



Analysis of ESL Students' Activities during Summer Holidays in Pakistan

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Abstract: Education is a continuous process, and students need to focus on their academic activities uninterrupted throughout the academic calendar to achieve their targets. The current study aims to analyze ESL students' activities during the summer holidays in Pakistan. The target population for the current study was secondary school ESL students from the private sector. Sixteen participants were selected by using a convenient sampling technique. The participants were interviewed for gathering qualitative data. The data were analyzed by using interpretive and data reduction techniques. The findings indicate that the participants take part in different co-curricular and extra-curricular activities during the summer holidays. Some challenges faced by students are also highlighted. Based on the results, some implications for ESL students are suggested.

Key Words: ESL Students, Summer Holidays, Activities

Introduction

Getting an education is a continuous and uninterrupted process for achieving academic goals. Students focus on various activities inside and outside school and keep them busy in multipurpose activities in order to get their targets. They get the knowledge from their teachers during school day insides school, while different persons such as their parents, brothers, sisters or other family members assist in their homework at their homes during the holidays. Therefore, parental involvement is significantly important in students' education (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). Hence, different people play their role in educating students inside and outside school as well. Teachers inculcate knowledge and skills and design various activities for their students while parents support their kids to follow the activities and schemes designed by teachers (Xu, 2005). Moreover, students get involved in various useful activities during holidays. The current study is framed in the contexts of Pakistan, where secondary school students enjoy 10 to 12 weeks of summer holidays and participate in different academic and non-academic activities. This research aims to analyze ESL secondary school students' activities about what they do and what they do not do during summer holidays.

Literature Review

Students' activities during the holidays have been interesting and beneficial research; however, a few studies focused on this issue. Most studies addressed student activities during school boundary; nevertheless, very few focused on students' homework and activities in school (Xu & Yuan, 2003). Teachers manage and design various activities in class to transfer knowledge to their students that are an indicator of successful teachers, school and students. Well-planned activities, assignments and a

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conducive learning environment are the keys to success for schools, particularly for private schools (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005). After school hours, parents engage themselves with their kids to complete their homework, which reflects their interests and expectations about what they desire in connection with their children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Warton, 2001).

As far as students' activities during school hours are concerned, they are provided organized and planned activities, guidelines and assignments by their teachers, whereas, after school timing, students do their homework on their own generally without appropriate guidelines. Particularly, they get involved in various unhealthy activities due to lack of teachers', parents' or instructors' guidelines or instructions and they are not supervised well after school timings (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez, & Brown, 2004). In connection with students' activities, Cosden, Morrison, Albanese, and Macias (2001) reviewed 10 different studies conducted on structured after-school programs and found that various programmes provide assistance in students' homework, activities and other academic needs in order to establish good study habits.

Span of Summer Holidays

As regards summer holidays, they are observed in different countries that are known as the longest break in a school year. Normally, the length of summer holidays is approximately two to three months; however, they vary from country to country depending on the duration of the summer season. Teachers and students enjoy summer holidays from 6 to 8 weeks in Australia, Britain, The Netherlands, Canada and Germany, while the duration of summer holidays ranges between 6 and 14 weeks in the United States of America, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Lithuania (Webmedia, 2015). According to Hughes (2015), the length of summer holidays in China is around 45 days (from mid-July to the end of August). Students in Iran and Mexico enjoy 2 months of summer holidays in the months of July and August. Luzer (2013) reported that the length of summer holidays in Egypt is often four months starting from the mid of May and ending in the mid of September. The span of summer holidays in India is two to three months; however, it varies depending on the region. In the southern part of the country, the holidays start in the last week of March until the last week of June. In northern India, the schools close for the summer holidays on 1st May and reopen on 1st July every year.

The span of summer holidays varies from country to country and region to region based on territorial climate. The length of summer holidays also depends upon the intensity of temperature during these days. In addition, summer holidays are observed only in those countries where the summer season is too hot, and children cannot attend schools due to high temperature. Webmedia (2015) reported the length of summer holidays in different European countries, as shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1. Length of Summer Holidays in European Countries

Country	Length	From - to
Belgium	2 months	July 1 to August 31
Czech Republic	2 months	July 1 to August 31
Denmark	6 weeks	end of June to early or mid-August
Finland	2 and a half to 3 months	late May, or at the beginning of June to August
France	2 months	July to August
Norway	8 weeks	mid-June to mid-August
Spain	3 months	mid-June to mid-September
Sweden	2 months	first week of June to the first week of August
Switzerland	Six weeks	early July to mid-August.

Table 1 indicates the length of holidays in different countries. The majority of the European countries have summer holidays ranging between six weeks and three months. However, the summer holidays are almost in the same period but vary in duration and/or starting and ending dates. European students (like students of many countries of the world) also enjoy the Christmas holiday, autumn break,

spring break, and Easter holidays other than the summer holidays. [Westcott \(2013\)](#) mentioned the length of summer holidays in some other countries that also varies from region to region, as stated in Table 2.2.

Table 2. Length of Summer Holidays in different Countries

Country	Length	From - to
Brazil	around 3 months	early December until early February
Iceland	60 to 75 days	1 st week of June to mid-August
Japan	30 to 35 days	late July to late August
Russia	3 months	June to August

In this view, the working days differ in each country. Students in the UK attend on average 190 days a year, and in the United States of America for 180 days and in 208 days in East Asian countries. According to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the average school days are 195 days out of 365 days ([McCarney, 2015](#)). It means students spent 170 days out of school and enjoy different types of holidays. The study period is very less; therefore, teachers give summer reading assignments and homework to students during the summer holidays in order to avoid learning loss and boost up their performance.

With reference to summer holidays in Pakistan, teachers and students of the province of Balochistan, Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa enjoy holidays for 10 to 12 weeks starting from the 1st week of June until the 2nd or 3rd week of August every year. The reason for the long span of summer holidays is due to the severe heat conditions of weather and high temperature; 45 to 52 centigrade ([Pakistan Meteorological Department, 2015](#)) during this period. On the other hand, heavy snow paralyzes life in the winter in northern areas of Pakistan such as Azad Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan and some areas of Balochistan. Therefore, there are two months of winter holidays, and schools close for only two weeks for summer holidays. Thus, the teachers assign homework to the students before starting holidays so that the students can carry on their academic activities during the summer holidays.

Activities during Summer Holidays

Policymaker and educators design various activities to promote students' summer learning that is a strategy to improve low-performing students' achievements. Librarians chalk out summer reading schemes to encourage students to visit libraries. In connection with reading activities, US First Lady Michelle Obama recently launched Let's Read Let's Move, a campaign that is an initiative to fill the summer reading gap ([McCarney, 2015](#)). This campaign indicates that America showed her concern about children who don't read during summer vacations and lose their academic progress. It urges the students to participate in combating summer reading loss and different healthy activities to compensate weaker students' academic performance. Japan is also too conscious about its students' performance. The Japanese students have to go to their respective schools once or twice during the summer holidays to show their teachers what and how they are handling their summer holiday homework ([Westcott, 2013](#)).

In Pakistani contexts, the students engage themselves in various activities during the summer holidays. The first and foremost responsibility is to complete their summer homework. Besides, the students participate in various academic activities such as reading books, novels, magazines, short stories and newspapers. They also participate in different games and supports such as cycling, swimming, cricket, football, hockey and badminton. Some of the students, particularly female students, take part in kitchen activities that include preparing food and cooking different dishes ([Siddique, 2011](#)). They also join summer camps and painting classes to enhance their academic, professional and aesthetic performance.

Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study was to investigate secondary school ESL students' activities during the summer holidays.

Research Question

The following research question was designed based on the research objective.

RQ: How do secondary school ESL students spend summer holidays?

Methodology

Sampling

The target population of the current study was the ESL students of secondary school level in Pakistan. A sample of 16 ESL students of grade 10 was selected through a convenient sampling technique from four districts, such as Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur, Lodhran and Vehari from Southern Punjab, Pakistan. Four participants (2 males and 2 females) were taken from each district. All the students were taken from urban private secondary schools. Their age ranged from 15 to 17 years, with a mean of 15.4 years.

Instrument

A self-designed open-ended interview protocol was used to collect qualitative data. Three experts determined the validity of the interview protocol. Two of them were secondary school senior teachers, while one of them was a university lecturer who checked the contents of the interview protocol. The experts tested all the items very carefully and gave critical comments to improve the instrument. Therefore, some changes were made in the items based on the constructive comments of the experts.

Data Collection

In order to collect qualitative data, interviews of the participants were conducted in the month of September/October after they have spent their summer holidays. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of the data, and consent was taken from the interviewees to record their responses. Sony ICD-AX412 Digital Flash Memory Voice Recorder was used to record the interviews. Each interview lasted for 8 to 10 minutes.

Data Analysis

NVivo version 10 was used to analyze the qualitative data. The participants were given codes such as S₁ (student 1), S₂ (student 2), S₃ (student 3) and...S₁₆ (student16). Interpretative and data reduction techniques were used to analyze the data under different themes. Based on the qualitative analysis of data, the following themes were yielded, which indicate that the students participate in different co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Academic Activities

Most of the students reported that they focus on their summer homework and participate in different learning activities as well. S₅ said, '...my mother helps me in completing my homework. She guides me on how to do homework in time. S₁₀ expressed his views that he goes to a nearby academy to attend classes in order to learn lessons assigned by their teachers even though my parents hardly afford the tuition fee of the academy. One of the students stated that she, along with his younger brothers and sisters, regularly do their homework and try their best to perform well in the exams to be conducted after summer vacations. As reported by different students, summer homework is an important task for students to complete during the summer holidays; however, two of the students regretfully expressed their views that they do not like to do their summer homework since their teachers generally do not bother to check their homework after summer holidays. One of the students stated that he reads magazines, digests and newspapers during summer vacations. In addition, he also expressed his views that books and magazines are very costly and the public library is too far from his house. Another student indicated that her mother is extremely cognizant of the importance of studies. Therefore, she purchases some storybooks for her during summer vacations and motivates and encourages her to read storybooks.

Recreational Activities

Some of the students reported that they make different plans to participate in different games and support activities. S9 said that he likes playing cricket on a daily basis. Another student showed his interest in playing football. Most of the students said that they visit some historical and important visiting sites every year during summer vacations. One of the students said that the temperature is very high during the holidays; therefore, he, almost every year, plans his visit to the northern part of the country, particularly Naran and Kaghan valley and spends a few weeks there with his parents. S3 stated that he visits his relatives during holidays to spend time with his cousins. Some students participate in different games such as cricket, football and hockey and visit tourist places spots. S16 said that he likes cycling and swimming. Some students reported that they participate in indoor activities and only enjoy the Internet and video games since they have lots of homework to do. One student added that he also prefers to engage himself in indoor games, including watching cartoons and movies and not going outside due to high temperature.

Another student said that "...I am conscious about my skin complexion, that is why I do not go outside, particularly during 12 to 6 pm to play games in an open area. Therefore, I prefer to stay at home for watching TV and movies". S7 added that he is also of the same opinion and watches different videos on Tablet. Contrarily, S10 said that he does not like video games and movies since his parents do not allow him to do so. He further said that his parents realize that such types of activities are harmful to him. Therefore, he spends leisure time with his friends, chatting and planning for studies.

With reference to recreational and leisure activities, some tour operators fleece students and their parents. They offer attractive tour packages for students during summer vacations and earn thousands of rupees that are an extra financial burden on parents, whereas they already bear other expenses such as tuition fees and academy fees for extra coaching. They also pay three months of summer holiday fees to schools. In this connection, some of the students said that '...they are unable to go on recreational trips through tour operator since it will be a great dent in our parents' finances; however, we individually visit any tourist site during summer holidays'. Some of the students said that they go with their parents to some historical places in Lahore. S15 said that he joins a soccer club that provides him with a nice recreational opportunity, and it is also useful for health. S6 said that he joins Iqbal Football Academy every year during summer vacations since he wishes to be a great footballer in the future. Some other students stated that they have interests to participate in different games, but unfortunately they do not have enough facilities such as a swimming pool, gym or football club and tennis court nearby. S7 added that he is also interested in playing badminton, but unfortunately, it is a very expensive game for him, and he, therefore, can't afford this game.

Professional Skills and Training Courses

As regards students' participation in different professional skills, S4 said that she learns different skills such as painting, flower making, stitching and embroidery during the summer holidays. She further said that these things help her to improve various skills. Another student, S11, said that she helps her mother in the kitchen to improve her cooking and food preparation skills. S8 said that he enrolls in spoken English classes to enhance proficiency in English speaking skills that would help him in the future for getting a higher education and a job. Another student added that he also gets admission to improve his English language skills. Some of the interviewees responded that they do part-time jobs to support their parents financially. S2 said that he works in a shop to earn some money. In addition, S13 and S14 stated that they work on their farms to help their parents.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings of the current study reveal that secondary school ESL students participate in different academic and recreational activities. In addition, they also take part in activities that help them promote their professional skills. These findings are inconsistent with the findings of [Autier, Boniol, Severi, and Doré \(2001\)](#), who concluded that co-curricular and extra-curricular activities support students to improve their intellectual abilities. The findings show that the students make efforts to complete their

summer homework that is according to [Hughes, Ruhl, Schumaker, and Deshler \(2002\)](#), who reveal that it is the first and foremost duty of the students to do their homework assigned by their teachers. Some of the students keep themselves busy with video games and the Internet activities that might provide entertainment for young students; however, they must avoid watching too much TV, bad sleeping habits and the Internet surfing since there are many other useful activities for students that should be used as substantial learning chances.

Regarding recreational activities, some students participate in different games and sports; however, facilities are not sufficient for students to participate in healthy activities. This finding is compatible with the findings of [Yin et al. \(2005\)](#), who claimed that healthy activities are mandatory for students to make their minds healthier. Besides, the opportunities for sports and games are meagre and expensive too. Therefore, the students belonging to poor families feel an inferiority complex. In addition, students participate in professional courses such as English language courses, painting, and embroidery, which help students prepare them for future needs. This finding is also consistent with [Langer \(2000\)](#), who concluded that students should pay attention to doing some professional courses and their regular studies that would enhance their abilities and interest in a different field. Their keen interest will also help them to get various opportunities to earn money. Some of the students remain busy in the Internet activities that might be harmful, as [Suhaib and Bargees \(2006\)](#). Nalwa and Anand (2003) concluded in their study.

Implications and Recommendations

Participating in various academic and recreational activities indicates a healthy attitude of the students that might lead them to a successful life. It also indicates that students do their homework and participate in different activities as well. However, facilities are not enough for students. They are also expensive. Therefore, it is the government's responsibility to provide facilities for students so that they may become good students, players and useful citizens with a healthier mind and body. The government should provide sports facilities such as sports clubs, fine arts academies and gyms. Teachers should focus on students' personality development. Parents should also feel their responsibilities and provide opportunities for their kids to participate in healthy activities. They can motivate their children to take part in nearby academies to prevent the educational decline of their children. It will support them to compensate for their summer learning loss. In addition, students should also work diligently to complete their summer homework. They should also actively participate in various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, which would help them improve their abilities. They can join academies to do professional courses such as English language courses that can enhance their confidence and English language skills. They will also be able to improve their motor skills if they join art and craft courses. Female students should participate in courses such as cooking, painting, sewing and embroidery, which would be helpful for them in their future life. They will also fulfil their satisfaction and increase their responsibilities as a female member of the community. Conducting English language camp during summer vacations in private schools is a novel idea to improve students' English language capabilities, confidence and social interaction skills. Such type of activities will develop and groom students' personality, behaviour and attitude.

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