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Views of Classroom Teachers about the Use of out of School Learning Environments

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Abstract

One of the major goals for education is to provide information that can be used by students in daily life. In this context learning environments out of schools are significant. The aim of this study is to identify the views of the classroom teachers about the use of learning environments out of schools. The participants of the study were 21 classroom teachers. The data were collected through the face to face interviews. The findings indicated that the majority of the classroom teachers regarded the learning environments out of school as museums, field visits, mosques and health clinics. They reported that such learning environments can be used for life sciences, social studies and science courses. The contributions of the learning environments out of school were stated by the participants as follows: making learning long-lasting, socialization, improving student interest, learning by doing. The potential problems related to the learning environments out of school stated by the participants are as follows: granting permission, security, financial problems and transportation. In order to faciliate more frequent use of the learning environments out of school they suggested that bureaucratic procedures should be less, and financial support by the ministry of national education should be given. In light of the findings it can be said that the most frequent learning environments which classroom teachers were stated that historical places and institutions; the less used one were stated that art places and virtual places. The following suggestions are developed based on the results of the study: Classroom teachers may be informed about learning out of school through in-service training activities. Pre-service teachers may be informed about it in teacher training programs; Permission procedure can be made much easier. In learning activities out of school procedures may not involve such requirements; state may support for learning out of school through financial support and transportation; various activities can be planned to support for cooperation between schools and society; teachers may be supported by guides and administrators during the learning activities out of school.

Keywords: learning out of school, learning environments out of school, classroom teachers, view

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Sınıf Öğretmenlerinin Okul Dışı Öğrenme Ortamlarından Yararlanmaya İlişkin Görüşleri

Öz

Okul dışı öğrenme genişletme, içerik ve öğretim yöntemleri olmak üzere üç boyutta ele alınabilir. Genişletme boyutu: Toplumun, doğal çevrenin ve çalışılan konunun yapılandırılmış öğrenme etkinlikleriyle okul dışına taşınmasıdır. İçerik boyutu: Doğal çevre ve onun ilişkileri hakkındaki bilgileri, okul dışında kullanılacak özel becerileri ya da insanın çevreyle ilişkisini, birey ve toplum olarak insanın çevre üzerindeki etkisini içerebilir. Son boyut olarak okul dışı öğretim, çeşitli konulardaki kavramları anlama becerilerini geliştirmek için etkinlikleri kullanan; bilişsel, duyuşsal ve psikomotor alanlar arasındaki bağlantıları sağlayan bir yöntemdir. Çocuğun gelişiminde ders dışı etkinlikler, ders içi faaliyetler kadar önemlidir. Ancak okullarımızda ders dışı etkinliklere yeterince yer verilmemektedir. Bu araştırmanın temel amacı sınıf öğretmenlerinin okul dışı öğrenme ortamlarından yararlanmaya ilişkin görüşlerinin belirlenmesidir. Araştırma verileri 2015-2016 öğretim yılı güz döneminde Afyon ilinde 21 sınıf öğretmeni ile yapılan yüz yüze görüşmeler ile elde edilmiştir. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak, sınıf öğretmenlerin okul dışı öğrenme ortamlarından yararlanmaya ilişkin görüşlerini belirlemek amacıyla araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen ve 5 açık uçlu sorudan oluşan görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Veriler betimsel analiz ile çözümlenmiş, elde edilen görüşler frekans ve yüzdeler ile tablolar halinde sunulmuştur. Sınıf öğretmenlerinin görüşleri okul dışı öğrenme ortamları, okul dışı öğrenme ortamlarından en çok yararlanılan dersler, okul dışı öğrenme ortamlarından yararlanmanın öğrenciye katkıları, okul dışı öğrenme ortamlarından yararlanmada yaşanan sorunlar ve çözüm önerileri temaları altında ele alınmıştır. Sınıf öğretmenlerinin okul dışı öğrenme ortamlarından yararlanmaya ilişkin görüşleri incelendiğinde sınıf öğretmenlerinin en sık yararlandıkları okul dışı ortamları olarak tarihi mekânları ve kurum/kuruluşları belirttikleri; en az yararlanılan ortamlar olarak ise sanatsal mekânlar ve sanal ortamları belirttikleri belirlenmiştir. Elde edilen sonuçlar ışığında sınıf öğretmenlerinin farklı derslerdeki kazanımları sanat ve sanatsal mekânlarla disiplinler arası yaklaşımla ilişkilendirmelerini sağlayacak çeşitli uygulama örnekleri geliştirilmesi ve bu örneklere programda da yer verilmesi; bunun yanı sıra sanal öğrenme ortamlarına ilişkin farkındalık geliştirmelerini sağlayacak çeşitli seminerlerle bilgilendirilmeleri önerilebilir.

Keywords: learning out of school, learning environments out of school, classroom teachers, view

Introduction

In recent period people may learn everywhere, including home, school and workplace and it has made learning a life-long activity (Bozdoğan and Yalçın, 2006). Therefore, learning cannot be limited to formal school education and it may occur out of schools (Yavuz, 2012). People may make use of their learning in daily life. Learning cannot occur only in lectures or in formal education delivered in schools. Beginning by birth people may learn from their parents, family members, friends, other people as well as from television, movies, plays, museum visits, books, newspapers and magazine throughout their life (Türkmen, 2010).

There many different definitions of learning out of school. For instance, Karademir (2013) argued that learning activities out of schools aim at complementing gains of several courses. Priest (1986) suggested that learning out of school is an experiential process in which discovery is the basis. Öztürk (2009) defines learning out of school as a education which is delivered in nature and immediate environment and which covers learning activities that are less structured and simultaneous. Bunting (2006, p. 4) regards learning out of school as a way to apply formal learning to related contexts. Binbaşıoğlu (2000, p. 9) argued that learning activities out of school are systematic and well-planed and are conducted in accordance with student interest to improve their personality with the permission of school management. Salmi (1993) stated that learning out of school is an education which makes use of out of school places and institutions. Learning out of school is a connection between formal and informal education. Payne (1985, p. 2) defines it as a teaching method or strategy in which students can take part in activities which are not possible to be used in classroom. there are also views about learning out of school which equate it with field trips and picnics. However, such activities are just fun for students. Therefore, learning out of school is closely related to course content (Karademir, 2013). The basis for learning out of school is the use of out of school environment for learning purposes and is to use theoretical learning in daily life.

One of the desired goals of education is to provide knowledge that can be used in daily life. Therefore, learning activities out of school are very significant to complement student learning (Kıyıcı and Yiğit, 2010). Such activities reinforce formal learning and show students that their learning is closely related to daily life. It is not possible to make a distinction between formal learning and learning activities out of school. However, learning activities out of school should be controlled, programmed and planned (Köse, 2013). Tatar and Bağrıyanık (2012) argue that learning out of school focuses on an active interaction between students and environment. In this process instead of having directly information from teachers (passive learning), students can construct information taken from environment (active learning). Chin (2004) suggests that museums, science centers, zoos, botany gardens can encourage students to be interested in science, which are both flexible and creative. Therefore, such environments can be used in learning out of school. Major advantages of learning out of school can be given as follow:

- It may complement formal learning activities, meet student needs and interest and provide an opportunity to become good citizens (Bunting, 2006, p. 5).
- It may reinforce formal learning activities, make it possible for students to actively take part in learning process and to find answers of their questions (Tatar and Bağrıyanık, 2012).
- It may reinforce positive attitudes, values and beliefs of students and provide an opportunity to transfer them into behaviour (Lakin, 2006).
- It may improve social relations of students (Orion et. al., 1997).
- It combines multidisciplinary course plans with experience-based teaching methods allowing for students to become active thinkers. In addition, it makes all these cognitive processes attractive for students (Bunting, 2006, p. 5).

Lakin (2006) categorized learning activities out of school into three groups: attitudes and emotions, information and understanding, and personal and social development. It was also stated that learning activities out of school are fun and have positive and significant effects on students' attitudes, values and beliefs. Dillon et. al. (2006) argued that students remember learning activities out of school for long periods of time. However, just remembering activities may not indicate that these activities represent learning. The major goal of learning out of school is to provide efficient student learning. In developed countries learning activities out of school are attached significance. Schools in such countries have expanded their facilities and personnel to accomodate the requeirements of learning activities out of school. On the other hand, learning activities out of school are closely affected and varied by the facilities of school, the attitude of school administration and parents, teachers' competency levels, and student neds. Therefore, such activities may vary based on facilities of schools and public support (Köse, 2013).

Bunting (2006) argued that learning out od school has three dimensions: expansion, content, and methods. Expansion refers to the fact that the topic at hand is transfered to out of school environment through activities. The content may include the interaction in natural environment and between people and environment as well as the effects of environment on people. Learning out of school is a method which provides a connection between cognitive, affective and psychomotor fields.

As stated earlier such learning activities are signficant as much as formal learning activities in the development of children. However, in Turkey learning activities out of school are not so much common. The reasons for it seem to be heavy requirements of the curriculum, insufficient information about these activities and lack of sources in schools. The other major factor is that such learning activities are not planned and lack of systematical approach (Köse, 2013). Simmons (1998) found that teachers did not feel themselves competent in providing learning out of school and had some concerns about the safety of students. They also reported that they needed in-service training about learning out of school. Dillon et. al. (2006) argued that problems related to learning out of school can be divided into two groups as external and internal. External problems include safety and health concerns of teachers and students, lack of self-efficacy, demands of formal education, lack of

time, source and support. Internal problems are reported to be the students' age, prior knowledge, experience, concerns, learning styles and preferences, as well as ethnical differences.

There are numerous studies on the use of learning out of school for certain courses (Taşoğlu, 2010; Karademir, 2013; Güler, 2011; Kıyıcı and Yiğit, 2010; Çavuş et. al., 2010; Hakverdi Can, 2013; Bozdoğan and Yalçın, 2006; Kılıç and Şen, 2014; Tatar and Bağrıyanık, 2012; Bozdoğan, 2007; Bozdoğan and Yalçın, 2009, Türkmen, 2010; Kurtuluş, 2015, Dillon, 2006; Simmons, 1998). However, the views of classroom teachers about learning out of school have not been studies. Information about the views of classroom teachers about learning out of school may guide the use of it. The aim of this study is to reveal the views of classroom teachers about learning out of school. In parallel to this aim the study tries to answer the following research questions:

- Which learning environments are used by the participants in learning out of school?
- For the participants does learning out of school contribute to the courses? What are these courses?
- What do they think about the contributions learning out of school to students?
- What do they think about the problems related to learning out of school?
- What do they think about the ways to improve learning out of school?

Method

The model, participants, data collection and data analysis are given in this section.

Research Model

The study is modeled on qualitative research methods which employs the data collection techniques such as observation, interviews and document analysis. Such an apporach attempts to reveal perceptions and events in natural conditions as a whole (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). Descriptive studies tries to describe th topic at hand as it is (Büyüköztürk et. al., 2014). Descriptive methods have a significant role in identifying the characteristics of facts (Hepner et. al., 2015).

Participants

A total of 21 teachers working at public schools serving lower, medium and high socioeconomic status children in Afyon during the school year of 2015-2016 was participated in the study. They were selected using criterion-based sampling technique, which is part of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling techniques provides an opportunity to analyse the topic at hand in depth. Criterion-based sampling technique requires the selection of subjects based on pre-determined criteria (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). The criteria used in the study were the working at public schools serving lower, medium and high socioeconomic status children. In

addition, those teachers who were volunteer were chosen. Table 1 indicates the demographical characteristics of the participants:

Table 1

Demographical Characteristics of Participants

		f	%
Gender	Female	11	52,38
	Male	10	47,62
Professional experience	0-4 years	1	4,76
	5-9 years	8	38,09
	10-14 years	6	28,57
	15-19 years	1	4,76
	20 years and more than 20 years	5	23,80
Educational back ground	Two-year higher education	1	4,76
	Undergraduate	19	90,47
	Graduate	1	4,76
Field of teaching	Classroom teaching	17	80,95
	French language and literature	1	4,76
	Biology	2	9,52
	Geophysics engineering	1	4,76

Table 1 shows half of 21 classroom teachers are female participants. Nearly all of the participants (90,47%) had undergraduate education. The majority are the graduates of classroom teaching (80,95%).

Data Collection Process

The data of the study were collected using an interview form with five open-ended items which was developed by the authors. The draft interview form was reviewed by five field specialists. Then based on their feedback the form was reorganized. Then it was administrated to five classroom teachers in a pliot study. Based on the findings from pilot study the form was finalized.

Data Analysis Process

The data collected were analysed using descriptive methods. The data were interpreted based on the themes and discussed based on cause-effect relations (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). The analysis was carried out following three steps: reduction of the data, presentation of the data and correction/confirmation (Türnüklü, 2000). Direct quotations were used and those used in the text were selected based on three criteria: interesting, explanatory and marginality (Ünver, Bümen and Başbay, 2010).

The statements of the participants were analysed by the authors and a field specialist and categorized as mutually agreed and disagreed ones. The reliablity was

established using the formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The reliability coefficient was found to be P = 89, indicating the reliability of the study.

Findings

The findings are given in tables with frequency and percentages. Table 2 presents the views of the participants about the types of learning out of school.

Table 2

Views of the Participants about the Types of Learning out of School

Places		**f**	**%**
Historical places	Museums	17	80,95
	Historical places	7	33,33
	Anıtkabir	1	4,76
Institutions	Libraries	6	28,57
	Local administrative units	6	28,57
	Health-care units	4	19,04
	Science centers	2	9,52
	Post office	1	4,76
	Nursing home	1	4,76
	NGOs	1	4,76
	Meteorology directorate	1	4,76
Art places	Cinema	4	19,04
	Theatre	4	19,04
Natural places	Picnic areas	5	23,80
	Zoos	3	14,28
	Nature (sea, forest etc.)	2	9,52
	Botany gardens	1	4,76
	Underwater museums	1	4,76
Social places	Parks	6	28,57
	Mosques	5	23,80
	Grocery	2	9,52
	Local market	2	9,52
Educational institutions	School garden	2	9,52
	Universities	1	4,76
	Public education centers	1	4,76
	Knowledge homes	1	4,76
Virtual places	Virtual visits	1	4,76
	Field trips	1	4,76
	Documentary	1	4,76

As can be seen in Table 2 the participants referred to learning environments out of school as historical places, institutions, NGOs, art places, nature, toplumsal alanlar, educational institutions, virtual environments.

They mostly reported historical places, while virtual environments were less reported. The most frequently reported learning environments out of school are museums, historical places, libraries, parks, local administrative units, picnic areas, and mosques. The following statements exemplify their views about learning environments out of school:

> *"For me learning environments out of school are those places where people do something... ıt may be homes. gardens, play grounds, parks, nature, and other places where we may learn something. Such environments can be everywhere. I mostly use museums and mosques."*

> *"Learning environments out of school are those places where children can learn by doing, including school yard, game grounds, libraries, museums. In addition, mosques, all places which may contribute to learning can be considered to be learning environments out of school."*

> *"Learning environments out of school are those places which may contribute to learning. For instance, museums and theatres, historical places, forests, zoos and similar places..."*

> *"Museums, parks, local market, local health-care unites… everywhere we may deliver the course out of school."*

The views of the participants about the courses which can be delivered though learning out of school are given in Table 3.

Table 3

Views of the Participants about the Courses which can be Delivered Though Learning out of School

Courses	**f**	**%**
Life sciences	13	61,90
Social studies	9	42,85
Science	8	38,09
Mathematics	5	23,80
Turkish language	2	9,52
Visual arts	2	9,52
Religious culture and moral knowledge	1	4,76
Physical training	1	4,76

As can be seen in Table 3 the participants suggested that most proper courses for learning out of school are life sciences, social studies and science. The following statements exemplify their views about this point:

> *"It is most proper for life sciences. As the name implies this course is about the knowledge of life. Therefore, this course can be delivered anywhere in life. Students may not easily understand theoretical knowledge, so it would be better to teach in environment."*

"It is useful for verbal courses. We use it for social studies courses. Because it is closely related to the units such as natural environments, society. Historical places, historical objects and work. It parallels with course content. So it is better to those environments."

"It suits for both life sciences and science. For instance, we should show an insect to children, we can easily find it outside. Students can also review animals outside. In life sciences course the topic of cleaning can be explained outside."

As stated earlier, for learning out of school the participants mostly stated the courses of life sciences, social studies and science. The reason for it is that life science is closely related to life. Table 4 shows the views of the participants about the benefits of learning out of school.

Table 4

Views of the Participants about the Benefits of Learning out of School

Benefits of Learning out of School	**f**	**%**
Permanent learning	15	71,40
Socialization	13	61,90
Student interest	9	42,85
Learning by doing	8	38,09
Student achievement	5	23,80
Connection between learning and daily life	4	19,04
Making learning easier	4	19,04
Using senses	3	14,28
Developmental benefits	3	14,28
Equal opportunity	2	9,52
Student experience	2	9,52
Skill acquisition	2	9,52
Better interaction between teacher and students	1	4,76
Making learning concrete	1	4,76
Applying learning	1	4,76

Table 4 indicates that the majority of the participants reported that learning out of school makes learning permanent. They also argued that it faciliates socialization and improves student interest and learning by doing. Therefore, they thought that it has many benefits for students. The following statements show their views about the contributions of learning out of school:

"It makes it possible for students to see and to learn something. Therefore, their learning becomes more permanent. It is also much more fun for them, so their interest improves."

"It has many benefits. It contributes student learning. They can learn fast, their learning becomes permanent."

"It is certainly useful, because in courses they get theoretical learning but they they can apply their learning to places they visited. They can learn by seeing. It is very useful."

"Students learn abstract knowledge in class. But if they visit related places their learning becomes concrete. I think it is very useful in making their learning concrete and in transforming it into acts."

Table 5 presents the views of the participants about the problems in employing learning out of school.

Table 5

Views of the Participants about the Problems in Employing Learning out of School

Problems in Employing Learning out of School	**f**	**%**
Permission	15	71,42
Security	11	52,38
Finance	10	47,61
Transportation	7	33,33
Discipline	5	23,80
Staff support	3	14,28
Time constraints	1	4,76
Crowded class	1	4,76
Unfamiliarity by students	1	4,76
Weather conditions	1	4,76
Harmful websites	1	4,76

As can be seen in Table 5 the most frequently stated problems in using learning out of school by the participants are permission, security, finance and transportation. The following statements show their views about problems in using learning out of school:

"Due to problems we could not use it very often. We should take permission for it from the local education unit. We sould also take permission from the places to be visited."

"We should plan each step of the learning out of school. We must find a vehicle. We must take into consideration security of the students. So all these should be financed. Sometimes students do not want to take place in visits."

"Problems... the most significant problem is that the procedures are very complicated. Permission, finance, transportation. All these are significant problems for us."

"Transportation is very significant problem. Because we should bring nearly twenty or thirty students."

"Problems… the most major one is granting permission… It takes long time. In addition, finding a vehicle is also problematic, it costs higher. We could not be sure that it is safe."

"We must take permission. The procedures are really complicated. Transportation is another problems. If the class is crowded it is hard to manage them."

Table 6 shows the suggestions of the participant to make learning out of school more productive.

Table 6

Suggestions of the Participants to make Learning out of School More Productive

Suggestions of the Participants	**f**	**%**
Financial support by the ministry	17	80,95
Reduction of procdures	11	52,38
Transportation	8	38,09
Plans by teachers	6	28,57
Reduction of program demands	3	14,28
Support from other institutions	3	14,28
Guidance	3	14,28
Expansion of learning environments	1	4,76
Technological support	1	4,76
Sharing responsibility	1	4,76

Table 6 shows that the majority of the participants suggested that the ministry should provide financial support, procedures should be less complicated and transportation support should be provided. Their views are exemplified as follows:

"To make it more productive... either the ministry of parents should provide financial support, they should encourage us. It should be easier if municipality provide the transportation, if parents have positive views about it."

"We should have financial support. But curriculum is another problem. It is very demanding. So we do not have enough time. Therefore, if demands are reduced or if curriculum supports learning out of school and research we can easily organize it."

"Procedures can be made much easier. In the visits we should be accompanied by either a guide or a school administrator to reduce management problems. If local education units have vehicles we may employ it for this purpose."

"Schools may have their own vehicle which can be used for visits. Permission-related procedures can be much easier. In addition, curriculum demands can be reduced."

"Permission-related procedures can be much easier. Less ducments may be required. Financial support should also be given to students. If vehicles are provided by institutions we may go visits more frequently."

"Curriculum demands can be reduced. Permissions should be given much more easily and we must be accompanied by someone or school administrators to help us."

Table 7 shows the most frequently visited places reported by the participants.

Table 7

Most frequently visited places reported by the participants

Places	**f**	**%**
Museums	7	33,33
Field visits	5	23,80
Mosques	2	9,52
Local health-care units	1	4,76
Craftsmen shops	1	4,76
Virtual visits	1	4,76
Post offices	1	4,76

As can be seen in Table 7 the most frequently visited areas for learning out of schools are reported by the participants are museums, field trips, and mosques. The following quotations show their views:

"In life sciences course we visited local health-care unit while teaching the unit of occupations. They met physicians and nurses there. They talked to them. It was fun for students."

"We visited post office, and we made observations."

"We visited museums. They liked it. They saw several objects, equipment there. They became happy.

"In the there was a unit about the mosques week. It was in religion course. so we visited a mosque: students observed several parts of it such as pulpit, altar, etc."

Conclusion and Suggestions

For the participants the learning environments out of school were museums, historical places, libraries and parks. the most frequently visited areas for learning out of schools are reported by the participants are museums, field trips, local health-care units and mosques. Çengelci (2013) found that the majority of teachers regarded field visits, libraries and cinemas as learning environments out of school. The participants reportd that learning out of school was mostly useful for the courses of life sciences, social studies and science.

They thought that learning out of school has many benefits for students. The majority of the participants reported that learning out of school makes learning permanent. They also argued that it faciliates socialization and improves student interest and learning by doing. It makes it possible for students to learn by doing and by using senses, to improve student achievement and student learning. The findings of the study are in consistency with the following findings. Bozdoğan (2007) found that science centers are significant in improving student interest and academic achievement. Kılıç and Şen (2014) concluded that learning out of school created a significant difference in student attitudes towards physics course. Kıyıcı and Yiğit (2010) argued that field visits contributed to students' ability to make a connection between their learning and daily life through providing first-hand experience. Tatar and Bağrıyanık (2009) stated that learning activities out of school are significant in learning by doing and that such activities improve student interest. Orion et al. (1997) argued that when active student involvement is realized learning out of school could produce more gains and significant learning. Ramey-Gassert (1997) remarked that learning out of school improves student motivation and is fun for students.

The participants reported that they were aware of the benefits of learning out of school, but due to various problems they cannot frequently employ it. The most frequently cited problem was taking permission. They also mentioned other problems, including security, finance, transportation, discipline, staff support, time constraints, crowded class, unfamiliarity by students, weather conditions and harmful websites. The other findings also indicate simlar problems. For instance, Kenny (2009) found that both teachers and school administrators do not easily get involved in learning out of school due to time constraints and transportation although they know its benefits. Bozdoğan and Yalçın (2009) concluded that teachers cannot employ science and technology museums sufficiently due to certain problems such as lack of financial support, transport, demanding curriculum and difficult permission procedures. Dillion et. al. (2006) found that teachers cannot frequently employ learning out of school due to such concerns as health and security, heavy curriculum demands, time constraints, insufficient information about it, and lack of source. Karademir (2013) concluded that the majority of teachers use learning environments out of school, but they avoid using them due to several problems mentioned above.

In the study the participants suggested that in order to make it productive procedures should be made easier. They also suggested that the ministry should assist it through financial support and transportation. The other suggestions are as follows: planning by teachers, support by other institutions, provision of guidance, technological support and sharing responsibility. Çengelci (2013) found that teachers prefered to carry out learning out of school with parents, other institutions and NGOs. The findings of the study mentioned are consistent with the present findings.

The participants reported that they mostly employed museums as learning environment out of school. They also reported that similar activities were carried out covering field visits, mosques and post offices.

The following suggestions are developed based on the results of the study:

- Classroom teachers may be informed about learning out of school through in-service training activities. Pre-service teachers may be informed about it in teacher training programs
- Permission procedure can be made much easier. In learning activities out of school procedures may not involve such requirements.
- State may support for learning out of school through financial support and transportation.
- Various activities can be planned to support for cooperation between schools and society.
- Teachers may be supported by guides and administrators during the learning activities out of school.

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