

**TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE REASONS OF  
SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENTS' ABSENTEEISM IN EUROPE AND  
TURKEY**

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**ABSTRACT**

This work is a study of convergent pattern of mixed methods research that combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess teachers' and students' opinions about the reasons of secondary education students' absenteeism in Europe and Turkey. The study sample is 10 teachers (two from each country) working in high schools in Turkey, Iceland, Austria, Czech Republic and Spain, and 155 students studying in those schools. The sample group was determined by using purposive sampling technique. The data collection tool applied to 155 students is the "The Scale of Absenteeism Causes" which is 5-point Likert type and consists of 34 items and 4 dimensions. Also, semi-structured interview form was applied to these 10 teachers. Percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used while analysing the quantitative data collection tool. Descriptive analysis technique was used in the analysis of qualitative data. In the analysis conducted in the study, it was observed that there was a difference between the reasons of students' absenteeism in terms of gender. Also, a significant difference was found according to the country they live in. According to teachers, student absenteeism originates from school, students themselves, their psychology, and parents. In addition, teachers' suggestions to reduce students' absenteeism and early school leaving were included in the interview form and evaluated in the analysis part of the study.

**Keywords:** Absenteeism; early school leaving; teachers' and students' opinion

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# AVRUPA VE TÜRKİYE'DEKİ LİSE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN DEVAMSIZLIK NEDENLERİ HAKKINDA ÖĞRETMEN VE ÖĞRENCİ GÖRÜŞLERİ

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Avrupa ve Türkiye'deki orta öğretim öğrencilerinin devamsızlığının nedenine dayalı olarak öğretmenlerin ve öğrencilerin görüşlerini değerlendirmek için nicel ve nitel araştırma yöntemlerini birleştiren karma yöntem araştırmasıdır. Araştırmanın örneklemini Türkiye, İzlanda, Avusturya, Çek Cumhuriyeti ve İspanya'daki liselerde görev yapan 10 öğretmen (her ülkeden ikişer) ve kolayca ulaşabilmek için amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılarak belirlenen bu öğretmenlerin okullarında öğrenim gören 155 öğrencidir. 10 öğretmen ile yapılan görüşmelerde yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. 155 öğrenciye uygulanan veri toplama aracı "Devamsızlık Nedenleri Ölçeği" dir. Nitel verilerin analizinde betimsel analiz tekniği kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın yapılan analizinde nedenler arasında farklılık olduğu görülmüştür. Öğrencilerin devamsızlık nedenleri arasında yaşadıkları ülkeye göre anlamlı farklılık bulunmuştur. Öğretmenlere göre öğrenci devamsızlığı okul, öğrenci, psikoloji ve velilerden kaynaklanmaktadır. Öğrencilerin devamsızlığını ve okulu erken terkini en aza indirmede verilen öneriler görüşme formuna dahil edilmiş ve çalışmanın analiz bölümünde değerlendirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Erken okul terki; öğretmen ve öğrenci görüşleri; devamsızlık

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rapid developments in the field of information and technology have greatly changed the life of society. The importance of school as an organized system is unquestionably increasing for the individual to adapt to this changing social life, and schools are multidimensional institutions that are directly related to the progress and development of the country. According to Durkeim (1993), a school is an institution that has everything necessary to keep a child's sense of solidarity awake. According to Parsons (1993), the main actors in schools are students and teachers; therefore, education - teaching includes the interaction process between teacher-student and student-student (Tezcan, 1993).

School attendance is an especially important process to be successful in our Turkish education system, to obtain a school diploma, and to reduce the dangers that may come from outside of school. Therefore, in our education system, students are expected to attend school regularly and this is also supported by education laws. The causes of absenteeism should be investigated, and necessary measures should be taken for the development of students and the quality of education (Ministry of National Education, 2011) since it will cause early school leaving in the long term.

According to Bir Bakışta Eğitim 2014-2015 report, while the school attendance rate of 90 percent of children in Turkey is nine years, this rate is 13 in the OECD member countries. In addition, 90 percent of children who continue their education in Turkey are 6 at least, and 14 most. However, the 15-19-year-old age range of students continuing education in OECD countries is 84 percent and this rate is 69 percent in Turkey. According to this rate, Turkey is the third country in the world with the lowest continuity of education after Mexico and Israel (Türk Eğitim Derneği, 2015).

The prerequisite for students to benefit from educational opportunities is to ensure their attendance at school, and the biggest obstacle to educational activities is the absence of students. Our attitude consists of our own behaviour, feelings, and thoughts towards an object, and we are closer and

more inclined towards what we approach in a positive attitude (Ekici, 2012). According to Özbaş (2010), a positive attitude towards the school should be created and everything necessary should be done to ensure that students attend school (Şanlı, Altun & Tan, 2015).

There are many different reasons for absenteeism such as the reasons arising from the family, the student himself, the geographical conditions of the region where the school is located, and the educational environment. In the literature, some of the factors that cause school absenteeism are listed as follows: Students' lack of interest to school, gender discrimination in education, obligation to work due to economic problems, illnesses, lack of parents support, expensive school costs, negative situations caused by school administration and teachers (Başaran, 1996, p. 105); factors caused by school, economic factors, student factors and familial factors (Baker, M. L., Sigmon, J. N. & Nugent, M. E. (2001, p.2); maltreatment at school, discord in the family, broken families and low educational level (Pehlivan, 2006, p. 98).

Gömleksiz and Özdaş (2013) determined in their study that parents' negative attitude towards education, not paying attention to education, negative physical conditions of the school/classroom, unfavourable climate conditions, and low-income levels of families may lead to school absenteeism. Hoşgörür and Polat (2015) found that the main reasons for absenteeism are family reasons, followed by personal, health and friendship reasons, respectively. Yüner and Özdemir (2017) asserted in their study that students perceive the school as a pressure place at a medium-level, protection-development place and home, and their tendency to drop out of school is low. Between the pressure place dimension of metaphorical school perception and negative attitudes towards school, there was a moderate positive correlation; between all dimensions of school dropout tendency and the dimensions of protection-development place and home, there was found significant negative relationships. In addition, it has been determined that the metaphorical school perception is a significant predictor of the dropout tendency. Balantekin and Kartal (2019) stated that the first among the suggestions of the participants to ensure the attendance of students to the school was the implementation of criminal sanctions, followed by the implementation of a guiding program for absenteeism, accessibility of student addresses, and education for families; a program or project to be prepared to prevent students from falling into a permanent absence should include the themes of school approach, school environment (Suhid, Aroff, & Kamal, 2012), family (Shahzada, Ghazi, Nawaz, & Khan, 2011) and students themselves (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

### **1.1. Problem Statement and Importance of the Study**

In today's world, where teachers' goal is to have students gain 21st century skills, it is still a big problem that we face unwillingly coming to schools, absenteeism or completely quitting them. This fact becomes even more apparent in studies that explore how students can define school or what school means to them. Since it is known that commitment to school will bring along permanent and effective learning, it is among the aims of all stakeholders to maximize the students' desire to go to school and accordingly to reduce absenteeism and minimize school dropout. In the studies on the reasons of the

absenteeism problem of the students in Turkey which leads them to the early school leaving eventually, while the reasons from the perspective of students, teachers, managers, and stakeholders are examined, comparing the situation in Turkey and the European or perspectives of other students and teachers from different nations and cultures has not been studied yet. Therefore, in this study, the answers to the question of what the teachers' and students' opinions about the reason of secondary education students' absenteeism in Europe and Turkey are have been sought. Following sub-questions guided throughout the study:

- o What are the causes of student absenteeism according to teachers in Europe and Turkey?
- o What are the teachers' suggestions to reduce student absenteeism and early school leaving?
- o Do the students' reasons for absenteeism show a significant difference in terms of gender?
- o Do the students' reasons for absenteeism show a significant difference in terms of country variable?
- o Do the students' reasons for absenteeism show a significant difference in terms of defining themselves as academic?

## **2.METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Model of the Research**

In this study, convergent pattern of mixed methods research that combines quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. According to this method, both quantitative and qualitative dimensions will be considered to present complete and accurate data. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018: 326) In the mixed method, qualitative and quantitative studies and the data obtained from the study should be combined (Creswell, 2013). In the study, tools measuring quantitative and qualitative data were applied to teachers and students simultaneously. Data analysis was done separately.

### **2.2. Population and Sampling**

The study sample is 10 teachers (two from each country) working in high schools in Turkey, Iceland, Austria, Czech Republic and Spain, and 155 students studying in those schools. The sample group was determined by using purposive sampling technique.

### **2.3. Data Collection Tools**

The sources of information of this study consisted of written sources about the reasons for absenteeism and the opinions of curriculum development experts, teachers, and students. In this study, a scale on the reasons for students' absenteeism and a semi-structured interview form were used to determine teachers' opinions about absenteeism in depth.

In the quantitative step of the study, "The Scale of Absenteeism Causes", which is a five-point Likert-type rated as 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'agree', 'strongly agree', 34 items and 4 sub-dimensions, developed by Ocak and Baysal (2017) was used. Sub-dimensions are "Causes of absenteeism due to school ( $\alpha = .92$ )"; "Causes of absenteeism due to students themselves ( $\alpha = .89$ )"; "Causes of absenteeism due to parental issues ( $\alpha = .88$ )"; "Causes of absenteeism due to students' psychology ( $\alpha = .79$ )". The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach Alpha) value of the whole scale

is  $\alpha = 0.936$ . Frequencies, percentages, mean, t-test and one-way ANOVA tests were used to evaluate the data in the scale.

Teachers' opinions about the reasons for absenteeism were questioned in the semi-structured individual interview form. In the semi-structured interviews due to its nature, what the interviewee wanted to state about the subject was listened to and considered, and they were also used in the analysis process. The answers given to the questions in the interview form were analysed by descriptive analysis method. Two open-ended questions were asked in the interview form. Following questions guided throughout the study:

- o What are your thoughts on the reasons for absenteeism or early school leaving?
- o What are your suggestions to solve this problem?

The duration of the interview was determined as 40 minutes considering the scope and nature of the questions. Instead of the names of the teachers in the study, some expressions have been used. For two secondary education teachers participated in the survey from Turkey TT1, TT2; for Icelandic teachers IT1, IT2; for Austrian teachers AT1, AT2; for Czech teachers CT1, CT2; for Spanish teachers ST1, ST2 expressions were used.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis

The data collection tool was applied to 155 students studying secondary education in Turkey, Iceland, Austria, Czech Republic, and Spain. While analysing it, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used. Semi-structured interview form was used in the interviews with 10 teachers working in secondary education. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researcher using a separate interview form in each interview. Descriptive analysis technique was used in the analysis of the data. In addition, the findings revealed the ways in which the problems experienced could be solved, and the positive and negative aspects of alternative practices.

### 3.FINDINGS

#### Sub question 1: What are the causes of student absenteeism according to teachers in Europe and Turkey?

The answers given by the teachers participating in the study were coded and categorized according to the sub-dimensions of the scale applied to the students and shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Teachers' Opinions on Student Absenteeism

Opinions	Teachers	<i>f</i>
Due to school	IT2, AT1, AT2, CT2, ST2	5
Due to students themselves	TT2, CT2, ST1, ST2,	4
Due to parental issues	CT2, ST2	2
Due to students' psychology	TT1, IT1, CT1, CT2, ST2	5

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that student absenteeism originate from school, student, psychology, and parents. The number of teachers who attribute the reason for absenteeism to school is 5. Examples of teachers' sentences are below;

IT2. "It is necessary to determine the interests of the student and involve them in schools' activities. A student who is busy with a thing at school he enjoys will not continue to be absent and will not be able to leave school."

AT1. "Students want to do something different and that's why they think that school is not enough for this different thing."

AT2. "Students want variety in the school. It is also important that students feel comfortable at school. When these are missing, absence is inevitable."

CT2. "In addition to the distance of the school world from real life and inability to respond to student needs reasons, the lack of awareness of the reality of education in their own countries or short-term interests of politicians are reasons for absenteeism and early school leaving."

ST2. "School doesn't sound interesting for students."

The number of teachers who attribute the reason for absenteeism to students themselves is 4. Examples of teachers' sentences are below;

TT2. "Environmental factors bind the student to the school. Students who have favourite friends and favourite teachers attend school regularly. They actively and willingly take part in all kinds of activities."

CT2. "Low motivation, low interest in the course, and lack of adaptation to the education system are among the reasons for absenteeism and early school dropout."

ST1. "Mainly because of lack of motivation. They also want to work and earn money as soon as possible."

ST2. "Students aren't interested in lessons."

The number of teachers who attribute the reason for absenteeism to parental issues is 5. Examples of teachers' sentences are below;

TT1. "The most important part of education is family. There is a meaningful connection between the family's perspective on education and the student's interest in school. I noticed that if the family is educated or cares about education, the student goes to school regularly. In this context, the biggest reason for absenteeism stems from the family."

IT1. "Families are the main reason for leaving school at an early age. Especially families' negative attitude towards the education prevents them from going to school. The student who thinks that my family does not support me in any way ends his school life at an early age."

CT1. "I think the main reasons stem from home. Parents of children who are addicted to drugs or alcohol or who are poor and have broken families are unable to provide their children financially and moral support because they must work harder. As a result, children choose to work instead of continuing to school due to lack of resources and motivation."

CT2. “Problems stem from families who are not aware of what actually their kids need, which is education.”

ST2. “Without motivation and family support, it is inevitable.”

The number of teachers who attribute the reason for absenteeism to students' psychology is 2. Examples of teachers' sentences are below;

CT2. “Poor school experience, low motivation, low interest in the lesson and their developmental stages.”

ST2. “When there is no internal motivation, this can be possible.”

**Sub question 2: What are the teachers' suggestions to reduce student absenteeism and early school leaving?**

The answers given by the teachers participating in the research are shown in coded Table 2.

**Table 2.** Teachers’ Suggestions to Reduce Students Absenteeism

Opinions	TT	IT	AT	CT	ST
Increasing communication with the family and training them on this issue	1	1	2	1	1
Changing education policy	2	1	1	1	2
Deepening the work of guidance counselling services	1	1	2	2	1
Reduction of class sizes	1	1	2		
Increasing the use of innovative techniques	1	1	1	1	2
Increasing the quality of preschool education	1	1	1		
Providing additional support to disadvantaged areas	1	1	2	1	1

When Table 2 is examined, “Changing the education policy and deepening the studies of guidance counselling services come first among the suggestions offered by teachers to reduce students' absenteeism and early school leaving. In this regard, a teacher from Spain expressed his suggestion as “It is necessary to strengthen the connection between the education and training and the employment sector, and to structure educational practices by experts.” (ST1). In addition, it is highly stated that they should increase communication with the family and train them, provide additional support to disadvantaged areas and increase the use of innovative techniques. In this regard, while a teacher from Turkey expressed his suggestion as “For many students coming from disadvantaged regions or socio-economically disadvantaged families, there must be provided additional support to schools” (TT1), a

teacher from Austria said, “Involvement of parents in education should be increased and cooperation between the school should be strengthened.” (AT2)

**Sub problem 3: Do the students' reasons for absenteeism show a significant difference in terms of gender?**

To determine this, the means of the groups were calculated first, and a t-test was conducted in independent groups to determine whether the difference between the means was significant. The data are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** T Test Results in Terms of Gender Variable

	Group	n	Mean	Median	df	p
General Mean	Female	50	2.00	2.00	153	0.021
	Male	105	2.18	2.18	153	0.021

When Table 3 is analysed, there is a difference between the reasons for absenteeism of male and female students. This difference is in male students' favour, but it can be said that gender does not have a significant effect on absenteeism. ( $p < 0.05$ )

**Sub question 4: Do the students' reasons for absenteeism show a significant difference in terms of country variable?**

One-way analysis of variance was used to find out whether the scores of the causes of absenteeism scale applied to the students in the study group showed a significant difference in terms of the country variable and to determine whether the difference between the means of the groups was statistically significant.

**Table 4.** One-Way Variance Analysis Results in Terms of The Country Variable

	Country	N	Mean	F	p
General Mean	Turkey	32	2.23	6.86	< .001
	Czech	31	2.37	6.86	< .001
	Austria	32	1.95	6.86	< .001
	Iceland	30	1.89	6.86	< .001
	Spain	30	2.09	6.86	< .001

According to Table 4, a significant difference was found between the reasons of absenteeism in terms of the country where the students study. ( $F = 6.86$ ;  $p < 0.05$ )

**Table 5.** Tukey Post-Hoc Test – General Mean

		Turkey	Czech	Austria	Iceland	Spain
Turkey	Mean	—	-	0.193	0.2387	0.0945
	difference	—	0.145	0.219	0.081	0.846
	p-value	—	0.516	0.219	0.081	0.846



Czech	Mean difference	—	0.338	0.3836	0.2395
	p-value	—	0.003	< .001	0.083
Austria	Mean difference	—	—	0.0456	- 0.0985
	p-value	—	—	0.988	0.826
Iceland	Mean difference	—	—	—	- 0.1441
	p-value	—	—	—	0.546
Spain	Mean difference	—	—	—	—
	p-value	—	—	—	—

Post-hoc Tukey test was conducted to find out in which countries this difference is and according to these results it was seen that the difference was between Czechia and Austria, and Czechia and Iceland.

**Sub-problem 5: Do the students' reasons for absenteeism show a significant difference in terms of defining themselves as academic?**

One-way variance analysis was used to find out whether the scores of the causes of absenteeism scale applied to the students in the study group showed a significant difference in terms of the defining themselves as academic and to determine whether the difference between the means of the groups was statistically significant.

**Table 6.** One-Way Variance Analysis Results in Terms of The Academic Self-Definition

	Self-definition	N	Mean	F	p
General Mean	Poor	2	2.12	0.473	0.652
	Average	56	2.08	0.473	0.652
	High	97	2.15	0.473	0.652

According to Table 6, no significant difference was found between the reasons of absenteeism in terms of the academic self-definition variable of the students in the study group. ( $F = 0.473$ ;  $p > 0.05$ )

Considering the averages of each item of the causes of absenteeism scale applied to the students in the study group, the items that emerged as the reason for absenteeism in terms of students are shown in the tables.

**Table 6.1.** Reason for Absenteeism in Terms of Students 1.

	m1	m2	m3	m4	m5	m6	m7	m8	m9	m10	m11	m12
N	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155
Mean	2.58	2.01	2.20	2.06	2.13	2.57	2.32	2.58	2.28	2.70	1.83	1.99

According to Table 6.1, it is seen that students agree on the items “I do not attend when the lessons are boring, the teachers have authoritarian behaviours, the lessons are not made fun enough by the teachers, and the teachers do not support us enough.” (m1, m6, m8, m10 > 2.51)

**Table 6.2.** Reason for Absenteeism in Terms of Students 2.

	m13	m14	m15	m16	m17	m18	m19	m20	m21	m22	m23	m24
N	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155
Mean	1.68	1.68	2.67	1.70	1.70	1.72	1.93	1.77	1.73	2.00	1.68	1.71

According to Table 6.2, it is seen that students agree with the item “I am absent because I need to take care of my sibling”. (m15 > 2.51)

**Table 6.3.** Reason for Absenteeism in Terms of Students 3.

	m25	m26	m27	m28	m29	m30	m31	m32	m33	m34
N	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155	155
Mean	2.01	1.53	2.06	2.13	2.66	2.32	2.61	2.28	2.70	2.70

According to Table 6.3, it is seen that students agree with the item “I am absent in the last and first weeks of school, when I’m late for school, when I’m sick, and when I feel not well mentally. (m29, m31, m33, m34 > 2.51)

#### 4.DISCUSSION

Education consists of three pillars: parents, school, and student. (Morris, 1999). It is the duty of the family, school, and system to ensure that students continue their education life effectively and actively. Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) argue that teachers' poor teaching strategies, boring learning environment and poor student-teacher relationship lead to absenteeism. According to students' opinions, the study findings show that students' absenteeism reasons are arising from the school itself. Also, compared to both students' and teachers' opinions, the reasons are mostly based on the school and the students themselves.

Although there is a compulsory education up to a certain age all over the world, various cases of absenteeism occur. Most families send their children to school so that they can have a profession and see it unnecessary for students who fail in basic classes to attend school. When students who may be talented in different areas of intelligence fail in basic courses, other areas are ignored, and their education life is terminated by their parents who directed them to a working life. However, school is the main centre of individual and cultural and social development. The awareness of the necessity of education should be instilled in parents and a basic awareness should be created about its necessity. In the literature on this issue, Shahzada, Ghazi, Nawaz, and Khan (2011) state that a significant number of male students do not attend school due to family pressure. In the findings of this study, absenteeism due to familial reasons emerges as family pressure for taking care of his sibling, not to pressure just for

the male ones. Besides, according to this study, it can be said that gender does not have a significant effect on absenteeism, but between the reasons of absenteeism in terms of the country where the students study, there was a significant difference. According to Post-hoc Tukey test, it was seen that this difference was between Czechia and Austria, and Czechia and Iceland.

Suhid, Aroff and Kamal (2012) state that students' absenteeism is related to strict school management, crowded classes, and strict school rules. In the findings of this study, it is seen that student absenteeism originate from school, student, psychology, and parents. The teachers who attribute the reason for absenteeism to school agree on the items that "I do not attend when the lessons are boring, when the school does not have the necessary facilities, when our teachers do not support us enough and the school administration behaves dissatisfied". Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) found that most of the students were absent from school due to illness. According to the findings of this study, students stated that they are absent from school when they are ill or don't feel well mentally, too.

Considering the suggestions offered by the teachers, it is seen that they agree on increasing the communication and studies with the guidance service and regulating the education policy of the countries. In this context, Yorgun (2014) emphasized that a software such as the Early Warning System, which was developed for the predetermination of early school leaving in the USA, could be disseminated. Also, Yorgun (2014) stated that regarding of the guidance service, school counsellors are likely to encounter students at risk of dropout, in this case, equipping students about what kind of interventions can be effective with the students at risk of dropout can contribute to minimize this risk.

Planning preventive or intervention activities in regions where winter months are difficult as climatic conditions may eliminate possible transportation problems that may be experienced. In addition, preventive studies about students who are absent at schools will contribute to the solution of the problem. First, it should be understood that education is not only to acquire a profession but also to train the mind is an important skill.

Apart from these, it is also seen in the study findings that placing different courses for our students who have individual differences in the curriculum or creating learning and teaching environments that can develop different types of skills and attract their attention can reduce the problem of absenteeism by eliminating the negative attitudes they create towards the school.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

According to the above results, students attribute their reasons for absenteeism to the school and to the psychological conditions they are in. While these absences do not differ by gender, including family-related reasons, there are differences between countries. When the suggestions offered by the teachers are considered, it is seen that the emphasis is on the use of guidance services and technology. It is stated that in the resolution of absenteeism, which is the general problem of the education community, first, the broad definition of education should be taken as a basis, and then, with suggestions

based on the causes of absenteeism, regionally and personal differences, steps should be taken to reduce the negative attitudes towards the school and to reduce absenteeism.

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