis with its most general definition.

In the second part of the background report, the determinants of student absenteeism are analyzed by taking into consideration the factors arising from students and which cannot be could not have been observed, and the effect of the economic crisis on student absenteeism is focused. Accordingly, the variations in student absenteeism are analyzed in relation to the student's age, employment status, school type, regions (NUTS I), score received on the SBS exam, settlement area type and income level. Determinants of student absenteeism are estimated together and separately for categories of 0-20 days of absence and 21-90 days of absence.

The background report suggests that the economic crisis affected student absenteeism largely through effects of household income.

In 2008, the effect of income on student absenteeism was not different than it was in 2007. Yet, in 2009 the effect gets considerably stronger, and in 2010 it is significantly larger than it was in 2007, although smaller than in 2009. The effect of the economic crisis on income in 2009 and 2010 is drastically transmitted to student absenteeism.

The adverse effect of the economic crisis on income level is seen for students who are absent in school for 20-90 days per school year. This means that during periods of economic crisis students in the risk group should be monitored closely.

On the other hand, as income level is recorded in the e-school system as a proportional variable (rather than in absolute terms) through subjective evaluation by the parent, it is impossible to reach an absolute evaluation.¹⁵ This deficiency of the dataset also obstructs any conclusions about the current effect of conditional educational aid and about the amount in which it could be most efficient.

It should be noted that income is an important determinant of student absenteeism not only during periods of economic crisis but generally.

Analysis of panel data suggests that there is an inverse relationship between household income and student absenteeism. As income rises, student absenteeism decreases; and as income decreases, student absenteeism increases.

The income level does not have an effect on students who have an absence record of 0-20 days. In other words, students who have an absence record of less than 20 days do not seem to be affected by changes in income level. On the other hand, as the income level of students who have an absence record of 20-90 days meliorates, their absenteeism decreases considerably. This suggests that, all other variables held constant, students with highest levels of student absenteeism are usually in those household which have the most unfavorable conditions, in terms of income.

The risk of absenteeism among 6th-8th graders increases as they get older.

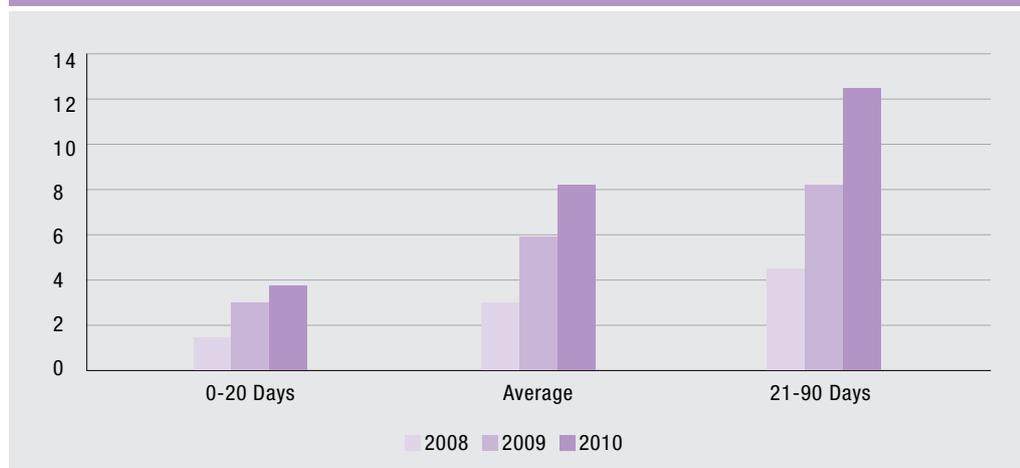
For instance, the number of days in which a 6th grade student was absent in 2007 increased by three days in 2008 and by six days in 2009. This age-related increase is eminently low for students who have an absence record of 0-20 days, whereas it is considerably high for students who have a record of 20-90 days of absence. For example, for a 6th grade student who had 25 absences in 2008, his or her number of absences increased to 29 days in 2009 and 33 days in 2010 (Figure 9).

If older students are more likely to receive higher returns by employment, it would not be surprising to identify a strong relationship between age, employment status and absenteeism. The findings of the background report are quite in line with this hypothesis.

¹⁵ For instance, one cannot argue that students whose household income is larger by 1000 TL have 2 days less absence record.

On average, employment status causes two more days of absence.

FIGURE 9: CHANGE IN STUDENT'S AVERAGE NUMBER OF ABSENCES ALONG WITH HIS OR HER AGE



Source: Börkan et al., 2014.

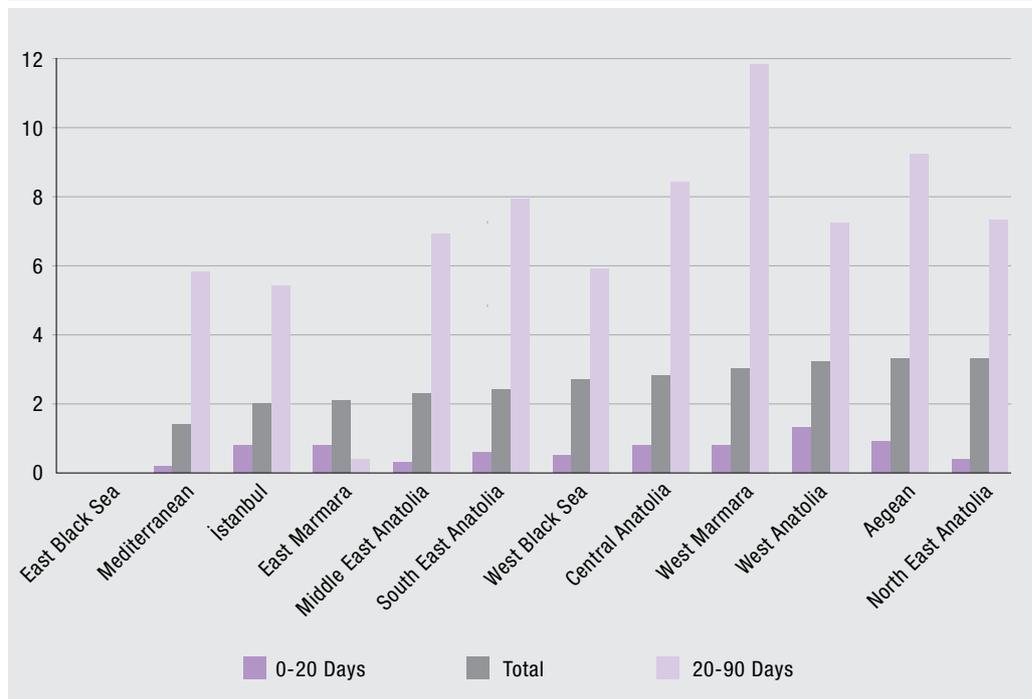
Yet, this effect can almost only be seen among students who have an absence record of 20-90 days. For students who have an absence record of 0-20 days, being employed do not affect attendance negatively. Students who are not absent frequently attend school regularly and therefore benefit from school to a large extent. On the other hand, students who have an absence record of 20-90 days must have already lost their strong attachment to school and therefore, if they are employed, this increases their record absence by 7 days.

The general achievement score on the SBS exam, an indicator of the academic development level of the student, increases his/her absenteeism decreases.

If we assume that SBS can actually measure academic achievement and learning outcomes and that principals and teachers do influence their students' SBS scores, we should accept that SBS is also an important indicator of teachers' and principals' success. While some principals and teachers are able to contribute to academic achievement and help keep attendance levels high at the same time, some others have lower performance. In a similar vein as the effect of employment status, the relationship between achievement on the SBS exam and absenteeism is much stronger among students who have an absence record of 20-90 days compared to those who have a record of 0-20 days of absence.

Quality of education is even more important for students whose attachment to school is weaker.

Among students who have an absence record of 0-20 days per school year, absenteeism does not differ significantly across settlement areas (urban/rural) or regions. This means that the differences across settlement areas are not related to cultural or unobserved factors. The differences in the number of absences for students in the 0-20 absence category are largely determined by income and employment status.

FIGURE 10: AVERAGE NUMBER OF ABSENTEEISM BY IBBS 1 REGIONS (AFTER CONTROLLING FOR INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS)

Source: Presentation of ERI based on Börkan et al.

For students who have an absence record of 20-90 days, region does still play an important role in determining absenteeism, even after controlling for income level or employment status.

For instance, absenteeism of students in Western Marmara region are estimated to be 12 days more than that of the students in Eastern Black Sea region, after controlling for income and employment status (Figure 10). More comprehensive research projects should be designed and undertaken to explain the reasons behind these regional differences.

In sum, panel data analysis suggests that economic crisis affect student absenteeism significantly and students who have an absence record of 20-90 days are affected most severely by crisis. Moreover, regional differences play an important role for students who are inclined to have an absence record of more than 20 days. In addition, a student's age, employment status, academic achievement level and educational quality are important determinants of his or her absenteeism.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO DECREASE STUDENT ABSENTEEISM

MULTIPHASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR ABSENTEEISM (AŞAMALI DEVAMSIZLIK YÖNETİMİ, ADEY)¹⁶

When policy-makers started to develop ADEY in 2009, a comprehensive study and needs analysis was undertaken to identify the reasons of absenteeism and drop-out.¹⁷ ADEY was designed on the basis of those findings and launched in the 2011-2012 school year.

The most important objectives of ADEY are to identify risks of absenteeism early, and to enable school stakeholders to implement individualized interventions and monitor the absenteeism effectively.¹⁸ Among the methods and instruments to be used to reach these objectives are increasing awareness about the importance of regular attendance among school stakeholders, identifying basic rules and principles for monitoring absenteeism, identifying and continuously monitoring students who are at risk for high absenteeism and dropping out of school, implementing appropriate interventions against absenteeism, and improving collaboration among public agencies.

In this context, policy-makers aim to strengthen the communication between the schools and parents. To ensure communication, parents have to update their home phone numbers and addresses at the start of each semester through an information form sent by the school to houses. If parents cannot be reached through these methods, village headman should step in.

Moreover, to strengthen the communication within schools, school committees for risk monitoring were established. These committees are composed of a school principal or vice-principal, one home class teacher, a school counselor (if there is no school counselor at school, one of the secondary stage teachers) and parents if needed. This committee gathers once a month to discuss problems related to absenteeism.

As part of ADEY program, if a student is absent from school with no excuse for one day, school stakeholders get in contact with his/her parent. Action plans according to the type of absenteeism should be implemented when the student is absent for more than two days. Action plans are diversified according to the reason of the absenteeism.

In sum, ADEY provides school principals and teachers a wide spectrum of action plans that they can implement when they have cases of absenteeism within their school. ADEY also foresees legal action in case these action plans do not yield positive/expected results and administrative fines for parents.

¹⁶ This part of the report is prepared before ADEY is completed but since MoNE started a new study to monitor and avoid absenteeism, it is not taken off from the report.

¹⁷ The report completed by Kültegin Ögel in 2009, was prepared in the context of strengthening the capacity of policy-makers in the provincial outposts of MoNE and other public agencies for fulfilling the educational needs of students and monitors their risks of absenteeism in 81 provinces. Therefore, the report has comprehensive knowledge about the problem of absenteeism. A literature review on absenteeism was undertaken, a sample from the e-school database was investigated and qualitative and quantitative analyses were undertaken.

¹⁸ MoNE Directorate General for Primary Education & UNICEF Turkey Office, 2011.

As ADEY has been recently launched, it is too early to comment on how successful it has been so far in monitoring absenteeism and fulfilling the needs of students. Impact assessment of ADEY would be very useful to see whether and to which extent ADEY can overcome problems which lead to absenteeism. Recommendations in this report and also the findings which lead to the recommendations could also contribute to the implementation of ADEY.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE FINDINGS OF THE BACKGROUND REPORT AND SUPPORTING DATA

The emphasis of the background report on income/poverty and the economic crisis brings two important issues to the foreground. First, economic crises exacerbate student absenteeism for students who experience higher risk of absenteeism. Second, in addition to economic crisis, income/poverty is another basic determinant of student absenteeism.

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ABSENTEEISM

In e-school, data related to household income should be collected regularly and using objective criteria. A warning system should be launched through which students at high risk of absenteeism could be monitored, especially during times of economic crisis.

In e-school, data regarding income is collected through subjective criteria. Yet, income data can be collected through objective criteria, the findings of analyses could also be used to design interventions. To collect data safely and decrease data loss, parents should not enter data manually. The options for the income question should be given as [0-500], [501-1000], [1001-1500], [1501-2000], [2001-2500] and [2501+] (TL/month) and parents should not be able to select more than one option.

Another important requirement is that data collected to assess the impact of an economic crisis on educational outcomes should have variability before and after the crisis. Data in the e-school system should be updated regularly. Both student attendance and income should be monitored continuously so that warning systems can be developed through which at-risk students can be identified and early interventions can be undertaken. ADEY is a promising step taken towards this aim by MoNE and it has the potential of being one of the most important instruments to fight against absenteeism.

Such a warning system, on the other hand, should be based on a number of indicators. In addition to income, the warning system should be fed with a myriad of socio-economic indicators. Some of the data to develop these indicators is currently being collected through e-school. Yet, data loss is a problem obstructing the reliability of conclusions based on these data.

A robust data collection process is the most important pre-condition for benefitting from the e-school system in a comprehensive way and the system should be improved in this respect (Table 1). Ways must be found so that data on household income and other socio-economic indicators can be collected and updated robustly through the e-school system.

TABLE 1: MISSING DATAS IN E-SCHOOL SYSTEM	
	Missing data (%)
Employment status of the mother	38.89
Income level of the family	27.93
Does the student have his/her own room?	21.62
Student bussing	15.1

Source: ERI calculations based on Börkan et al., 2014.

For a reliable and robust data collection period, The Directorate General for Basic Education should designate October as the month of data collection. Question forms for data collection should be processed by optic scanners. A guide including information regarding questions and how to answer them should accompany the question forms.

The guide should describe how and how often data should be collected, processed and entered to the e-school system. For instance, number of siblings (a factor which might be related to various educational outcomes) data should be collected in a very clear way. In the current system, the answer "one" to the number of siblings can be interpreted as "the child has one sibling" or "the child is the only child in the family." These problems can be easily overcome to use collected data effectively to fight against absenteeism.

MoNE offices in provinces and districts should control whether data is being collected as planned through a randomly selected sample of schools.

Moreover, a user-friendly format should be designed for reporting of data. Absenteeism should be defined as a ratio of days of absence to total number of days in which the school was active, and this ratio should be used as the basic indicator in reports. In addition, other indicators, especially the share of students who have an absence record of more than 20 days should be monitored by policy-makers across schools, districts and provinces.

Through implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations and some other minor changes in the e-school system (e.g. replacing manual data entry with drop-down menus, decreasing data loss), absenteeism and other educational outcomes can be monitored closely by policy-makers and turned into user-friendly reports. As a result, e-school can easily host a warning system in which students at risk can be identified and intervened, especially during instances of economic crisis.

Lastly, realizing the potential of e-school depends to a large extent on skillful coordination with other data collection instruments of MoNE such as ADEY, the Primary Education Standards, and on the utilization of data received through these channels for policy designs based on monitoring and evidence.

INCOME AND ABSENTEEISM

The background report suggests that various socio-economic factors do play important roles in determining student absenteeism. The most important of these factors is household income. Cross-section analysis suggests that absenteeism increases as poverty increases, and panel data analysis suggests that absenteeism increases as household income decreases. A recommendation which takes these findings into consideration can aim to overcome poverty and/or break the link between poverty and absenteeism.

Conditional educational aid, while it is limited, decreases poverty and incentivizes regular school attendance of poorer children. The poorest 6% of households are targeted to receive monthly financial aid on the condition that children in the household regularly attend school.

Boy who attends primary education regularly, per month	30 TL
Girl who attends primary education regularly, per month	35 TL
Boy who attends secondary education regularly, per month	45 TL
Girl who attends secondary education regularly, per month	55 TL

As of May 2011, 680,000 girls and 702,000 boys benefit from conditional educational aid.¹⁹ 40% of conditional educational aid is provided in the Southeastern Anatolia region, and a further 27% is provided for the Eastern Anatolia region.²⁰ The background report suggests that conditional educational aid increases school attendance levels especially in rural areas.

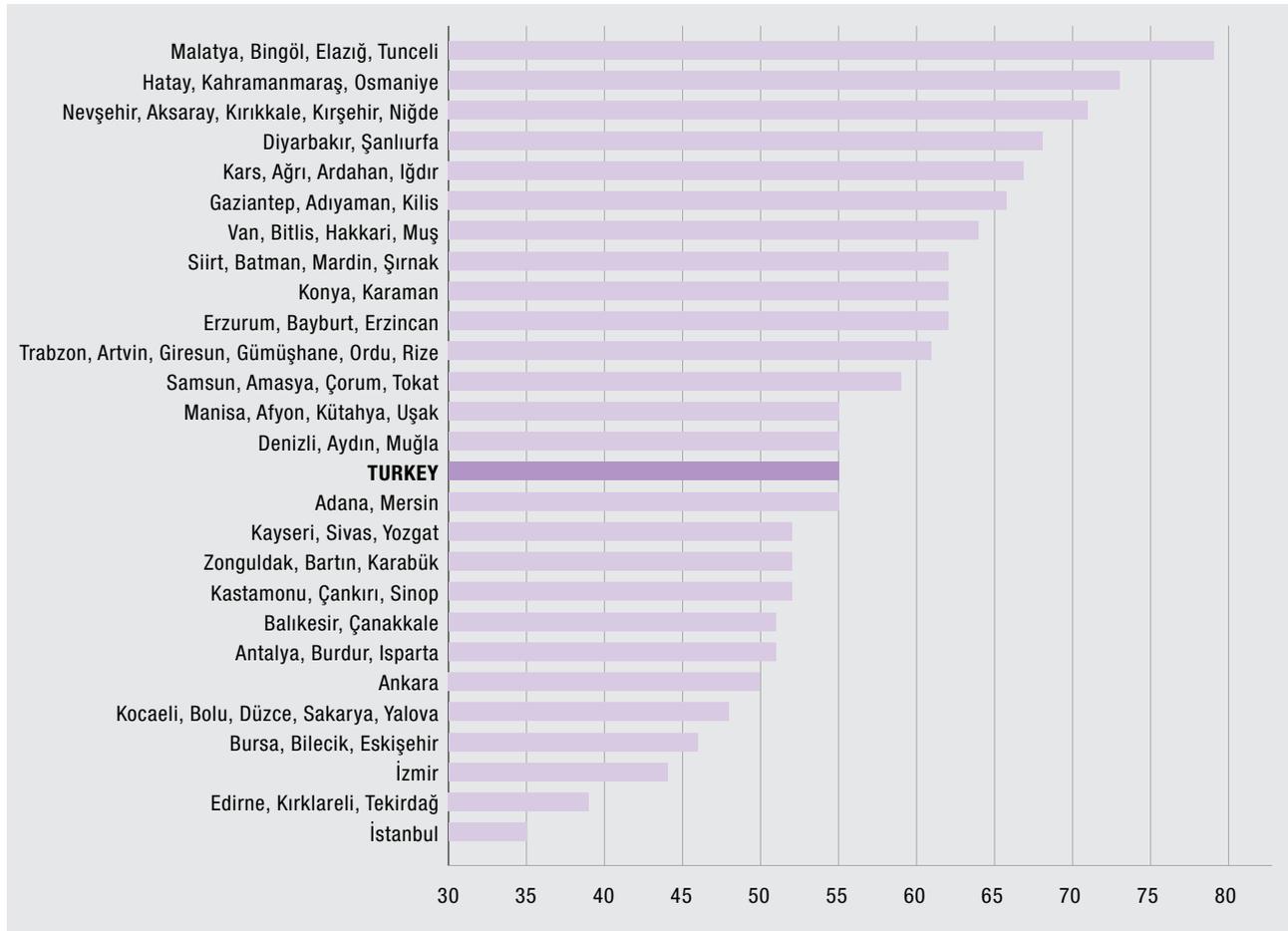
Expanding conditional educational aid in rural areas can be a practical solution to decrease student absenteeism that is caused by poverty.

On the other hand, the fact that conditional educational aid is only effective in rural areas may result from the fact that equal amounts of financial aid are delivered both in rural and urban areas. The amount of aid that is allocated by the Directorate General for Social Assistance and Solidarity (Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Genel Müdürlüğü, SYDGM) might be sufficient in rural areas to decrease poverty whereas it fails to have a considerable effect on poverty in urban areas, as households in urban areas have higher income and expenditure levels. It is also highly possible that the amount of conditional educational aid might be effectively decreasing poverty in some regions, whereas it is ineffective in other regions. When adjusted through purchasing power parity, 55 TL,

¹⁹ UNICEF, 2012.

²⁰ DG for Social Assistance and Solidarity, 2011.

FIGURE 11: PURCHASING POWER OF CONDITIONAL AID FOR EDUCATION (TL55/MONTH) IN DIFFERENT REGIONS



which is given per girl regularly attending secondary education, can mean double the educational expenditures in Bingöl versus in İstanbul.

Moreover, the background report suggests that absenteeism takes place much more prominently in 6th-8th grades and effectiveness of conditional educational aid also decreases if the student is in 6th-8th grades. Conditional educational aid is twice as effective in decreasing absenteeism in 1st-5th grades as it is in 6th-8th grades.

Another policy step to be taken can thus be differentiation of the amount of conditional educational aid across rural and urban areas (or regions/provinces) and across grades (setting a different amount for 1st-5th grades and 6th-8th grades).

Increasing the amount for students in 6th-8th grades and/or in urban areas would very probably decrease absenteeism. On the other hand, independently from expanding the conditional educational aid program, there is also need for a mechanism which would ensure attendance of students who receive the aid. According to the rules of the program, students who are entitled to receive the aid lose their entitlements if they have an absence record of four or more days within two months in which

schools are open (20% or more of the days in which the schools were in operation).²¹ In practice, the data on attendance of the student is announced by teachers. In the case of absenteeism, teachers may still report that the requirements are met, and this may lead to the fact that some of the objectives of the program cannot be realized as students do not benefit from proper instructional time. Findings of the impact assessment report of the conditional educational aid for the period 2005-2006 suggest that while the program did increase the enrollment ratios in secondary education, its effect in increasing attendance is quite limited.²²

Furthermore, the impact assessment report finds that some households which are objectively entitled to conditional educational aid are not provided with sufficient information on the application and selection processes and conditions of the aid.²³ Due to this deficiency, many households cannot receive the aid although they are part of the poorest 6%. Therefore, another step should be periodic efforts to inform poorer households on application and selection processes.

CHILD LABOR AND ABSENTEEISM

In addition to household income and poverty, the background reports suggest that there is a strong link between child labor and absenteeism.

Child labor in Turkey is primarily manifested as seasonal supply of labor. A 2007 study by Eğitim-Sen supports the findings of the background report. Accordingly, in 115 primary education schools of some neighborhoods of Batman, Adiyaman, Şanlıurfa, Diyarbakır, Adana and Gaziantep where agricultural labor is widespread, 10% of approximately 250,000 students leave school before summer and before they receive their report cards and come back to school in autumn well after the official start of school, due to paid seasonal agricultural labor. On average, students leave the school as early as 39 days before the official start of the summer break and come back as late as 33 days into the start of the new school year.²⁴

One of the policy steps taken to avoid the damages of supply of seasonal child labor to education is the Project for Enhancement of Employment and Social Life of Seasonal Agricultural Laborers (*Mevsimlik Tarım İşçilerinin Çalışma ve Sosyal Hayatlarının İyileştirilmesi Projesi*, METİP). The aim of METİP is to identify conditions in which seasonal migratory agricultural laborers work and live in a comprehensive and multi-faceted manner and to enhance these conditions through an action plan. One of the indispensable aspects of these efforts is ensuring continuous access of children of seasonal laborers to educational services. In this context, METİP oversees regional boarding schools, bussing to schools, open education for those children who are not anymore in mandatory school age, catch-up education programs within the school year and summer schools in regions where children have to work.²⁵

Limited information can be accessed about the scope of METİP activities and no impact assessment is available on the efficiency of these activities. Some of the exemplary activities are undertaken in Manisa where 130,000 TL is allotted for bussing, school meals and education materials of 350 children of the 16,000 seasonal migratory

²¹ DG for Social Assistance and Solidarity, 2010.

²² Akhter et al., 2007.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Eğitim-Sen, 2007.

²⁵ Ministry for Labor and Social Security, 2010.

laborers expected to arrive in Manisa in 2011.²⁶ The related official documents suggest that the total budget of METİP is 44 million TL, and 5% is allotted to educational activities.²⁷

NGOs should participate in the design, implementation and impact assessment of METİP activities and NGOs themselves should be enabled to implement projects and activities, so that alternative models can be discovered and effective models can be generalized and scaled up. Mechanisms to incentivize NGO involvement would have a facilitating role in prevention of child labor in seasonal agricultural activities.²⁸

Yet, a comprehensive solution to this problem requires national agricultural policies and programs, and policy priorities such as enhancement of sustenance activities in rural regions, increasing the efficiency of agricultural activities, and protection of seasonal agricultural labor in terms of wages and social security. METİP does not have such aims and its proposals to ensure access to education can only result in temporary solutions.

Forming a national database to identify students who go to school and work as seasonal agricultural laborers and children who had to drop out of school due to seasonal migratory labor can be a first step in the solution process of the problem. It is a good start that the Directorate General for Basic Education is working towards that aim.

For 700,000 out of 900,000 students who have a record of more than 20 days of unexcused absence, no reason for the absence was entered to the e-school system. Out of those whose reasons were entered to the system, seasonal agricultural labor was reported to be the reason of absenteeism for only nine thousand. Yet, in a study which was undertaken in only 115 schools, Eğitim-Sen reported that more than 20,000 students were suffering from chronic absenteeism due to seasonal agricultural labor. Therefore, the need to improve the data collection process within e-school confronts us again.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND ABSENTEEISM

While the background report focuses on the socio-economic determinants of absenteeism, its findings are also helpful for understanding the relationship between the quality of education and student absenteeism.

According to the report, the achievement level of the student is quite influential on his/her absenteeism. In other words, students who benefit from school and learn are much less inclined to be absent, whereas students who do not benefit from school as much have more absences on record. This finding clearly shows the need for specialized academic support mechanisms for students who are having academic difficulties. In this context, the Every Child Succeeds Project (Her Çocuk Başarır, HÇB) gains importance as it oversees individualized interventions and one-to-one support programs for students who are unable to reach pre-defined academic standards. In 2011, as part of the pilot activities of the project 3,344 students in 72 schools benefited

²⁶ Ministry for Labor and Social Security, 2011.

²⁷ UNICEF, 2012.

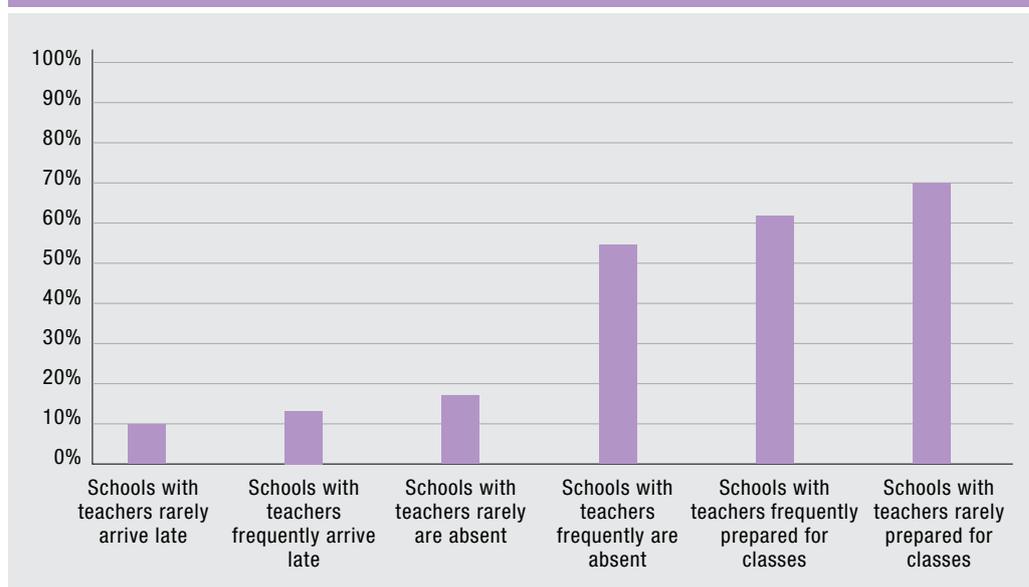
²⁸ Development Workshop, 2012; <http://goo.gl/MIJp5>.

from academic support activities. Yet, this project does not have clear fiscal sources which would ensure sustainability and no impact assessment was undertaken for the pilot activities.²⁹ Therefore, ensuring fiscal sustainability of HÇB, constituting a concrete timeline for following activities planned in the project and undertaking impact assessments are the priority steps that should be taken to revive this project.

School principals and teachers should be emphasized in relation to quality of education. Quality of education is directly related to school principals and teachers, and any progress or regression in student achievement is a reflection of the performance of the school principal and teachers. The TALIS 2008 dataset enables us to buttress these arguments.

In schools in which student absenteeism harms education the most, one in every five teachers thinks that he/she cannot create any progress for students who are the least willing and hardest to reach out to. The fact that teachers do not feel confident about themselves may lead teachers coming to classes unprepared, being late to school, or teacher absenteeism.

FIGURE 12: BEHAVIOURS OF SELECTED TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS WITH LOWER RATES OF STUDENT ABSENCE



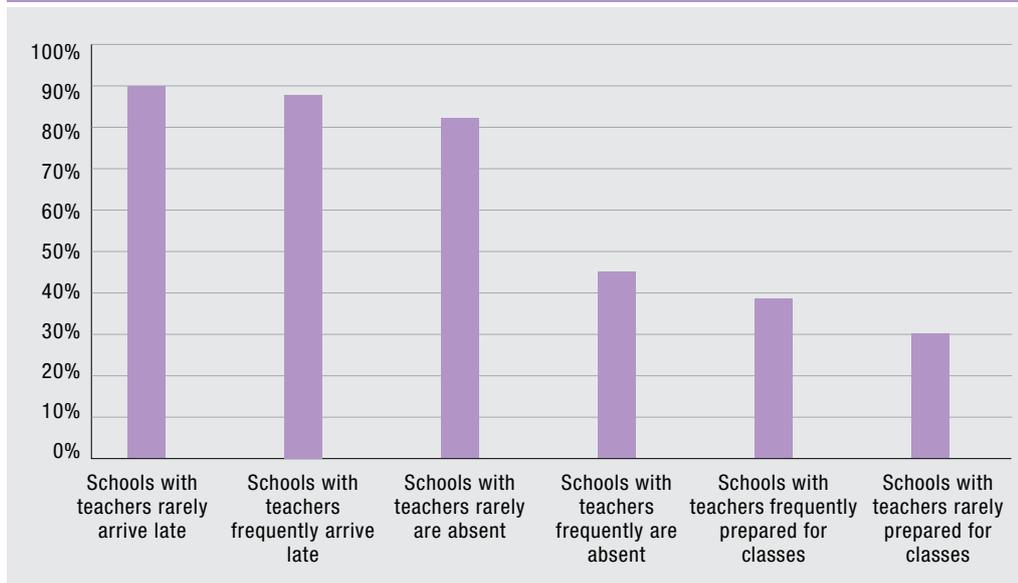
Source: Calculations of the ERI using TALIS 2008 datas.

In schools where teachers are not late or absent and come to classes prepared, students also have a record of less absence. In schools where teachers are frequently late and absent and come to classes unprepared, students are also frequently absent.

²⁹ Interview by ERI with DG for Innovation and Educational Technologies.

Studies on school management also reach similar findings. Some studies suggest that students think that school management is the most important reason of their

FIGURE 13: BEHAVIOURS OF SELECTED TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS WITH HIGHER RATES OF STUDENT ABSENCE



Source: Calculations of the ERI using TALIS 2008 datas.

absenteeism.³⁰ In addition, there are some findings suggesting that practices of school management have indirect effects on student absenteeism³¹ and lists such practices and policies of school management as rule enforcement mechanisms, social, cultural and sports activities, school day organization (start, end and recess times) as factors determining student attendance. The tolerance level of school management, enabling student participation in making of school policies, and taking students' expectations and requests into consideration are also suggested as mechanisms through which student attendance might be affected.³²

Policies which would increase educational quality through enhancing the efficiency of school management and teachers have the potential of decreasing their days of absence. Desired outcomes can only be achieved if policies award value to school management and teachers for their role in determining the quality of education. Thus, one of the most important steps to be taken is launching a mechanism through which school principals and teachers can monitor efficiency of themselves through self-evaluation. One should use the Primary Education Institutional Standards (İlköğretim Kurumları Standartları, İKS) for assessment within this context. Within the scope of İKS, some of the indicators are related to how e-school is being used to monitor absenteeism, but beyond that İKS has indicators on how e-school is being utilized. Thus, İKS might be useful for a better utilization of e-school for data collection and reporting. In addition, İKS provides school principals and teachers with an over-arching tool for self-evaluation and relates school development and teacher training issues to these self-evaluations. If utilized effectively and efficiently, İKS has the potential to strengthen the e-school system and to contribute to the professional development of school administrators and teachers.

³⁰ Altinkurt, 2008.

³¹ Balcı, 2002.

³² Başar, 2001.

CONCLUSION

Decreasing student absenteeism to a minimum level and maximizing the benefit students gain from instructional time is of vital importance for the education system. Steps taken to reach this aim have also the potential to prevent early drop-outs from the education system.

Findings brought together in this policy report clearly show that student absenteeism has become a problem which cannot be ignored anymore. The problem is manifested in different degrees across genders, 1st-5th and 6th-8th grades, and across urban and rural areas. The most disadvantaged group is children who live in low-income households and already have a record of high absence. Findings also suggest that the most disadvantaged group is also the group most vulnerable to the negative effects of economic crises. This situation highlights the importance of the mechanisms through which student attendance can be monitored closely and through which school administrators and teachers are enabled to undertake early interventions.

In this context, various components of education management information systems are the most obvious instruments to identify students early who are at risk of absenteeism before economic crises (and other social fluctuations) and for starting early and effective interventions. E-school provides comprehensive data at school and student levels, ADEY is a tool to closely monitor student attendance and its multi-phase management, and İKS is developed for self-evaluation of teachers and school administrators. E-school, ADEY and İKS should be followed closely and assessed. This policy report highlights that data collection processes can be enhanced through some changes to e-school. The strengths and weaknesses of other initiatives mentioned based on self-evaluation and monitoring should be identified.

The critical intervention to bring student absenteeism to a minimum is coordinated and comprehensive functioning of these initiatives in a way they would feed each other.

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