

*Original Research Article*

# Views of Teachers on the Benefits of After-School Programs and Summer Programs in terms of Social Emotional Learning

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Abstract

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**After-School programs play an important role in training and education in terms of student development and social emotional learning. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the views of teachers on the benefits of After-school Programs and Summer Programs in terms of Social Emotional Learning (SEL). The questions to the participant teachers are: “What should the children with inability of social emotional learning be provided out of school?, and “Do the after-school programs, youth centres or youth clubs offer a variety of academic, recreational, cultural, and community activities in terms of SEL? A qualitative research method was used to evaluate and compare the views of teachers on After-school Programs. The research was conducted with the participation of 14 Primary and Secondary School teachers in Erzincan City. The views of the teachers obtained through interviews show that after-school programs, youth centres and youth clubs as well as Summer Programs play a significant role for the students to develop social emotional learning skills. This paper draws attention to the views of teachers in classroom management as a means of increasing both the parents’ and the students’ awareness of social emotional learning.**

**Key Words:** After-School Programs, Collaborative Learning, Social Emotional Learning, Youth Clubs

## INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional development is defined as awareness of the feelings, competencies and incompetencies, the increase of control over emotions through knowing how to behave, thus establishing a balance between the experiences one has in his inner-world and the expectations of the environment, and the ability to adapt to society. In the process of emotional growth, children experience positive and negative emotions in a natural way. It is very important to create a sense of basic trust to prevent negative feelings in children.

In the study we tried to determine the benefits of after-school programs, youth centres and youth clubs and their effects on social emotional development and learning skills of the primary and secondary school students.

## After –School programs

After-School programs play an important role in training and education with the extracurricular activities such as doing homework, study, tutoring, arts, sports, culture, science studies, social responsibility projects, clubs training and school teamworks.

After-School Programs are of great importance in that the students should develop responsibility and awareness of the society and recognize their talents and interests to reach their potentials. Many of the high quality programs have social or character development in their curriculum as well as a community involvement component (Huang and Dietel, 2011).

Learning is not only confined to classrooms and examination rooms, it also continues outside. The programs prepared after school are the trainings by which they can develop themselves in sports, visual arts, performing arts, music and personal development areas, and find opportunities to perform their skills and abilities as individually or in teams.

Social events and courses in clubs throughout the education life enable the students to transform their knowledge into experience, thus supporting their social and cultural development. With these programs, the students can develop critical thinking and leadership skills through self-confidence and teamwork by learning both sharing and solidarity and democratic life.

Within the scope of After-School Programs, primary school students can do their homeworks under the supervision of teachers in centres, and spend quality time at home with their parents. Secondary school students can study for national examinations through preparation courses in After School Clubs and take the services of boutique courses.

The benefits that after-school programs provide for students include giving the young a chance to develop relationships with their peers and adults, to get engaged in activities from which they get experiences, develop some deep skills, knowledge and get opportunities for choice of independence.

### Summer Programs and Summer Camps

Summer Programs and summer camps are designed and implemented under the authority and supervision of the Ministry of National Education (MEB, 2009)

- Summer Programs are prepared in accordance with student-centred, interdisciplinary, and modular planning.
- The Programs and camps are prepared in accordance with individual learning under the guidance of their advisors and leaders.
- The programs and camps are prepared in the quality of developing their creativity, their skills of finding solutions and different approaches to the problems and preparing them for the conditions in their adulthood period.
- The programs that will develop special skills, knowledge and behaviours in interdisciplinary frame are prepared for the students to get academic success.
- The activities and training programs are planned to ensure the students to develop metacognitive thinking skills and social emotional learning skills so that they can do analysis, synthesis and evaluation to observe their relations with live objects.
- The duration of the programs is determined in accordance with individual potential.
- Values education is given at each stage of the training program

### Youth Centres and Clubs

Youth Centres and Youth Clubs are non-profit foundations and do function as a kind of educational and training centres in the fields of arts, sports, entertainment and personal development. The Performing Arts Workshops in these centres and clubs provide children with after-school arts programs. Founded as non-profit organizations, they try to bring arts education to the concerned children in primary and secondary schools. These programs help students that come from low-income families and environments, and need the development of critical thinking, creative thinking and expression, and basic learning skills through the arts. The primary objectives and the duties of Youth Centres and Clubs are

- to organize scientific, cultural, artistic and sporting activities to meet the interests, the needs and expectations of the students in their free time after school;
- to provide the conditions that ensure their physical and mental development, protect them from harmful habits;
- to organize courses, seminars and entrepreneurship programs in relevant to their training and employment;
- to ensure them to adopt the values such as love, respect, tolerance and kindness;
- to ensure the children to acquire consciousness of the sanctity of the family and love and respect to their parents and grandparents;
- To make easy to access information and communication technologies.

The students choose their clubs for their own interest and continue these club activities throughout the year. In cases a sufficient number of requests are available, new clubs are opened. The clubs provide the students with training and courses as shown in Table 1.

### Social and Emotional Learning

The social and emotional ability and efficiency and is an important aspect for an individual to be healthy and happy. The children and the youth with social and emotional inability have the tendency to risky features, which have a negative impact on their future health, such as violence, addiction to smoking, alcohol and drug, AIDS, adolescent pregnancy, irregular sleeping and eating habits, negative conflict solving behaviour (Burke, 2002; Zins and Wagner, 1997). A protective institution is needed to protect the school-age-children from these negative factors. This is Youth Centre or Youth Club providing social and emotional learning skills for children at the age of 12-14 years through after-school training and cultural programs.

This protective against adverse effects as early as 12-14 years of age there is a need to establish a structure. The teachers and the parents can reach their aim by

**Table 1.** Educational and Cultural After-School Activities in Youth Centers and Clubs

<b>Training Courses</b>	Computer, Web Design, Chart, AutoCAD, Photoshop, School lessons, Maths, Physics, History, Geography, Chemistry, Turkish Language, English Language, Ottoman Language, Arabic Language, German Language, French Language
<b>FineArts</b>	Painting, Music, Folk Dance, Theatre, Cartoon, Poetry, Literature, Photography, Cinema
<b>Personal Development Courses</b>	Speed-reading, Body Language, Team work, Effective Communication, Time management, Sign language, Oratory, Career Planning, Values Education, Project Cycle, Leadership, Problem Solving and Decision Making, Diction, Motivation, Stress Management, Anger Management, Drama
<b>HandCrafts</b>	Ebru, Husnu-Hat, Gilding, Origami, Wood Carving, Model plane, Jewelry design, Wood painting, Glass Staining, Dyeing, Filigra, Calligraphy, Tiling
<b>Sports</b>	Taekwondo, Ping pong, Fencing, Badminton, Tennis, Aikido, Basketball, Volleyball, Football, Handball

equipping children with the skills of coping with problems and conflict resolution. This process is concerned with Social Emotional Learning (SEL). The term of SEL emerged from a new understanding of nature of biology, the relation of emotions and intelligence with success and happiness (Stern, 1999)

### Literature Review

In a study by Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP, 2008), it is argued that beyond academics, a lot of after-school programs focus on improving students' social and developmental outcomes, such as self-regulation, self-esteem, self-concept and social skills, and collaboration.

Collaboration among peers promotes social emotional development (Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1990), contributing better attitudes toward learning, better self-concepts, better attitudes toward others, and better racial relationships (Bossert, 1988/1989; Slavin, 1990). Peer-tutoring programs usually suggest social emotional gains: tutees are described as more cooperative and respectful toward peers and teachers, while also exhibiting higher self-esteem (Gensemer, 2000; Roswal et al., 1995).

There is evidence that shows effectiveness of mentoring and motivational programs for disadvantaged teenagers, which largely result from the benefits of promoting motivation and improving non-cognitive skills (Karoly et al., 1998; Blau and Currie, 2005; Heckman, 2000).

In their study, Tierney and Grossman (1995) found that 18 months after being matched with a mentor, Little Brothers and Sisters were less likely to have used drugs or alcohol, to skip class or a day of school, or to lie to their parents; they were more likely to feel competent in their school work and to report a better relationship with parents (Cunha et al., 2005).

Arvaja and Hakkinen (2010), in their article, presented the ideas that are based on the recent research on collaborative learning, demonstrating the dual nature of collaboration, in which cognitive and social processes of learning interact with each other in a dynamic manner. The article first discusses the central concepts and research trends related to the social dimension of collaborative activity. Further, research results on social relationships in collaborative learning are summarized.

Social Dimension in Collaborative Activity the most widely used definition of collaboration describes it as a construction of shared understanding through interaction with others, where the participants are committed to or engaged in shared goals and problem solving (Dillenbourg, 1999; Littleton and Hakkinen, 1999; Roschelle and Teasley, 1995).

In addition to the construction of shared understanding, collaboration is commonly referred to as the co-construction of knowledge (Rafal, 1996; Baker, 2002), building collaborative knowing (Stahl, 2004), co-argumentation (Baker, 2002), negotiating of shared meaning (Pea, 1993), construction of common knowledge (e.g., Elbers and Streefland, 2000; Crook, 2002), exploratory talk (Mercer, 1996), or coordination (Barron, 2000). However, on closer inspection, the core of all these terms seems to refer to interaction of a similar type – one that calls for specific qualities from cognitive, social, and emotional perspectives (Jarvela, 2011).

According to Barron (2000), the extent to which a group works collaboratively depends on the degree of coordination among the group members. In her study, Barron (2000) found three forms of coordination – shared task alignment, mutuality, and jointly focused attention. It is argued in the study that the students have collaborative orientation toward problem solving, and the activity is organized around joint problem-solving efforts.

There are reports about the positive effects of friend-

ship on collaboration (e.g., Hartup, 1996; Azmitia and Montgomery, 1993; MacDonald et al., 2000). Azmitia and Montgomery (1993) found that collaboration between friends leads to more transactive discourse, greater equality in roles, and larger increases in knowledge than collaborations between acquaintances. In their study, friends justified their proposals, elaborated on their partners' proposals more often, and also engaged in transactive conflicts more frequently than acquaintances did. In their study on social emotional development, MacDonald et al. (2000) found out that, in creative tasks, friends engaged in more transactive discussions than nonfriends, and their musical compositions were rated more highly than those of the latter.

Hartup (1996) drew a synthesis on studies comparing friends and nonfriends during collaborative problem-solving tasks. According to these studies, friends tend to engage in more extensive discourse and task-oriented talk, offering suggestions more readily, and are more supportive and critical than nonfriends. Also, he argues that mutuality is clearer and interaction is more positive and equally balanced between friends than between nonfriends. Thus, Hartup (1996) reported that social interaction between friends can facilitate cognitive development.

According to Hirsch et al (2012), most after-school programs have focused on younger, elementary-school age youth. Centers can offer challenging programs and activities that promote learning and developmental growth as well as teach young people how to navigate dangerous situations. The safe environment of a high-quality center can shelter youth from violence, keep them out of trouble, and give them a chance to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that they need as a foundation for adult life.

In the book edited by Gootman (2000), it is demonstrated that most delinquent behavior occurs during the after-school hours, from 2:00 to 8:00 p.m. In addition, police and other authorities report that risky behaviors, such as sexual activity and drug and alcohol use, as well as juvenile crime, increase significantly from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. (Fox and Newman, 1997). Hein explained that after-school programs are emerging in the public consciousness as an intervention to prevent violence and other high-risk behaviors as well as to promote the healthy development of children and adolescents.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

### **Problem Statement and Purpose**

The aim of the research into the views of teacher on the benefits of After-School Programs, Youth Centres and Youth Clubs in terms of Social Emotional Learning Skills of the students. We tried to find answers to the questions

of "What should the children with inability of social emotional learning be provided out of school?", and "Do the after-school programs, youth centres or youth clubs offer a variety of academic, recreational, cultural, and community activities in terms of SEL?"

### **Method and Research Design**

We used a qualitative research method to determine and evaluate primary and secondary teachers' views on the benefits of After-School Programs and Summer Programs in terms of Social Emotional Learning. This kind of methodological approach has been chosen as it enables researchers to interpret and make judgement about immeasurable data (O'Tool and Beckett, 2010). We conducted this research with the participation of a group of Primary and Secondary School teachers in Erzincan City. For this reason we relied on case study design for the purpose of our enquiry.

### **Study Group**

Participants for our study group were fourteen classroom teachers working in various Primary and Secondary Schools in Erzincan City, Turkey. We preferred and used easy accessible sample technique in the research, as it increases the speed of collecting data and enables researchers to access the sample easily (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2006). We obtained the data from 14 teachers who admitted to be involved in the interview for the research. The participants were asked whether they were contented to answer to the questions, and then we applied the tool. The names of the teachers are coded with initial letters of their names. We preferred to admit experienced and veteran teachers who have worked at least ten years as a teacher in schools as they have the ability of realizing the psychological and emotional situations of their students.

### **Data Collection Tool and Analysis**

In the study, we used the tool with semi structured interview form to gather data from primary and secondary school teachers. We asked two open ended questions to the participants. The questions were designed to determine clearly what the views and suggestions of teachers on after-school programs in terms of social emotional learning skills of the students.

We obtained the data with the help of the interview with the participants; the data were then transferred and digitalized into computer in order to form digital data. We used content analysis with the percentage and frequency values.

## FINDINGS

The findings that we obtained from the participant teachers for the questions in the semi-structured interview form are given below.

The two questions were "What should the children with inability of social emotional learning be provided out of school?, and "Do the after-school programs, youth centres or youth clubs offer a variety of academic, recreational, cultural, and community activities in terms of SEL?"

We evaluated the two replies together as they are interrelated to each other. The sample statements similar and unsimilar to one another for the two questions are given as followings.

Mss. P.T. 10-year Primary School teacher: *"...The students who are lack of skills at social emotional learning should take part in the activities offered by Youth Centre, because there they have a great chance to know new students and make friendship.... Last year the students who were bad at some courses such as language and computer attended to the courses of English and computer at youth centre very near to our school, and they academically made a great stride... They are now among the most successful ones in the classroom. Two years ago they were rather shy and asocial among their peers....."*

According to Gootman (2000), children and adolescents spend only a small part of their day in the classroom. He argues that after-school programs have the flexibility to offer tutoring assistance, skills in problem solving, practice test taking, and fun skills-building activities in a range of subjects, including math, reading, and science. All of these opportunities may enrich students' academic knowledge and lead to greater success in school

The emotional state that the students are in and the quality of social environment also have an impact on learning process. In one study SEL was found to affect academic attitudes like motivation and commitment to work, behaviors such as attendance, work habits, collaborative learning, and performances such as notes, test results, and dominance to subject (Zins et al. 2004).

From the remarks of the participant teacher in our study, we can reach the conclusion that tutoring assistance, some practices in supplementary courses and skill building activities all contribute to students' achievement in courses supplied in Youth Clubs. With the collaborative learning in the club, the students develop social emotional learning skill.

Mss B.B. 11- year Primary School teacher: *"....When I realized that one of my male students could not do well at homework, and not get on well with his fellows. I told my student that I wanted to see his parent. I learned that his mother has died and he has lived with a step-mother and two step brothers. My student admitted not being behaved fairly at home and discriminated with his step*

*brothers. He always spends all his time after school chatting and playing games at internet café.... I directed him to Youth Club to take part in motivation courses and some kind of sport in which he is interested.... It is five months since he was engaged in the activities and he is now emotionally and socially one of my best students in the classroom. His classmates also began to go to club for sports and art courses..."*

The factors affecting the structure and development of the youth have changed substantially in recent years. The most important factor in the formation and development of the children's values and judgments is the communication and interaction that they establish with adults, however many families in today's rapidly changing world have shifted away from the concept of "extended family" to "nuclear family" living, and due to the presence of both parents in intense work environment, or parents being divorced, they hardly establish an effective communication with their children. For this reason, not only the family and school environments but also other external powers are of great importance in developing value judgement of the youth.

With the latest technologies, media such as television and social mediagivethe young very different messages from those that their family and school try to give. This can result in negative outcomes for the children in the process of perception, internalization and adaptation. However, Social Emotional Training gradually starting from a young age will prepare them to protect themselves against all these negative factors, and will affect character development in a positive direction. This will take them to success in academic life, intheir private life, sports life, professional life, that is, in all areas of life. That is the reason why after-school programs and youth centres are of great importance in developing social and emotional learning skills.

From the reply of the participant teacher in our survey, we can point out the mission of after-school programs to protect children from the negative aspect of media, and acquire them perception, internalizarion and adaptation that they need to solve their problems quickly through social emotional learning skill.

Mss. A.D.F. 10-year Secondary School teacher: *"...I have been working in a school in low-income part of the city. Most of the students are from poor family, and they can't afford to buy some sports equipment for saloon activities, so they are emotionally broken and can't participate in social activities, either. As the youth centres are non-profit organizations and provide all kind of possibilities and opportunities without money, I directed them to after-school programs organized in Youth Clubs. After a short time my students gained self-confidence through collaboration with the other students and mentor. Their social emotional learning skills have been developed by close relationship between them and their elder friends, who lead them to think analytically,*

*critically and positively....”*

According to The Afterschool Alliance (2012), the children served by afterschool programs are primarily from economically disadvantaged environments and are a high needs population. After-school programs operating after school hours on week days, at weekends, and during the summer season turn out to be integral components of children’s academic, social and cultural development (Grossman et al. 2009). In Turkey, as the after-school programs, youth centres and youth clubs as well as summer programs for youth are funded by the state budget and offer free service to the children, adolescents and teenagers at the ages of between 6 and 18, about 5 million school-age children join to After-school programs, organised to protect their safety, help develop and nurture their talents, improve their academic performance and provide opportunities for them to form bonds with those who are positive role models. Thus the students develop social emotional skills for learning through collaborative environment.

The studies carried out on After-school programs suggest that quality afterschool programs can positively affect a number of significant school success factors. In their study, Durlak et al. (2011) analyzed more than 60 studies of afterschool programs in terms of emotional, social, and academic development components. They found that those programs meet quality criteria, suggesting a positive impact in many significant occasions such as school grades, school attendance, self-perception, reduction in problem behaviors, academic achievement (test scores), positive social behaviour, school bonding, further, assessments by classroom teachers of students participating in 21st Century. Community Learning Centers programs reveal results similar to those of Durlak et al. These teacher assessments have found that participating students demonstrated improvement in the areas such as greater homework completion, better school attendance, better grades, more positive engagement, less misbehaviour, and improved test scores (Learning Point Associates, 2012).

From the statements of the participant teachers in our survey, the students from low income environments are directed by teachers to after-school programs, youth centres and youth clubs during school term and summer season so that they can utilize and get benefits from academic, social and cultural activities.

Mr. F. K. 24-year maths teacher: *“...I give maths courses at 5th and 6th grades. I have four students who were not academically good at maths and socially at relationship with the other peers in the last term. I was hearing them smoke and have some bad habits like bullying to others. I talked to their parents at times but it didn’t work. I asked the mentors of youth centre to be concerned with them and admit them to the activities in the club. After 3 o’clock on weekdays and all day at weekends they are at the club joining language and maths courses three days a*

*week and hand craft workshops at weekends. I have noticed a good improvement in their behaviours and scores at maths exam. Moreover they are more respectful to me in and out of the school. Now I advise all the parents to send to the youth clubs for after-school programs and follow their children’s achievement socially, emotionally and culturally...”*

Millions of children take part in after-school programs every day, as those programs are safe, academically and socially useful for the students at every level. After-school programs are planned and organized to offer homework and other academic support, sports, artistic experiences or other activities contributing to students for developing skills (DeVita, 2009).

According to Community Forum (2008), after-school programs provide children with supervision, and enriching experiences that broaden their perspectives and enhance their socialization. Attendance of after-school programs is associated with positive outcomes for both children and parents. Observed outcomes for children include; Better emotional adjustment; Better behaviour and better grades at school; Better peer relations; Fewer antisocial behaviours; and Enhanced self-esteem

As reported in Community Forum (2008), children left alone during after-school hours have a greater chance of engaging in unsafe and undesirable behaviour. For example: Unsupervised children have been linked with greater rates of delinquency; a significant number of youth crimes are committed during after school hours; the risk of gang involvement and illegal substance use is higher during this period.

Mr. A. C. 15-year science teacher. *“... I have two students at the age of 14. They do not have friends more than one or two and they are also problematic. They cannot get on well with the girls and fight others at every break. Both students have separate parents, one lives with his mum and the other with his grandma. They are emotionally collapsed and socially unhappy, as nobody in the classroom want to make friendship with them. They are very clever and don’t have any problem with their exam scores.... They have begun to be rude to school staff in recent weeks. I am sure that they will be better emotionally and socially if they spend their free time at a youth club or centre after school.... Although I insisted them attending to the activities of youth centre applying after-school programs, they still resist not to do so. I have been trying to persuade them to go clubs for weeks. I will manage to...”*

Friendships are important in helping almost all students develop emotionally, socially and academically. The students with friends at school and afterschool time have better attitudes about learning, more academic success, better self esteem, fewer social problems as adults, and a greater sense of well-being than students without friends.

It is argued in a study of Afterschool Alliance (2015) that friendships and connecting with fellow students

sharing their interests is a key component to young people's everyday lives. Afterschool programs create a connected learning environment for students who build on their interests, introducing them to new passions, providing mentors and a supportive peer network, linking this engagement to academics, career and civic participation.

Afterschool programs are stated to be flexible, to allow students to further explore their interests. In addition, they are social, bringing together students and their friends, as well as peers who share their curiosities; and they are academically enriching, finding new ways for students to participate in relevant, hands-on activities while building academic and workplace skills and knowledge.

Some of the teachers participating in our survey admitted that they couldn't provide a friendship environment for the students who feel alone. They argue that afterschool programs and youth clubs are safe and perfect places for the students who need a new environment and new friends in terms of their well-being at school and at home, so they try to direct their students with poor friendship at school to youth centres and clubs applying afterschool programs.

Children participating in after-school programs and summer programs have been found to change positively in terms of behaviors, attitudes, self-regulation and self-esteem. Summer programs and after-school programs during teaching term impact students' interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and reduce negative behaviors.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Teachers, school staff and families should take many positive steps to impact friendship building between students through recreation activities at schools. If these recreation activities are not available at school environment, the students should be given opportunities to attend to after-school programs at youth centres and youth clubs that provide cooperative activities promoting positive peer interactions as after-school programs have a unique opportunity to assist children who may be struggling to make friends.

The parents and teachers who recognize that friendship for their children and students does not occur of their own accord should ask other families for encouraging friendship. If children at school age can't come together in after-school time to play games, to ride bicycles together, to meet at birthday party, to go to theatre or cinema, the parents should encourage them to take place after-school programs to make up for these activities.

The teachers and parents should try to determine individual needs of students, such as mobility, effective communication and managing inappropriate behaviors.

Parents should discuss and talk with their children about what they have difficulty doing at school, like any

quarrel with their peers, bullying, cyber-bullying or poor at exam scores. The children who have problems with social interactions can resolve them with the help of afterschool programs.

With the quality and favourable programs, youth centre and youth clubs can provide a lot of recreational and inclusive activities for parents who can't supply them for their children at home after-school time. The opportunities available at afterschool programs can help students to develop self-confidence, self-regulation, self-esteem, responsibility, skills of problem solving and decision making, social interactions and social emotional learning skill.

With inclusive programs and activities of after-school programs and summer programs such as camping, trip, trekking, children can be taught such virtues and values as greeting each other; willingness to accept responsibility; listening to each other respectfully; having a strong desire for success or achievement; the disposition to do good; generosity and helpfulness; purity in conduct and intention; helpfulness; careful to keep clean; orderliness; thoughtful and sympathetic regard for the needs of other fellow students; responsibility; polite, purposefulness; respectful or considerate behaviour; discipline; punctuality; cooperation; contentment; empathy; excellence; concentrated awareness; reliability; gentleness; honesty; moderation; perseverance; sincerity and tolerance.

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