



A Qualitative Research on the Problems and Expectations of Imam Hatip Secondary School Students (The Case of Istanbul Province)*

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ABSTRACT

Imam Hatip Secondary Schools are the schools where the lessons related to religion (The Holy Quran, Tafsir and Hadith etc.) are taught as a compulsory part of the curriculum. In other secondary schools, only one religion lesson is compulsory, and the other religion-related lessons are taught as elective. The aim of this research is to examine the problems of Imam Hatip Secondary School students in school, to learn their expectations and to identify the school of their ideals. The research was carried out through a semi-structured interview form, one of the qualitative research methods. It was held in 2019 at the 13 Imam Hatip Secondary Schools in Istanbul with the participation of 156 students. The research in which the results are given by creating themes; reveals that the students are generally satisfied with their schools, they love the school more to see their friends and participate in the activities. In addition, students have emotional expectations from their teachers and administrators; like showing them more interest and smiling. Students described their ideal schools as follows; school uniform is not compulsory, they only attend lessons of interest and have longer break hours. Teachers can have short conversations with their students before starting the lesson. Motivation activities can be held for the lessons students are hesitant about whether they will benefit them in the future. Most importantly, school can be developed in line with students wishes and needs by holding frequent meetings with their.

Keywords:

Religious education, Imam Hatip Secondary School, commitment to school, emotional expectation, human value.

1. Introduction

Schools are places where students spend most of their daily time. When students feel peaceful, happy and safe in schools, they are better connected to school and their education in general (Sarı, 2013). The fact that children are "happy" is undoubtedly an issue that almost everyone in a society can agree on. It is very important for children and adolescents to be satisfied and happy about their lives in terms of their emotional and social development (Bozkurt & Sönmez, 2016). In addition, the student, who is happy, peaceful and safe at school and accordingly has a high level of commitment to the school, tries to take more than what the school offers, besides being more successful academically. By internalizing what he has learned, he transfers them to practice more easily (Taş Akarsu, 2018).

It is possible to say that Imam Hatip schools that integrate social and humanitarian sciences as well as practical and theoretical sciences with Islamic sciences are a unique experience for our country. These schools have an important place in our country in meeting the religious, moral and spiritual needs of individuals as well as general education (Aktaş, 2017). Imam Hatip Secondary School (IHSS) are the schools

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in which religious lessons taught selectively in other secondary schools are taught as part of the curriculum. Because of the educational content and form given in these schools; a school climate and school culture, which is specific to these schools, is formed (DOGM, 2017). Religious understanding of students studying in these schools develop here. Parents send their children to these schools because they want not only academic success but also for their children to learn religion. For this reason, it can be said that the expectations and goals of the students studying in these schools and the parents who send their children to these schools differ from those in other secondary schools (Çiftçi, 2019). Theoretical and applied researches on various subjects related to the education model applied in Imam Hatip schools have been conducted. In this sense, one of the subjects to be researched is the student factor studying in these schools. This is because determining the expectations of the students and their problems in their school, which is the most important element of education, will result in a higher quality of education and new perspectives (Gencer, 2019). In this context, students' problems, expectations, goals and ideals are important for determinants, practitioners, parents and researchers.

The aim of this research is to examine the problems of IHSS students who have faced a new school with a different environment and curriculum than primary school and started to take religious lessons within the framework of a program prepared by the Ministry of National Education. This way, it will be possible to learn about their expectations and to determine the imagination of their ideal school. The problem statement of the research; "What are the problems that Imam Hatip Secondary School students experience in their schools and what are their expectations about the solution of these problems?"

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This research is made according to the qualitative research method. The qualitative research method covers a process revealing perceptions and facts in a natural and inclusive manner aiming at understanding human life styles, behaviors, organizational structures and social change by utilizing data gathering methods such as observation, interview and document analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Three stages are considered inevitable for a qualitative study: The establishment of the theoretical framework that will form the basis of the research is the creation of a systematic, feasible and flexible research design, and listing the research findings as a consistent and meaningful document (Balçı, 2015).

The research was carried out through a semi-structured interview form, one of the qualitative research methods. Since the research is carried out according to the qualitative research method, in this research type, it is aimed to create working environments that will facilitate in-depth study with a group that reflects the problem situation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). In this regard, the working group was formed in 2019 with the participation of 156 students in 13 Imam Hatip Secondary Schools in the Sancaktepe, Sultanbeyli, Kartal, Pendik, Arnavutköy and Sultangazi districts of Istanbul. The demographic characteristics of the working group are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants in the Working Group

	Working Group	N	%
Gender	Female	74	47,4
	Male	82	52,6
Grade Level	5	30	19,2
	6	48	30,7
	7	34	21,7
	8	44	28,4
Total		156	100

Considering the gender and class distributions of the participants in the study group, it can be said that there is a balanced distribution in general and the data obtained reflect the students' perspective. The semi-structured interview form with open-ended questions was presented to the opinions of two faculty members who are experts in the field. Because of the expert opinion received, necessary corrections were made and the interview form was finalized. The six questions posed to students in the final form are as follows:

1. Does the school meet your expectations? What would you say about the features of your school that you like or dislike?
2. Does studying at Imam Hatip Secondary School make a difference about you at school, in your family or in your environment?
3. Have you ever thought, "I wish I didn't go to school today"? What are the reasons that make you feel this feeling?
4. What would you do if you were a teacher or administrator in this school?
5. Do you think that the lessons you study at this school will benefit you in the future?
6. Could you describe your ideal school?

Within the scope of the research, semi-structured interview forms were evaluated using content analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods. Content analysis is a method that allows the data to be shaped systematically within the framework of predetermined categories. The main purpose in content analysis is to reach the concepts and relationships that will explain the collected data. In this respect, the process performed in content analysis is to encode similar data, classify them in the light of certain themes, and interpret them in a way that the reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

2.2 Validity and Reliability

Various models have been developed in which validity and reliability criteria are categorized according to quantitative and qualitative research types. Validity in qualitative research can be described as stating the topic objectively in the frame of the main problem (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Some of the methods used as validity and reliability methods in qualitative research are: providing diversity of data collection (interviews, observations and document review), feedback (presenting the data set to the participants), making intensive identification while conveying the findings, clarifying the researcher's prejudices, presenting negative or inconsistent information in reverse order within the themes, working for a long time in the research area to present the data set to researchers working in the same field, to present it to an external researcher for the examination of the entire research (Creswell, 2019).

At this point, four main strategies; "dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability" as trustworthiness criteria ensure the rigor of qualitative findings (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Başkale, 2016; Çepni, Kılınç & Kılcan, 2018). For dependability, the following has been done; good structuring of data collection tool and research method was provided. The diversity of organizations was achieved thanks to schools with different student profiles. Participant volunteering was taken as basis and they were informed before the meeting. By making a pilot application, the questions were re-structured. For credibility, the following has been done; when and where the research was conducted was shared. Demographic characteristics of the participants were announced. The stages and details of the study were announced in order to repeat the research. Expert review and evaluation was carried out before and after the research. For transferability, the following has been done; record-taking, note-taking and observation operations were done in a natural environment, namely at school. The records were combined with the notes kept and analyzed. Some of the analyzed data was quoted unchanged in the research. For confirmability, the following has been done; while preparing the data collection scale, it was aimed to stay away from directing the participant by getting expert opinion. Care was taken to ensure that the participants were from people that the researcher did not know before. Focus group meetings were held to prevent the participant from turning to consensus with the researcher. Meetings were held in the school environment to maintain social distance with the participants.

3. Findings

Students in the study group were coded from S1 to S156. Student coding shows 5th grade students between "1-30", 6th grade students between "31-79", 7th grade students between "80-112", and 8th grade students between "113-156". The codes were created according to the answers given by the students to the six questions in the semi-structured interview form. Based on the findings, three themes were created under two headings. Then, code frequencies are given and students' opinions are presented. The topics that students are satisfied with at school, their problems and expectations are shown in tables.

3.1 Issues IHSS Students Are Satisfied With

The topics that Imam Hatip Secondary School students are satisfied in their schools are concentrated under seven headings. While one of the subjects that satisfy the students is about physical opportunities, six of them can be evaluated under the title of education. The topics that the students are satisfied with at school are shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Issues IHSS Students Are Satisfied With

Theme	Code	f
Issues IHSS Students Are Satisfied With	Giving religious education.	84
	Teachers and administrators to make an effort for them.	62
	Social facilities such as gym, dining hall and library.	53
	LGS courses are being held.	38
	Competitions and events organized at the school.	35
	Parents and other elders celebrate themselves when they practice religious.	29
	Taking lessons from foreign teachers in English-Arabic lessons.	16

The opinions of the students on the topics they are satisfied with are as follows: S1: "Our school is a very good school. Because the Holy Qur'an, Religious Culture and Hz. There are lessons of the Prophet's Life. We also do many activities about these lessons." S2: "Our teachers are kind and warm towards us." S3: "It is very fun to process the lessons on the smart board." S7: "I want to read and finish the Holy Qur'an from beginning to end until I finish this school. This way, I will make my family happier." S32: "I think what we have learned will be useful in the future because our lessons are generally religious." S33: "This school is different from other schools because we have classes such as the Holy Qur'an and Arabic." S35: "What I like most about this school is that the principal, assistant principals and teachers value us." S38: "My favorite things in this school are many the trips, mangala, chess and archery activities." S40: "It is good that the religious lessons are dominant, so we understand Islam better." S41: "School is good because lessons are fun and good. I get along well with my friends." S42: "I feel happy and safe here. Because when my teachers are with me, it is as if my parents are with me." S43: "What makes this school different from other schools is that girls and boys are in separate classes. We have extra religious classes and we participate in many activities." S80: "My school meets my expectations. Because there is a Z-library, mind games class, robotic coding class, music workshop and gym." S81: "I miss my school even on vacation. Because we are having fun with my friends whom I love so much." S82: "I am satisfied with the school. Because we have a masjid and a game room. Our last lesson is our homework lesson; so I don't have to do homework at home." S83: "Our teachers are very good, they treat us with understanding, and I want to be a teacher in this school." S84: "Being with my friends is the reason I come to school." S88: "I think the lessons we see at school will be useful. This is because when I become an architect, I need math when I go abroad." S92: "What I like about this school is that there are a lot of religious classes and classes are not divided as lazy people and hard-workers."

3.2 Problems Experienced by IHSS Students

The problems that Imam Hatip Secondary School students experience in their schools are concentrated under six headings. While three of said problems are related to education (short breaks, diversity and difficulty of lessons and unnecessary lessons), three topics are related to different topics. The topics that students are consider as problems with at school are shown in Table 3:

Table 3. IHSS Students' Problems

Theme	Code	f
IHSS Students' Problems	School uniform is compulsory.	51
	Short breaks.	44
	The lessons are very diverse, heavy and difficult.	37
	Cleaning problems in toilets.	29
	Some lessons that they think will not benefit them in the future.	25
	Physical equipment is missing or not suitable for them	21

The opinions of the students about the problems they face are as follows: S3: "The lack of a gym is the biggest problem. In winter, our right to physical education lessons is violated." S4: "I do not like everyone running and bumping into each other during recess. There is no area where we can play properly." S5: "If I was a teacher, I would not always raise the same person to the board to answer the questions, I would not be unjust." S8: "If I was a principal, I would give free books, notebooks and backpacks to all the Syrian students and all other students that are in need." S10: "If I was a teacher, I would not do oral exams so that children would not be stressed." S31: "Washbasins are not clean; toilet paper and soap are not available." S37: "If I was a teacher, I would not always choose the same students for the activities." S38: "Students usually go to the principal with fear. If I were the principal, my students would not come to me afraid." S39: "I do not think that what we learned in Arabic class will be useful. We forget it very easily anyways." S81: "Our principal speaks for a very long time ceremonies. Our bags are already very heavy, we get tired." S87: "We are very tired when we carry our bags. It would be nice if there were lockers at school and a place where we could rest when we got tired." S89: "The girls' lavatory is not clean, we don't have a gym, and we cannot do the physical education lesson properly." S90: "I wonder where in life we will use the algebraic expressions we see in mathematics in our lives." S91: "There were times when I said, 'I wish I didn't go to school'. Especially when I had not done my homework." S93: "The same people are always chosen in the plan/program, so sometimes I don't want to go to school." S114: "Eighth grades are deprived of activities because there is LGS. A football tournament could be held." S116: "Our backpacks are is very heavy. We do not have a locker at school. My ideal school is like the schools in those cartoons. Everyone has their own closet, and each lesson is held in a different classroom." S120: "I say the words 'I wish I did not come to school' every day. Because I have to get up very early." S125: "We all see the same lessons just like the doctor gives all the patients the same prescription. We are asked to understand all the lessons." S130: "One of the problems in this school is that the library is closed even at noon." S133: "When I can't get my sleep, I say 'I wish I didn't go to school'. Attention should be paid to all students, not just the hardworking students." S134: "If I was a principal, I would put not only girls but also boys on duty." S136: "The teachers' words during the first few hours feel like a lullaby. For this reason, I said, 'I wish I had not come'." S137: "It is very nice that our teachers work for us. However, I think some lessons are unnecessary for my future goal, profession. I do not want to study those lessons." S140: "I think the eighth grade should be specially dealt with. It would be better to do activities occasionally because we are constantly studying." S143: "When my homework is not complete, I say, 'I wish I did not go'. Because it is embarrassing to be called out in front of everyone." S144: "I do not like school clothes at all. When I see them, I say, 'I wish I didn't go.'" S145: "I think that the Quran and Math lessons will be useful, but the Arabic lesson will not."

3.3 Expectations of IHSS Students

The expectations of Imam Hatip Secondary School students are concentrated under six headings. The most important expectations of the students are seen as emotional expectations. They expect their teachers to be more interested in them and their administrators to show less angry attitudes. In connection with the department in which they express their problems, extending the breaks, eliminating the necessity of school uniform and reducing the variety of lessons are other expectations of the students. The topics related to the expectations of students about school life and education are shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Expectations of IHSS Students

Theme	Code	f
Expectations of IHSS Students	Teachers chat with them before starting the lesson.	75
	School principals are not angry.	66
	Free clothing practice at school.	53
	Lesson diversity reduction.	48
	Longer breaks.	46
	Improving physical facilities.	28

The opinions of the students about their expectations are as follows: S4: "If I were a manager, I would not allow the sale of harmful things in the canteen. I would have the disabled lane built; I would cover the school with a carpet." S6: "In my ideal school, everyone has a single and soft chair." S9: "In my ideal school, there is grass instead of garden concrete and there are soft cushions at the desks." S34: "If I was a teacher, I would give extra lessons to those who do not understand. If I were the headmaster, I would learn the wishes of my students by making regular surveys." S37: "If I was a teacher, I would talk to them when my students were upset." S39: "My ideal school is a school where we can wear a sweater on our school uniform, where we have our own locker and we sit on soft cushions." S40: "I wish I was a

principal. I would go to the children, ask their wishes, and consult their ideas. I would also make sure that the sinks are more hygienic." S85: "My ideal school is a place where the lessons and breaks are half an hour and the school is carpeted, that is, like our home." Ö86: "If I were a manager, I would not make school uniforms compulsory. If I were a teacher, I would not give homework, I would only ask my students to read books. It would be great if they took our opinion about the school bell and the uniforms." Ö95: "If I was a teacher, I would take care of my students and try to make the lessons fun." S113: "If I was the headmaster, I would not be angry so that the children would not run away when they saw me. If I were a teacher, I would love my students, listen to their problems and share my problems with them." S115: "Most teachers start writing on the board as soon as they enter the classroom. If I were a teacher, I would chat a little bit and then start the lesson." S121: "There is a room in my ideal school and in this room we can convey all our requests and ideas to our teachers." S128: "If I was a teacher, when I entered the class, I would start the lesson after motivating my students to lesson. Therefore, for the lessons would be more fun." S131: "Our expectation is for lots of trips/excursions to be organized, especially for the 8th grade students to the high schools they want to study." S138: "If I was a principal, I would be a sweet principal who was more interested in students." S139: "If I was a teacher, I would do at least one hour of my weekly lessons by doing a book-reading hour in the library." S141: "If I was a teacher, I would not always teach, sometimes I would sing. I would do extra-curricular activities and make my students happy." S142: "If I was the headmaster, I would opened the wish box every month and fulfill the requests of the students."

4. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the results of this qualitative research conducted in Istanbul scale in order to determine the problems and expectations of Imam Hatip Secondary School students in their schools; it was determined that the students were generally satisfied with their school. As the things that the students are most satisfied with in their schools; they stated that teachers and school management strive for their own well-being, that there is a religious education at school, LGS courses are organized and there are physical facilities such as library, and smart board. There are similar findings in the literature. The students who study at Imam Hatip schools prefer these schools to learn the mostly religious information (Ateş, 2016; Çınar, 2018; Şatır, 2019), and the most important reason for the satisfaction of the students studying in these schools is the provision of religious education (Altundaş, 2019; Çalışkanoğlu, 2018) are the results revealed in the previous research. The students stated the points they did not like in their schools as follows; school uniform is compulsory, mobile phones are forbidden, toilets have cleaning problems, they have to understand too many the lessons. In Imam Hatip Secondary Schools, where male and female students study together, male students said that discrimination was made in favor of girls.

The students stated that they had emotional expectations from their teachers and administrators such as interest and a smiling face. They said that they were very afraid that their teachers and administrators would be angry and yell at them. They stated that they expected their teachers to chat with them before starting the lesson. In the literature, it is emphasized that the middle school period is the period when students are more willing to learn and want to establish a better relationship with their teachers and satisfy them (Aktaş, 2017). Çalışkanoğlu (2018) stated that the most important features that students want to have in their teachers are "sincerity" and "valuing the student"; it expresses that the characteristics of "knowledge", "loving the teaching profession" and "physical appearance" come after sincerity and caring for the student (Çalışkanoğlu, 2018). This is because the negative attitudes of administrators and teachers can cause young people to move away from religion and school in a period when they are sensitive about religious issues, when religious doubts are intensified, and they experience independence and personality confusion (Altundaş, 2019).

The students stated that, thanks to their education at an Imam Hatip Secondary School, they were able to learn religious lessons, memorize the Holy Qur'an, learn from foreign teachers because of the projects such as the language (English-Arabic) projects, and participate in various competitions. They said that they felt closer to their parents because they were studying in this school. They also stated that they were happy in this school; because although it is a religious school, they are not forced to perform some religious rituals such as prayer and hijab. They said that their knowledge increased thanks to the seminars held in their schools and thus they felt more social. They stated that they saw more value in their families and their surroundings thanks to the religious knowledge they learned at school. They expressed that they were very happy that their elders congratulate them when they prayed for food in a guesthouse and brought a "iqama" before prayer. In his study, Terlemez (2019) states that parents who send their child to an Imam Hatip School

are happy when their children perform religious rituals such as praying for food, reading the Holy Qur'an and praying. As a result, the fact that adults say "mashallah" and appreciate them makes the students feel special, and the students are more accepted in out-of-school adult settings (Terlemez, 2019). It can be said that the fact that students love and are interested in lessons related to religious education increases their learning desire and motivation in general (Çiftçi, 2019).

The students said that they wanted to come to school to see their friends and participate in various activities and that the school was more fun than home. Because the influence of peer groups on middle school students is increasing; for students, the peer group is prioritized over their families (Köylü & Nazıroğlu, 2012). In the literature, it is stated that the friendship environment in the school increases the satisfaction of the students (Çalışkanoğlu, 2018), social and cultural activities in the schools, especially the activities carried out in connection with the vocational lessons in Imam Hatip schools, contribute to the socialization of the students and the feeling of "us" between them (Terlemez, 2019). In another study, it is stated that a student who feels accepted in the school environment has a higher motivation to learn and commit to school, and accordingly, the student's school performance and learning process quality increases (Atik & Yerin Güneri, 2015). The students stated that what made them say, "I wish I did not go" is waking up from sleep in the morning and an assignment that has not been done.

The students thought of their ideal principal in a profile that was not angry, gave more classroom hours to the classroom counselor teachers, and frequently listened to students' requests by conducting surveys. Aşlamacı and Eker (2016) state that effective communication opportunities that students will establish with their teachers and administrators will contribute to the formation of a school climate where they will feel happy (Aşlamacı & Eker, 2016). In their study on Project Imam Hatip Schools, Koç and Baştaş (2019) also highlighted that school principals should pay attention to the social relationships, needs and wishes of their students in order to improve the quality of life in their schools and emphasized that schools that can achieve this are more effective (Koç & Bastas, 2019). For the teacher of their ideals, they have drawn a profile that listens to the problems of their students, does not start the lesson immediately, and repeats the subjects they do not understand during recess and makes their students feel precious. In her study, Taş Akarsu (2018) states that secondary school students evaluate the school as a social society before evaluating it as an official and rules institution. In addition, she states that the managements and teachers' approaches to students in the framework of "human values and respect" can make students feel more valuable at school and connect more to their school (Taş Akarsu, 2018).

Most of the students think that the lessons they study will benefit them in the future. They said that this benefit is valid both for the exams they will take in high school and university and for the professions they will perform. They stated that especially mathematics, English and religious lessons would benefit more. There are similar findings in the literature. According to Özyiğit (2018), the idea of students getting a good education and having a good profession as a result is more important in their school preferences than other social opportunities provided by the school (Özyiğit, 2018). In a study about the project schools where education is carried out with more flexible curricula within Imam Hatip Schools, it is stated that the program diversity applied in these schools has a significant contribution to the more effective Imam Hatip schools (Koç, 2019). However, some students are hesitant whether Arabic and technology-design lessons will be useful to them or not. In another study for Imam Hatip Secondary School students, only Arabic was included among the lessons related to religious education amongst the three lessons that the students did not like and had difficulty with (Aşlamacı, 2017b).

The students described the school of their ideals as a school where they can wear the clothes they want, where they would only attend the lessons they wanted, where they had longer breaks hours and more comfortable chairs instead of wooden chairs. Aşlamacı (2017) shares the conclusion that two-thirds of the students who participated in the research found casual clothing positive (Aşlamacı, 2017a).

In the light of these results, various measures can be taken in Imam Hatip Secondary Schools to enable students to connect more with the school. In this context, the following suggestions can be presented:

- Teachers can have short conversations with their students before starting the lesson,
- A casual clothing practice can be applied on certain days of the week,

- Motivation activities can be held for the lessons that the students are hesitant about whether they will benefit them in the future,
- The staff can be more meticulous in toilet cleaning at schools,
- The environments where students can exhibit their religious knowledge alongside adults can be increased,
- In addition, most importantly, school and education can be developed in line with their wishes and needs by holding frequent meetings with students.

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