



Block scheduling

Background

The summary below presents the research evidence on block scheduling in the Arab World.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of block scheduling on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on block scheduling in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions and how they are perceived by school leaders, teachers and students using a range of research methods. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of block scheduling interventions that have been delivered in the Arab world.

Summary of the research in the Arab World

Block scheduling is an approach to school timetabling in secondary schools. It typically means that pupils have fewer classes (4-5) per day, for a longer period of time (70-90 minutes). International evidence suggests that how teachers use the time they are allocated is more important than the length of lesson or the schedule of lessons, and hence that the introduction of block scheduling is unlikely to raise attainment by itself.

There is lack of evidence of the impact of timetabling and scheduling changes on students' learning in the Arab world. Few studies, however, have looked at the possibility of expanding instruction time mostly in English. As such, a qualitative study conducted in the Sultanate of Oman has shed the light on the importance of expanding the English language teaching (ELT) instruction time (Al-Issa, 2013). Data collected from semi-structured interviews made with different agents involved in the Omani ELT system—grade 12 students, teachers, inspectors, teacher



trainers, school heads, and material writers revealed inconsistency of agreement around this topic. Nevertheless, findings of this study have direct implications for ELT policy to reconsider the instruction time allotted to English instruction and to provide teachers with professional development aimed at developing their pedagogical skills and increasing their theoretical and practical knowledge, and research skills.

In the UAE, extending the length of school day by 90 minutes for all government high school pupils in the emirate was initiated in 2010 for a 10-year plan. The aim of this programme was to prepare high school students for transition into university without their having to go through a year or two of remedial classes, known as "foundation studies. The purpose of this initiative was to also give more time for students with their teachers and allow teachers to focus on problem solving and developing students' analytical skills, not rushing through the syllabus. As such, two more classes of 45 minutes each was implemented for all grade 10, 11 and 12 pupils in government schools on four of five school days. Another single session of 45 minutes was added every Thursday. The school year itself was lengthened by 10 additional days for all primary and secondary grades in public schools, bringing the academic year to 165 days total.

Assaf (2015) examined the relationships between extending school day and year and students' academic achievement in Arabic, English and math in the UAE. The data were collected using a self-managed questionnaire from a random sample of 400 grade 12 students from five public secondary schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Statistical analysis showed little or no reliable relationship between extending school days and year, and students' academic achievement. This finding could be attributed to the timeline of collecting the data after one year only of taking this decision. Hence, Assaf (2015) implies that the impact of extending school day on students may lead to different results if the study were conducted after two or three years of issuing the decision.



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Summary paragraph:

No robust impact evaluations of the effect of block scheduling on academic outcomes appear to have been conducted in the Arab world. The existing initiatives in Oman and UAE reported the need to extend the instruction time and length of school day to develop students' performance and improve the education system. However, there was no significant relationship between the length of school day and year and students' academic achievement in the UAE. Further research is needed to explore this topic thoroughly and investigate its implementation in different context within the Arab world. Empirical studies are also recommended to collect both qualitative and quantitative data to give a complex picture of this strand and its implications on overall school performance and on students' discipline, social relationships and motivation (Assaf, 2015).



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References

Al-Issa, A. S. (2013). The implications of expanding the Instruction time for the English language teaching policy implementation in the Sultanate of Oman: A qualitative study. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 10(4), 311-333.

Assaf, M. A. (2015). The impact of extending school day and year on students' academic achievement. British University in Dubai, UAE.

Search terms

Block scheduling; timetable; lesson length; lesson sequence.

Databases searched

Academic Search Complete

ERIC (EBSCO)

Education Source

Google scholar

ProQuest Central

ProQuest Dissertations

Web of science