



## **Examination of Primary School Courses in terms of Different Variables in the Pandemic<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** It has been suggested by the education stakeholders to make different applications about the number of courses, their duration and their content in order to provide quality education without risking the health status during the Covid-19 epidemic process. The aim of this study is to examine the opinions of teachers about the change of courses in primary schools in terms of different variables during the pandemic process.

**Method:** The study was designed according to the qualitative research approach, and the data obtained were interpreted with descriptive and content analysis. 23 classroom teachers participated in the research conducted in September 2021. The sample was determined according to the easily accessible situation sampling.

**Findings:** In the research, it was stated that the number of courses should be reduced and the course types should be divided into themes and handled according to the region's characteristics and classroom conditions. In addition to academic, artistic, and psychomotor courses, it was stated that there should be social and psychological course practices.

**Implications for Research and Practice:** Within the scope of the research, 5 courses in primary schools, reduction of course durations to 30 minutes, academic, artistic, psychomotor, social and so on. specified in the themes. In the research, it has been suggested to combine the contents of the courses that are close to each other by emphasizing the reduction of the number of courses and their duration.

**Keywords:** Primary school, class hours, pandemic process

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## **Introduction**

Education can be defined as the process in which students, teachers, administrators, parents and other stakeholders work together and help children in learning age gain desired goals. The learning process includes teachers, students, physical space, materials, etc. Although it depends on many factors, one of the most important elements of learning and teaching processes is course hours (Kilic, 2018).

The courses to be taught in primary schools and their duration are determined in the course schedule of the General Directorate of Primary Education (GDPE, 2020). There are courses and course hour regulations specific to each grade level from primary school to the fourth grade. When the strategic plan of the Ministry of National Education covering the targets for the years 2015-2019 (MoNE, 2015) is considered, it will be seen that weekly course schedules are arranged in order to increase the quality of education. In addition, the determined course hours are important to increase the competencies of the students that are suitable for their development. The high number of courses or the heavy and abstract content in the basic education institutions, which constitute the first steps of the learning process, negatively affect the development of students. The courses have been selected to improve the existing abilities and capacities of the students and their contents have been created according to the learning levels of the students.

Many studies have been conducted in the field regarding the number and characteristics of the courses that are/will be taken at schools (Akinoglu, 2005; Ari, 2005; Arslan, 2000; Baines, 2007; Budak, 2010; Ministry of Development, 2014; Silva, 2007). In these studies, the changes in the courses from the past to the present and the development of these changes on the students were examined. When the course hours of different countries, the opinions of local and foreign experts about the curriculum, and the effects of the changes in the course contents and durations in our country are examined carefully, it is aimed to support the multi-faceted development of the students by taking into account the development and learning psychology of the students, to make progress from the current level, to provide equality of opportunity to each student. When foreign language teaching programs in different countries are examined, it is seen that centralized teaching programs are prepared in Turkey and implemented throughout the country, while in EU countries (Germany, Austria, Finland, Netherlands, Poland) a framework program has been prepared, giving each institution the flexibility to organize their own programs in terms of schools (Sahin and Aykac, 2019). For example, according to the TEDMEM report (2016), the total course time taken in the first 8 years of compulsory education in EU countries varies between 4440 hours in Croatia and 8480 hours in Denmark. In terms of the total of eight years of study, Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy rank at the top, while Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia rank at the bottom. Turkey is below the OECD average. It can be said that the education hours of the countries are related to the education practices. In this respect, it is difficult to take a certain number of course hours as a reference. There are countries that teach for long hours, or teach for short hours and practice, or do purely hands-on lessons. Course hours and contents should be determined according to the educational needs of the countries. The educational activities carried out are based on the multi-faceted development of students. Courses in general; It is prepared for students to gain universal values and gain deep knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes in the desired direction. When the content and application hours of the courses offered by the countries are examined, it is seen that the most time is given to language teaching. It can be said that the number of lessons is important for the language development of young students. According to Ozdemir, Yalin, and Sezgin (2008), students' language development should be handled primarily in student-centered content and sufficient course time should be used.

The number of courses determined by the countries is handled from different perspectives (duration, material, cost, number of training, number of students, health conditions, building need, etc.) in extraordinary situations and necessary arrangements are made. Floods, earthquakes, etc. experienced in the countries of the world at different times. extraordinary disasters forced countries to take different educational measures. The COVID-19 pandemic, which affects the whole world like our country, has brought to light different changes in our educational arrangements and practices. During the COVID-19 epidemic, it has been suggested by the education stakeholders to make different

applications about the number of courses, their duration and their content in order to provide quality education without risking the health status. Considering the developmental status of the students in primary schools, the total time they will spend in front of the screen in distance education and the perception time of the students; In face-to-face trainings, the use of masks within the scope of pandemic measures, maintaining social distance, washing hands frequently, etc. practices necessitated the re-examination of the courses in terms of different variables. The aim of this study is to examine the views of teachers about the change of courses in primary school in terms of different variables during the pandemic process. For this purpose, answers to the following questions were sought within the scope of the research:

1. What are your views on the number of courses required in primary schools?
2. What are your views on the types of courses that should be in primary schools?
3. What are your views on the required course periods in primary schools?
4. What are your views on the course content that should be in primary schools?

### **Method**

The study was designed according to the qualitative research approach, and the data obtained were interpreted with descriptive and content analysis. According to Yildirim and Simsek (2014), qualitative research can be preferred in order to see the existing problems in their own environment objectively and to investigate the problem in depth. 23 classroom teachers participated in the research conducted in September 2021. The sample was determined according to the easily accessible situation sampling. An online structured form was prepared by the researchers, and the classroom teachers were asked their opinions on the arrangements they wanted to make about the number, duration, types, and contents of the courses.

### **Study Group**

Information on the characteristics of the participants based on the research data is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Working Group*

<b>Participants/ Variables</b>	<b>f</b>	
Gender	Female	14
	Male	9
Professional Experience	6-10 years	2
	11-15 years	2
	16-20 years	1
	21 years and over	18
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade		7
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade		6
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade		8
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade		2

According to the table data, 23 teachers, 14 women and nine men, participated in the study. Two of the teachers have 6-10 years, 2 of them have 11-15 years, 1 of them have 16-20 years and 18 of them have 21 years or more professional experience. Teachers with 1-5 years of experience did not participate in this study, where volunteering was essential to participate in the study. Seven of the classroom teachers participating in the research teach the 1st grade, six of them teach the 2nd grade, eight of them teach the 3rd grade and two of them teach the 4th grade.

### **Research Process**

A literature review was conducted for the purpose of the research, and similar studies were examined. After the topic was designed, the interview questions were determined and a draft interview form was

created. Four field experts were interviewed to evaluate the items in terms of purpose, meaning, and scope. Thus, the content validity of the research questions was ensured with the approval of the experts. Asking people who have general knowledge about the research subject and who are experts in qualitative research methods to analyze the research with various dimensions is one of the measures that can be taken in terms of credibility (internal validity) (Yildirim & Simsek, 2014). The interview form, which was submitted to the field experts for the validity study, was reformatted by making the necessary corrections in line with the suggestions made, taking into account that the questions were clear and understandable. The pilot application of the draft interview form was made with 9 teachers. At the end of the pilot application, it was decided to correct some expressions in the questions. The data obtained from the pilot interviews were not included in the analyzed research data. In order to increase the external validity (transferability), the data obtained are described in detail.

Research application permission was obtained from the Provincial Directorate of National Education for the implementation of the research in official institutions. Data collection was carried out through interviews, which is one of the qualitative data collection tools. In the research, interviews were held with 23 classroom teachers for 35-50 minutes. At the end of the interviews, participant confirmation was made in order to increase internal validity, the collected data was summarized and the participant was asked to state their thoughts on their accuracy. Throughout the research, the constitution/laws and regulations were complied with, no one was forced to participate in the research, and the personal information collected during the study was protected. The data obtained were interpreted with descriptive and content analysis. The data obtained within the scope of the research were transferred to the online process. Two researchers determined separate themes and codes for the views of the participants, and at the end of the interviews, the themes and codes for which the environment was determined were tabulated. In the structured interview, descriptive analysis was used in the coding of demographic data and data determined by the literature in the field. Content analysis was used in the analysis of open-ended questions asked within the scope of the research purpose. In this context, the stages of compiling the data within the scope of the same question, naming the data, developing the categories, ensuring validity and reliability, calculating and interpreting the frequencies were followed. In the naming and category development phase of the content analysis; The opinions of the participants, the case studies they told, the determinations they made were examined and grouped under categories such as course duration, number, types and content. In order to ensure validity and reliability, it was given importance to make decisions based on the consensus of the researchers in the coding of the data. The frequencies of the analyzed views were calculated based on the determined categories, and the data were tried to be interpreted based on this information.

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, many points were taken into consideration within the scope of the research. Enough (as much as the participant wanted) time was given to the participants to answer the questions. In order to prevent prejudices and misunderstanding regarding the data obtained, confirmation of the views of the participants was obtained. Different expert opinions were used both in forming the research questions and in the analysis phase. In the study, the compatibility of the results was checked by using two or more data collection methods. In this context, interviews and literature studies were used effectively. The findings were strengthened by adding the direct opinions of the participants to the research. The application steps of the study are explained and the process of the research is presented clearly. In order to increase the applicability of the research, how the sample selection was made, the characteristics of the participants and the environment were clearly stated.

## **Findings**

The data obtained as a result of the research are summarized in the relevant tables according to the sub-problem of the research.

### **Findings of Teachers' Opinions on the Number of Courses Required in Primary Schools**

According to the data obtained, Teachers' Opinions on the Number of Courses Required in Primary Schools are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Teachers' Views on the Number of Courses Required in Primary Schools*

Course Number	f
6 Courses	2
5 Courses	11
4 Courses	3
4 Courses and 2 face-to-face free activities	3
4 Courses and online courses two days a week	4

According to the table data, two of the teachers suggested 6 courses in primary schools (continuation of the current system), 11 of them five courses, three of them four courses three of them four courses in schools together with two courses of face-to-face free activities and four courses. They stated that online courses are held two days a week with four courses. The opinions of the some teachers regarding this finding are as follows:

T5: *“The number of courses in primary school should be determined according to the needs of the students. It should be noted that students are not supported at home. These kids are playboys. ... That's why four hours of courses should be given. Of course, this will not be enough. ... It may change according to the demands of the school and the family, but the students should do activities together for two hours.”*

T16: *“Whether it's a pandemic or a natural disaster. Nothing changes. Normal practice should be continued.”*

### **Findings of Teachers' Views on the Types of Courses that Should Be Taken in Primary Schools**

According to the data obtained, The Views of Teachers on the Types of Courses that Should be Given in Primary Schools are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Teachers' Views on the Types of Course That Should be in Primary Schools*

Course Types	f
Academic (Turkish, Mathematics)	15
Artistic (Visual arts, Music)	13
Psychomotor (Physical Education, Calligraphy)	11
Psychological (Self-awareness, anxiety management, Psychological resilience)	6
Social (Communicating, friendship, neighborhood)	5
Cultural (Our architectural and artistic works, songs, folk songs, stories, food and drinks, traditional clothes, folk dances, literary works and beliefs)	4
Technological Conscious Internet Usage (Cyber Security, technology addiction, social media literacy etc.)	3
Special Education (for those in need)	2

According to the table three data, 15 of the teachers recommend academic, 13 artistic, 11 psychomotor, six psychological, five social and four cultural courses. While three of the teachers suggested that there should be courses for technologically conscious internet use, two of them stated that there should be special education courses. The opinions of the some teachers regarding this finding are as follows:

T4: *“Whatever happens, I don't want a student who grows up deprived of art classes. For this reason, the student should be involved in an art-related activity.”*

T11: *“Since students' fine motor skills develop during this period, there should be a course for psychomotor skills. For example, it can be artistic writing work.”*

## Findings of Teachers' Opinions on the Course Lengths Required in Primary Schools

According to the data obtained, Teachers' Opinions on the Required Course Duration in Primary Schools are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Teachers' Views on the Required Course Durations in Primary Schools*

Courses Durations	f
40 minutes	1
35 minutes	2
35 minutes	17
25 minutes	3

In Table 4, the opinions of the classroom teachers regarding the required course durations in primary schools are given. One of the teachers suggested that the duration of the courses be 40 minutes, two of them 35 minutes, 17 of them 30 minutes and three of them 25 minutes. The opinions of the some teachers regarding this finding are as follows:

T8: *“Now times have really changed. Students want to get self-knowledge in a short time. I think we should do lessons without boring children. Therefore, the duration of the lessons should be reduced. ...”*

T15: *“On the one hand, the disease, on the other hand, technology addiction. Indeed, we are tired, and so are the children. The course times should definitely be reduced.”*

## Findings of Teachers' Opinions on Course Contents in Primary Schools

According to the data obtained, Teachers' Opinions on the Contents of the Courses That Should Be Taken in Primary Schools are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Teachers' Opinions on the Course Arrangements Requested in Primary Schools*

Course Contents	f
Combining the contents of Traffic Safety and Life Science courses	4
Combining the contents of Turkish and Life Studies courses	3
Combining the contents of Human Rights and Citizenship and Life Studies courses	3
Combining the contents of art courses with interdisciplinary understanding	2

According to Table 5 data, teachers; four of them suggested combining the contents of Traffic Safety and Life Sciences courses, three of them suggesting combining the contents of Turkish and Social Studies courses, three of them suggesting to combine the contents of Human Rights and Citizenship and Life Studies courses, and two of them suggesting that the contents of Art courses be combined with an interdisciplinary understanding. According to Öztürk and Kalafatçı (2016), while the number of Life Studies courses should be increased, in this research, the idea was expressed to combine the number of Life Studies courses with other courses. The opinions of the some teachers regarding this finding are as follows:

T9: *“The achievements of the Life Science course and the Traffic Safety course are very related to each other. The achievements of a theme in the Life Studies program are directly related to the achievements in the Traffic Safety course. For this reason, I do not think it makes sense to increase the number of courses.”*

T14: *“The increase in the number of lessons in primary school brings along different occupations such as students carrying extra books and teachers preparing extra materials. For example, we can give the achievements of the Life Studies course in the Turkish course. We can choose the texts we use in the Turkish lesson according to the achievements in the Life Studies lesson. So why do we need a new lesson?”*

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

23 classroom teachers participated in the study, which was conducted to examine the views of teachers on the change in primary school courses in terms of different variables during the pandemic process. Research results are given below.

They stated that five courses should be held in primary schools. Although there is a widespread opinion that student success will increase with increasing course hours, studies in the literature (Baines, 2007; Memisoğlu & Ismetoglu, 2013; Silva, 2007) show that the number of courses does not affect student achievement. In this context, it is suggested that the courses hours should be reduced according to the efficiency principle. This finding is consistent with the research data. Within the scope of the research, teachers; It can be said that they express these thoughts by approaching from different perspectives such as the difficulty of applying the hygiene rules in the pandemic, the developmental status of students at the basic education level, the low attention span of students in online and face-to-face courses. The epidemic disease experienced by the countries has brought together the search for effective education in a shorter time in education systems.

They stated that academic, artistic and psychomotor classes should be held in primary schools. When the literature is examined, there are studies that show that there are enough artistic courses (Kizilirmak, 2017; Ozcan, 2007) and that language courses are important (Bozavli, 2013; Edelenbo, Johnstone, & Kubanek, 2006). These data coincide with the research findings. Depending on the research data, the teachers preferred to have courses in different themes instead of more than one course with similar content in basic education. Students need knowledge and skills from many fields such as academic, artistic, physical, psychological, social, cultural and technological for their multidimensional development. It can be said that it is important for the curriculum to develop courses and achievements for the development of these areas by giving importance to each area.

They demanded that the course duration be reduced to 30 minutes in primary schools. As a result of the research conducted by Yilmaz and Arslan (2019), it was determined that the classroom teachers mostly expressed their opinion about reducing the weekly lesson hours in primary schools and that the lesson hours determined for the lessons were not compatible. According to Cayci (2018), the duration of the course should be reduced in order to increase the duration of recess, as it causes the distraction of features such as interest-attention-curiosity. This finding is consistent with the research data. During the pandemic process, teachers have demands to reduce their course times. During the pandemic process, teachers had difficulty in teaching with masks in the classroom. It is clear that staying for a long time in closed spaces such as classrooms is a challenging situation in terms of health conditions. On the other hand, it has been explained by the experts that the attention of the students in the online courses is easily distracted and staying in front of the computer for a long time is not suitable for the health of both students and teachers. For these reasons, it is thought that the teachers offered an opinion on reducing the duration of the course.

In primary schools; they suggested combining the contents of Traffic Safety and Life Science courses, combining the contents of Turkish and Social Studies courses, combining the contents of Human Rights and Citizenship and Life Science courses, and handling the content of art courses with an interdisciplinary approach. According to Ozturk and Kalafatci (2016), while the number of Life Studies courses should be increased, in this research, the idea was expressed to combine the number of Life Studies courses with other courses. Teachers stated that the process of reducing the duration and number of courses should be started by combining the contents of similar courses in the current program. This view is due to the effective use of time in the teaching process, the fact that students do not carry extra textbooks, the decrease in the books distributed by the Ministry of National Education, etc. aspects are of critical importance.

As a result of this study, which was limited by considering the opinions of 23 classroom teachers working in basic education institutions, pandemic conditions and the number of students, it was recommended to review the weekly lesson hours and plan the Free Activity lessons accordingly. For the conditions of the schools and for the versatile development of the students, it is recommended to conduct sufficient courses in the academic, artistic and psychomotor fields.

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