

# No more Saturdays?

Saddam Hussein | 06<sup>th</sup> Aug 2024



***In an absurd move, the Federal Directorate of Education has decided to shake things up, out of no apparent reason, by cancelling Saturday holidays for all educational institutes under its ambit.***

Starting August 10, 2024, our children will now spend their Saturdays too in a school or a college, diving into extra classes for Language and Mathematics.

While this move might seem like a grand gesture towards educational excellence, let's take a moment to question its brilliance - or lack thereof.

Imagine you're a kid. It's Friday, and you've survived another week of school. You're dreaming of Saturday morning cartoons, a game of cricket

with friends, or just lounging around doing absolutely nothing. But wait, the Ministry has other plans! Instead of a carefree weekend, you're back in the classroom, tackling grammar rules and algebra. How's that for a plot twist?

Let's start with the basics: kids need free time to grow mentally. The time during which the kids develop critical life skills like creativity, problem-solving, and resilience. It's when they learn to negotiate who gets the blue crayon, build imaginary worlds, and figure out how to turn the living room sofa into a fort. These aren't just cute anecdotes; they're essential experiences for cognitive and emotional growth. By cutting down their weekends, we're not just stealing their playtime; we're robbing them of vital developmental opportunities.

Now, let's talk about the myth of "more is better." Adding an extra school day might sound like a surefire way to boost learning, but let's look at countries like Finland. It has the best education system in the world. Fifty years ago, Finland had a reputation for having a terrible education system and risked becoming the economic step-child of Europe. Over the past half century, it has turned its schools around and is hailed internationally for its exceedingly high educational outcomes. How did they do it?

Firstly, Finnish educational institutes have discarded the concept of homework. One could wonder what the rationale behind such a decision is. Finnish educationists tell you that the students should have more time to be their age and enjoy. They are of the view that students have a lot to do in their lives: like being together, being with their families enjoying family time, playing, listening to music and reading.

School teachers in Helsinki tell you that many school children probably do nothing but maybe climb a tree. Is that worth it? Of course it is. They learn to climb a tree and enjoy nature. They also discover insects, plants and herbs and they may ask their teachers about all this stuff. This is real

learning; at least the Finnish think so. Pardon to our policymakers if they think otherwise.

Secondly, children in Finland go to school only for 20 hours a week, including an hour-long daily lunch break. Other than lunch breaks, they don't just do language and algebra, they play music, cook, paint, etc. The idea is that human brain needs to relax every now and then to function optimally. If you are constantly at work, you stop learning. The Finnish children do better by going to school for less hours.

So, what is the crux? Quality over quantity. Finland focuses on delivering high-quality education within a balanced schedule, rather than cramming more hours into the week. If they can do it, why can't we?

More importantly, what magical feats are expected to be accomplished on the sixth day that couldn't be achieved in five? This makes it obvious that for us, reform means merely applying a superficial fix, shying away from tackling the core issues that demand real effort.

What about mental health here? Another critical factor. Imagine the stress of being in school six days a week, with barely any time to relax and unwind. We're setting our kids up for burnout, anxiety, and a serious case of school fatigue. It's like asking marathon runners to sprint every day and still expect them to break records. A five-day school week helps maintain a healthy balance ensuring kids stay motivated and enthusiastic about learning.

Family time is another casualty in this context. Weekends are precious for families, a time to bond, catch up, and engage in activities that build strong familial relationships. With only one day off, these moments become rushed and rare. Social skills are honed during family gatherings, outings, and simply spending quality time together. By turning Saturdays into school days, we're not just adjusting a schedule; we're disrupting family dynamics and social development.

Now, let's just crack open the evidence vault. Educational policies should be rooted in solid research and tailored to the actual needs of students. Is there any concrete proof that an extra school day will significantly enhance learning outcomes? Or are we just grasping at straws, hoping that more time in class equals smarter kids? It's essential to ensure that our policies are backed by data and best practices, not just well-meaning but misguided notions.

Kids need a proper break to recharge, play, and grow. Instead of extending school days, let's focus on enhancing the quality of education within the current framework. After all, a well-rested, happy child is more likely to excel both in the classroom and beyond. So, let's keep the five-day school week and let kids be kids. They'll thank us for it - with maybe a little less algebra-induced eye-rolling.

***On top of everything, it's astonishing that we're still stuck debating a 5-day school week while the world is transitioning to just 4 days! A 4-day school and work week isn't just a trend - it's a smart move that boosts productivity, lowers stress levels, improves work-life balance, and gives us all more time for what truly matters. Let's embrace the future and let kids be just kids with more time to do other things rather than just be at school.***

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