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Press release

Expectations for all-day schools are too high

Children in the German-speaking part of Switzerland who utilise extended education offerings in the first two years of primary school generally perform no better in school than other children, an SNSF-funded project has found. Overall, the research shows that all-day schools do not fulfil all the expectations people place in them.

Expectations are high for non-compulsory, “open” all-day schools (a form of extended education also known as student clubs, daycare centres or “day structures”, depending on the canton). Extended education offerings at school are intended to promote equal opportunity and integration and lead to better educational achievement. It is also aimed at helping more women return to the work force.

The goal of a project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) was to investigate whether all-day schools have actually achieved the desired impact on students. The conclusion: “In their current design, the offerings are not having the hoped-for effect,” says Marianne Schüpbach, professor of primary education at the University of Bamberg, Germany, and project head of the study, which combines the results of several years of research work. The findings have been published in an edited volume.

As part of the EduCare research programme, the project focused on three specific areas: development of first and second grade students attending open all-day schools, the educational quality and the utilisation of the extended education offerings. Roughly 2000 first and second grade students were surveyed and followed up. The sample represented 120 classes at 53 all-day schools in 13 cantons in the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

No difference in educational achievement

“Attendance in the first two years of school had no effect on educational achievement,” says Schüpbach. In contrast, utilisation of extended education offerings did have a compensatory effect on the mathematics achievements of students from families of low socioeconomic status. However, “language achievement was no better for so-called at-risk children from families with a migration background and with low socioeconomic status compared with the group that utilised no extended education offerings,” says Schüpbach.

The study also investigated how children who utilise extended education offerings develop socially and emotionally. As regards social behaviour that has a positive effect on other people, no difference was found between students who utilise offerings compared with those who do not. However, the composition of a group had an impact on the development of behavioural problems in individual children: children placed in a group with many children with behavioural problems showed less improvement of the disruptive behaviour than in the comparison group. “This finding shows that a healthy mix of students is important,” says Schüpbach. In addition, there is a need to examine measures, such as increasing the number of caregivers, sensitisation of staff or introducing specific interventions to counter these disadvantageous effects.

Not enough targeted support

The study has also established that the educational quality of extended education offerings has improved slightly in the last 10 years and is of average to good quality. However, the main components of these offerings are still homework, lunchtime and the afternoon snack. The researchers also looked at which activities are made available to children. It became clear that “Freispiel” – unstructured play activities – are particularly important for all-day schools in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. By the same token, there are very few guided activities, for example in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) or in the area of language. “This is the main difference between extracurricular programmes in other countries, like the USA, which offer ongoing, stimulating, targeted and clearly structured programmes to specifically support languages or areas like social behaviour. At all-day schools in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, there is a lot of room for improvement of the learning setting and the offerings,” says Schüpbach.

The findings point to a discrepancy between the actual function and the expectations of parents, who send their children to all-day schools to encourage them: “In German-speaking Switzerland, all-day schools are more oriented towards child care and less towards education.”

Cost shuts out the middle class

The project further showed that students with a migration background as well as children from families with high socioeconomic status and thus high income are more likely to utilise extended education offerings. Children from families with middle-class incomes utilised the offerings the least. “The reason is means-tested cost-sharing,” says Schüpbach. For families with middle-class incomes, the offerings are often too expensive. “It might be a good idea to rethink the cost structure, so that extended education offerings could also be affordable for families with middle-class incomes, and to ensure a healthy mix of students.”

The EduCare programme

Since 2006, the SNSF has supported three related projects investigating the quality and effectiveness of family and extra-family care and education of primary-school-aged children. The descriptions of the sub-projects and the findings are available at www.educare-schweiz.ch.

M. Schüpbach, L. Frei and W. Nieuwenboom: All-day schools: an overview [In German: Tagesschulen: Ein Überblick]. Springer VS Research. (2017)

[Link to the online review copy](#)

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Links

- [Project website since 2006](#)
- [Project in the SNSF's research database P3](#)
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