

Students needs, parents, and teachers' perceptions about spending their free time

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify students' needs, parents, and teachers' perceptions about how students use their free time. This research took place at Liceo Mayor de Palermo in Bogotá, Colombia, with vulnerable children between eight and sixteen years old. The main variables identified by the authors were parents and teachers' perceptions, students' needs and academic engagement. A mixed approach from an analytical cross-sectional study in which the main research techniques applied were three different questionnaires for students, parents, and teachers. Some preliminary findings show that students have around 2 – 6 hours of free time after school in which they spend their time playing video games, watching movies or TV, and using electronic devices. Parents are so concerned about the way their children spend their time, excessive use of electronic devices and sedentary lifestyle. Factors such as money, time, transportation, and safety do not allow them to attend after-school programs. This study seeks to provide information necessary to identify needs, perceptions, and justification for designing free after-school programs to create a safe, healthy, and beneficial environment for this population.

Keywords: free time, after-school programs, needs, perceptions.

Resumen

El propósito de esta investigación es identificar las necesidades de los estudiantes, las percepciones de los padres de familia y de los docentes acerca de cómo los estudiantes utilizan su tiempo libre. Esta investigación se llevó a cabo en el Liceo Mayor de Palermo Sur en Bogotá, Colombia, con población vulnerable compuesta por niños entre ocho y dieciséis años. Las principales variables identificadas por los autores fueron las percepciones de padres y profesores, frente a las necesidades de los estudiantes y el compromiso académico. Se aplicó un enfoque mixto desde un estudio transversal analítico, donde las principales técnicas de investigación aplicadas fueron tres cuestionarios diferentes para estudiantes, padres y profesores. Algunos de los resultados preliminares muestran que los estudiantes tienen espacios entre 2 y 6 horas de tiempo libre después de clases. Se dedican a los videojuegos, a ver películas o la televisión, desde dispositivos electrónicos. Los padres de familia están muy preocupados por la forma en que sus hijos pasan el tiempo, el uso excesivo de dispositivos electrónicos y el sedentarismo entre otras. Factores como dinero, tiempo, transporte y la seguridad no les permite asistir a programas extraescolares. Este estudio busca aportar información necesaria para identificar las necesidades, percepciones y justificación para diseñar programas de actividades extraescolares gratuitas que permitan crear un ambiente seguro, saludable y beneficioso para esta población.

Palabras clave: tiempo libre, programas extraescolares, necesidades, percepciones.

Introduction

These days, there is an important concern about how our children and teenagers spend their free time. Parents, teachers, counselors are aware of this problem for new generations. One of the most important risks is to spend too much time on the screens (Guevara et al. 2019). There are several dangers associated with students spending their free time on the internet. One of the main alarms is that excessive screen time can lead to internet addiction, which can destroy a healthy balance of interests and activities in their lives. Internet has increased troubles in children and youth and showed lowered physical activity levels, less outdoor time, higher sedentary behavior that included leisure screen time and more sleep during the coronavirus outbreak (Bahkir and Grandee, 2020). It can lead to a sedentary lifestyle, which can increase the chances of becoming obese and developing other health problems. Another danger is that students may be exposed to inappropriate content, such as hate speech and violent content, including messages that incite self-harm and even suicide (Parenting Research Center, 2019).

Based on this issue, free time is defined as the period during which students are not engaged in their academic activities or other obligatory tasks and can choose to spend this time on activities of their own interest; It refers to those activities that a human being carries out when they are not working, and as a series of activities classified as relaxing such as watching television (Massimini & Carli, 1998); likewise as mentioned by Larson and Verma (1999), free-time activities must be motivating, of their own will with a high degree of initiative. When we refer to free time compared to the time spent at work, school, it offers us a different way of doing things, with the people we prefer and, above all, choosing the activities we want to do (Petra, Roguljić & Domagoj, 2017). In this section, it is pertinent to include the different theories of motivation which allow us to demonstrate why people carry out these activities in their free time in a particular way. Some theories such as self-determination which, according to Ryan and Deci, (2000), define it as that relationship of beliefs, values, and goals with action.

Janssen and LeBlanc (2010), mention that sport as an activity of free time generates health benefits in adolescents and intense motivation around physical activities. Likewise, exercise in adolescents generates mental health benefits and becomes a protective factor for the development of non-communicable or chronic diseases. (Reiner, Niermann, Jekauc, & Woll, 2013). Thus, physical activity and exercise are linked and present many positive results in terms of health, but it is also important to highlight that the lack of physical activity becomes a serious public health problem too (Carstensen, 2013).

Methodology

An analytical cross-sectional study is a type of quantitative, non-experimental research design. These studies seek to “gather data from a group of subjects at only one point in time” (Schmidt & Brown, 2019, p. 206), there was an approach using the survey research method which allowed it to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The study population consisted of primary, middle, high school students, parents, and teachers at the private school Liceo Mayor de Palermo, located in Palermo Sur. The aim of the present study consisted of three questionnaires that were

designed and applied to answer the following research questions. What are the students' perspectives on the use of their free time? How do students use their free time? In what type of activities would they be interested in participating in extracurricular activities? How do parents perceive the use of their children's free time?

In the first, we aimed to obtain detailed information about the ways in which students spend their free time and in which ways they would like to participate in after-school activities. It was questionnaire 1.. The second and third questionnaires were applied for parents and teachers to identify their perceptions about how students spend their free time. The implemented surveys had multiple-choice questions with unique answers and open-ended surveys. They aim to collect data about the context of the educational subject, the habits, and interests of the subject in their free time.

Results and analysis

Table 1. Distribution of sociodemographic characteristics of the population of the Palermo Sur school.

	Students	Parents	Teachers-directives
Gender	n=121	n=85	n=12
Female	54(46,2)	72(84,7)	6(50,)
Male	63(53,8)	13(15,3)	6(50,)
Socioeconomic level	Socioeconomic level		
Low-low	60(50)	27(32)	
Low-low	40(33)	26(30)	2(17)
low-middle	21(17)	32(38)	10(83)

Source: Data taken from the questionnaires applied to students, parents, and teachers in Palermo Sur school in Bogota.

The participants were made up of 218 among parents, students, and teachers (132 females, 82 males), aged between 18 to 50 years, who completed the whole set of questionnaires. They are belonging to the locality Rafael Uribe Uribe (UPZ 5) where, according to data from the Secretary of Social Integration of Bogota, boys, and girls from 5 to 13 years of age in this locality reach considerable degrees of monetary and dimensional poverty of 17.9% and 17% respectively, also representing 7.3% and 7.1% compared to the population in poverty in Bogota. Young people reach considerable degrees of monetary and dimensional poverty of 24.8% and 25.1% respectively.

Table 2. Average of how many hours students and parents think students have free time after school.

Hours	Students	Parents
	n=121	n=85
Between 2-4	44 (36,4)	38(44,7)
Between 4-6	49(40,5)	39(45,9)
Between 7-10	16 (13,2)	8(9,4)
Not answer	12(9,9)	0

Table 3. Results of students and parents ‘preferences about how students spend their free time.

Activities	Preference use of free time Students N: 121		Preference use of free time parents’ perception N: 85	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Play outdoors	31	14,4	33	13,3
Playing video games/using electronic devices	26	12,4	43	17,3
Read books or magazines	19	10,1	23	9,3
Watching TV/movies	21	11,6	49	19,8
Artistic activities (drawing, music, etc.)	36	18,6	31	12,5
Physical Activities/Sports	38	16,3	33	13,3
Spending time with friends	26	11,7	21	8,5
Attend academic reinforcement activities	15	8,5	11	4,4
Other activities	4	2,3	6	4,8

Estimate students’ free time out of school. Two sets of items were included on the student and parents’ questionnaires to estimate how much time and how students spent their free time. Students were asked to report the number of hours they have for free time, after school. They were told: “If no hours, write NA. Tables 2 and 3 give the percentages of students reporting how many hours they think they have for free time in front of parents' answers. As noted in the tables above, most students have between 2 – 6 hours free (76.9%) and prefer activities involving the use of electronic devices (12.4%), and (17.3%), watching television or movies (11.6%) and (19.8%). There is a correlation between parents and students about the number of hours students have at home, most of them have between 4 and 6 hours a day free. There is special attention

for students participating in artistic activities, and playing outdoors activities, however, in other questions about the real way they spend their free time, they answered that they do nothing, they entertain themselves on the Internet and parents consider that they spend too much time on cell phone screens. These simple descriptive statistics provide a dramatic picture of the lives of students outside of school. Their responses suggest what interests them and what they value, but also what opportunities may or may not be available, as well as what responsibilities they might have to their families.

Students who perform planned activities. The planned activities that students engage in vary between physical activities (86.7%), cultural or artistic activities, and academic tutoring activities (63.4%). The main reasons for which the students carry out these activities are enjoyment of the activities (48.9%) and fun with friends (33.3%). Moreover, there is evidence of accompaniment by the students' family and friends, which suggests the existence of a support and accompaniment framework. Finally, the students were asked which activities they would be interested in participating in if they had the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities proposed by the school, and there was a great interest in outdoor or physical activities (41.4%).

Table 4. Students who do not perform planned activities.

Variables	Reasons why students do not perform planned activities	
	Frequency	Percentage
No facilities close to home	19	21,8
What they offer I don't like	12	13,8
I don't have time	9	10,3
My parents won't let me	6	6,9
Laziness or reluctance	13	14,9
Because it costs money	9	10,3
By illness	0	0
Difficulty moving	19	21,8

According to the surveys, it has been revealed that there are several reasons why students do not engage in organized activities in their free time. Factors beyond the control of the students, such as lack of facilities near their homes (21.8%), difficulty of transportation (21.8%) and the lack of interest programs offered (13.8%) are the ones that impede them from participating in organized activities. This causes a large part of their free time to be spent on electronic devices (18.8%) and on their own entertainment (17.9%). It should be highlighted that although they do not engage in organized activities, most of them are interested in participating in extracurricular sports (16.2%) and artistic (18.5%) activities. In addition, some students (14.9%) prefer not to engage in any type of extracurricular activity due to laziness.

Table: 5. Parents' perceptions

Variables	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Spend too much time in front of screens (TV, computer, phone, etc.) during their free time	64	75,3	21	24,7
Enroll your children in extracurricular activities to make better use of their free time	80	94,1	5	5,9
Use of free time has an impact on school performance and personal development	79	89,9	12	14,1
Participation in extracurricular activities in the afternoon at the institution	75	82,2	7	14,9

Even though most parents 81.2% work, 20.0% indicate that they do not spend enough time with their children on weekends and days off. 89.4% report they have tried to mediate the way in which their children use their free time. In addition to this, 94.1% of parents consider the possibility of enrolling their children in courses for the use of their free time and 91.8% are willing to receive advice on how to guide their children.

Parents answered a series of open-ended questions were asked in which it was identified that the greatest challenges presented by parents when it comes to intervening in the way their children use their free time are rebelliousness, disinterest, and laziness (33.3%) from their children. 39.8% of the parents believe that positive incentives such as motivation, positive dialogue, rewards, and recommendations of activities can be a good strategy to manage the way in which students use their free time, and they also support their children's participation in sports activities (34.5%), artistic activities (17.3%) and reading activities (14.5%).

How children and teens use their free time generates several warning situations. Initially, it is evident that spending a lot of time in front of screens and electronic devices causes negative effects such as: weight and diet, this is generated by sedentary problems (Stiglic, & Viner, 2019), likewise this problem generates behavioral problems, anxiety, hyperactivity, low attention, self-esteem, and psychosocial health (Stiglic, & Viner, 2019). It affects adolescents in numerous aspects, since there is evidence of less physical activity, less attention and, above all, family functioning. (Graham & Sahlberg, 2021).

Teachers' perceptions

Teachers consider that the best activities for students are academic reinforcement (34.2%), artistic activities (34.2%) and sports (20%). Among the challenges that teachers encounter with extracurricular activities, teachers perceive factors such as lack of motivation (38.4%), insecurity in the sector (23%) and lack of interest (23%). According to teachers, curricular activities can help students develop social (25%), expressive and correct use of language (25%) and comprehensive (25%) skills. In addition, they will allow them to improve academic performance by strengthening knowledge (42.8%) and improving students' study habits (21.4%), as well as the values of responsibility, discipline, and commitment (21.4%). Finally, it is found that teachers perceive that extracurricular activities will allow students to explore and grow based on their interests and strengths (90.9%), acquire skills and knowledge useful for life (50%) and gain self-esteem (41.6%).

Research contributions to the educational field

Understanding Student Behavior, this type of study can help researchers understand the prevalence of certain behaviors among students during their free time. For example, this analytical cross-sectional study provides insights into how many students would like to engage in physical activities, how many prefer reading, how many spend their time on electronic devices, and so on. Other contributions can be providing a snapshot of a population at this specific point in time, they can help educators and policymakers understand current trends and issues among students for these days. The findings from such studies can inform school policies and practices.

Conclusions

Through the research and data presented, we can conclude that the excess hours of free time that students use in front of the screen can generate health and physical deficiencies and even affect educational and training processes. That's why it's important to regulate and keep screen time at recommended levels. Likewise, when seeing this problem, it is pertinent to encourage and motivate students to participate and take advantage of free time in a more productive way through spaces that allow them to exploit skills through their interests and to improve their personal and academic aspects. Under this premise, it is vitally important to consider the perceptions of teachers, parents and, above all, what students think and prefer when taking advantage of free time.

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