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PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY: IMPLEMENTATION OF HALF DAY AND FULL DAY SCHOOL LEARNING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS LAMPUNG PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to explore the subjective experiences of principals, teachers, parents, and students in implementing the half-day (4–5 hours/day) and full-day (7–8 hours/day) school systems in elementary schools in Lampung Province. Using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and focus group discussions in six elementary schools (three public and three private) representing urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. Thirty-two participants were purposively selected. The study identified five main themes: dynamics of curricular and non-curricular adjustments; diverse perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of each system; impacts on academic achievement, motivation, psychological well-being, and character of children; implementation constraints (infrastructure, human resources, socio-culture); and parental preferences influenced by occupation, economic access, and local values. The findings show that no single system is universally superior. The half-day system is more beneficial for family togetherness and preventing cognitive fatigue, while the full-day system is superior in structured supervision and character development. A hybrid model is recommended as the fairest solution. Policy implications include the need for minimum standards for full-day schools, affirmative subsidies for underdeveloped regions, and critical pedagogy training for teachers.

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INTRODUCTION
Changes in global socio-economic structures, particularly the increased participation of mothers in the workforce and rapid urbanization, have shifted child-rearing patterns from the nuclear family toward greater reliance on formal educational institutions. The full-day school system (7–8 hours/day) has emerged as a response to the needs of full-time

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working parents, while also aiming to provide a structured environment that protects children from negative external influences (Strietholt et al., 2015; Ulhassan et al., 2022). Conversely, the half-day system (4–5 hours/day) persists in many regions, justified by the importance of balancing structured learning, free play, and family togetherness (Aliyah et al., 2018; Driessen & Langen, 2013). School duration is positively correlated with academic achievement, but the effect strongly depends on the quality of time spent (Elish et al., 2022). Children attending full-day schools have higher levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity, especially in structured extracurricular programs (Spengler et al., 2019). Thus, the tension between the two systems creates complex policy dilemmas at national and local levels, since each choice carries consequences for the cognitive, socio emotional, and physical development of elementary school children.

In Indonesia, the peak of the polemic occurred in 2017 when the Ministry of Education and Culture issued Ministerial Regulation No. 23 of 2017 on School Days, mandating 8 hours/day for 5 days (Permendikbud No. 23 Tahun 2017 Tentang Hari Sekolah, 2017). This policy faced strong protests from teacher organizations, the *Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia* (KPAI), and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), arguing that it ignored infrastructure readiness, mental well-being of students and teachers, and cultural values that still uphold afternoon religious education (*Madrasah Diniyah*). At its peak, Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 revised the policy to be optional: schools together with local governments are given full authority to determine the learning time model according to regional characteristics, resource readiness, and local aspirations (PERPRES No. 87 Tahun 2017 tentang Penguatan Pendidikan Karakter, 2017). However, this optional policy did not run smoothly. Many schools experienced confusion in adjusting curriculum and time management (Netti & Hidayati, 2023).

Most teachers were not yet mentally and pedagogically ready to implement full-day learning, especially in managing long periods and designing varied activities (Rahmaeni & Kasmawati, 2024). This dynamic is an important background for phenomenological research in Lampung Province. Previous research has mostly used quantitative cross-sectional approaches that have not been able to capture the subjective meanings and contextual dynamics behind the choice of school time system. The research gap that this study seeks to fill is the lack of phenomenological exploration of how educational actors' principals, teachers, parents, and students personally interpret and respond to the dualism of time policies in Lampung Province, a region with high geographical, socio economic, and cultural diversity. The specific contribution of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing Lampung people's preferences for half-day or full-day systems, while formulating a contextual and equitable hybrid model.

Lampung Province, as the gateway to Sumatra Island with highly diverse characteristics (urban areas in Bandar Lampung, semi-urban in Central Lampung, rural/agrarian in West Lampung), serves as a unique social laboratory. Most of the population works in agriculture, plantations, and small to medium scale trade, with work schedules that do not always follow the 9 to 5 office rhythm. As a result, parental preferences vary greatly: in rural areas, many parents want children to return home early *(half-day)* to help with housework or family economic activities; in urban areas, parents working in the formal sector tend to prefer full-day school as a childcare solution that also provides quality education. Environmental context greatly influences students' adaptation success to the school system, including learning duration (Ghufron et al., 2022). Geographical differences, transportation access, and availability of educational infrastructure between coastal, lowland, and mountainous areas in Lampung also affect school readiness to optimally implement the full-day system. Based on these empirical facts, this phenomenological study is important to explore the meanings and subjective experiences of educational actors in Lampung in responding to the dualism of school time systems.

Theoretically, the half-day versus full-day school debate cannot be separated from child developmental psychology. Piaget explains that children aged 7–11 years *(elementary school)* are in the concrete operational stage, where the most effective learning is through direct experience, environmental exploration, and interaction with physical objects, not long lectures (Piaget, 1970). Learning durations that are too long without adequate breaks can reduce the effectiveness of information absorption and cause cognitive fatigue. Zhao et al (2023) how that lower-grade students (grades 1–3) have a lower threshold of cognitive load and therefore become tired and lose motivation faster in long sessions. Therefore, the half-day system, which provides space for exploration outside school, has strong theoretical justification from a cognitive development perspective (Zhao et al., 2023).

In contrast, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory provides a different justification that supports full-day schooling. Vygotsky explains that optimal learning occurs when children are assisted by a more competent individual

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(teacher or peer) to solve tasks that are slightly beyond their independent ability, in a process called scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1980). In full-day school, the longer duration allows teachers to provide more intensive and continuous scaffolding, monitor progress more closely, and give faster feedback . Hernández et al (2023), in their study of full-time schools in Mexico, found that full-day students had more stable academic trajectories, largely due to more intensive scaffolding opportunities. Sufficient peer interaction also enriches learning through collaboration and discussion. Thus, the choice between the two systems reflects different theoretical emphases about where and how the most effective learning should take place (Cabrera-Hernández et al., 2023).

Cognitive Load Theory Sweller, (2024) explains why overly long durations can be counterproductive. Human working memory has a very limited capacity (only 4–7 new information elements at a time); if information exceeds capacity, cognitive overload occurs, hindering storage in long-term memory (Sweller, 2024). Elementary school children have even more limited working memory capacity, thus needing more frequent breaks to consolidate information. Dong et al (2022) found that children aged 7–9 years are still highly dependent on external assistance to manage cognitive load (Dong et al., 2022). In the full-day context, 7–8 hours of learning without adequate breaks carries a high risk of causing cognitive overload, lowering motivation, increasing stress, and hindering conceptual understanding. In contrast, the half-day system with long afternoon breaks allows what is called "unconscious consolidation," i.e., natural memory strengthening while children rest or engage in leisurely activities.

Bronfenbrenner, (1979) ecological systems theory expands the half-day vs full-day debate into a broader social context, going beyond individual considerations of child cognition. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that child development is influenced by complex interactions between microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. In choosing a school time system, parents are influenced by their workplace *(exosystem),* support from the extended family microsystem (*whether grandparents can supervise children in the afternoon*), and the macrosystem of cultural values about the importance of afternoon religious education (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Policies that impose a uniform system without considering diverse ecological contexts will face strong resistance and risk failure in implementation. Therefore, a phenomenological approach is very appropriate to capture the complexity of meanings and experiences of educational actors in Lampung.

Based on the above background, this study aims to explore in depth the subjective experiences of principals, teachers, parents, and students in Lampung Province in implementing the half-day and full-day systems, and to understand the meanings they give to their choice of school time system. More specifically, this study answers: (1) how do educational actors in Lampung interpret their experiences in the half-day and full-day systems? (2) what factors influence their preferences? (3) what policy implications can be formulated based on these phenomenological findings to improve the quality of elementary education in Lampung Province.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design developed by (Smith et al., 2012). IPA was chosen because it is specifically designed to explore how participants make sense of personally meaningful life experiences, while acknowledging the active role of the researcher in the meaning-making process (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Smith et al., 2012) Unlike Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, which seeks to capture the essence of experience without researcher influence, IPA acknowledges that the researcher's understanding of participants' experiences is always mediated by the researcher's own interpretation. Through IPA, the researcher attempts to enter the participant's world, understand how they perceive and interpret their experiences, while remaining reflective of their own biases and subjective perspectives. This approach is highly suitable for exploring the half-day vs. full-day issue because each participant (principal, teacher, parent, student) has unique experiences and different meanings about the school time system they are undergoing.

The research was conducted in Lampung Province, selecting six elementary schools as locations: three public and three private spreads across Bandar Lampung City (urban, good infrastructure access), Central Lampung Regency (semi-urban/transitional), and West Lampung Regency (rural/mountainous, limited access). Purposive location selection aimed to capture rich variations from different socio-economic and geographical contexts. Thirty-two participants were recruited with the following criteria: (a) principals who have been running the half-day or full-day system for at least two

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years; (b) grade 2–5 classroom teachers; (c) parents whose children have been in the half-day or full-day system for at least one year; (d) grade 4–5 students able to communicate fluently. Participants consisted of 6 principals, 12 teachers (2 per school), 8 parents (2 from each half-day school and 2 from each full-day school), and 6 students.

Data were collected through (a) semi structured in-depth interviews (45–90 minutes per participant), (b) participant observation at each school for 3–5 days, and (c) focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers from the same school to explore collective dynamics. All interviews and FGDs were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Triangulation of data sources (principals, teachers, parents, students) and methods (interviews, observation, FGDs) strengthened validity. Analysis followed the six-stage IPA procedure (Smith, 2009): (1) reading and re-reading transcripts; (2) initial noting of linguistically, conceptually, and descriptively interesting points; (3) developing emergent themes; (4) searching for connections among emergent themes; (5) repeating the process for subsequent participants; (6) looking for patterns across cases. Analysis was assisted with NVivo 12 software. Data were considered saturated when no new themes emerged after the third and fourth interviews with each participant group. This was achieved after 32 participants. To ensure credibility, source and method triangulation and member checking (interview results confirmed back to participants) were performed. Transferability was enhanced by providing rich description of context. Dependability was ensured through a well-documented audit trail of the analysis process. Confirmability was maintained through researcher reflexivity throughout the research process, including a reflective journal to minimize bias.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Phenomenological analysis of interviews, observations, and FGD identified five main themes. Representative participant quotes are presented for each theme. In public half-day elementary schools, teachers reported having to complete all curriculum targets in a shorter time, thus tending to use intensive and dense methods in the morning, while extracurricular activities were very limited. A teacher in Central Lampung stated, *"We have to rush every day, sometimes the children don't have a long break."* This causes material accumulation and academic stress (Nakiah & Hamami, 2022). In contrast, in private full-day elementary schools, teachers have more flexibility to integrate character building, religious practices, and extracurricular activities *(arts, sports, scouting)* into the daily schedule. However, public elementary school principals who chose full-day faced significant constraints due to limited classrooms, healthy canteens, and open green spaces. As a result, the long hours were often filled with monotonous activities such as worksheets or material review. Without adequate facilities, full-day school becomes a burden (Wijayanti et al., 2025).

Urban formal-sector parents (bank employees, civil servants, private employees in Bandar Lampung) consistently chose full-day school because they feel more comfortable with their children under teacher supervision until afternoon, while also saving on childcare costs. A mother in Bandar Lampung said, *"I get off work at 5 PM, so full-day really helps because the child remains monitored."* Full-day school contributed 61.3% to student learning motivation (Yantoro et al., 2021). In contrast, rural parents in West Lampung (farmers, agricultural laborers, market traders) preferred half-day because they need children's help in taking care of siblings, housework, or supporting family economic activities. A father in West Lampung expressed, *"My child comes home at 11.30 AM, immediately helps me carry the harvest."* Full-day teachers acknowledged the greater opportunity to build emotional closeness with students but complained of physical and mental fatigue due to accompanying students from morning to afternoon without adequate breaks. Half-day students felt happier because they have more time to play at home, while full-day students felt proud because they considered themselves more productive and less exposed to negative gadget content.

Full-day teachers reported that grades 1–2 students often felt sleepy, lethargic, and had difficulty concentrating during afternoon lessons. Khayati, (2025) concluded that full-day has the potential to increase independence and emotional regulation but also causes emotional exhaustion and stress. Half-day students often spent their afternoons excessively using gadgets without parental supervision (Khayati, 2025). Boys were more difficult to adapt to full-day because of shorter attention spans and higher movement needs (Driessen & Langen, 2013). The main obstacle for public schools is the limited budget for nutritious lunches, rest rooms, and additional support staff. (Herianto, 2025) found that the availability of nutritious lunch significantly affects concentration and achievement, but not all schools have the budget (Simalango, 2026). Moreover, full-day teachers complained about minimal additional compensation comparable to their increased workload. A teacher in

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Bandar Lampung admitted, *"We stay at school until afternoon, but our salary is no different from half-day teachers."* Teacher well-being is a critical factor; without serious attention, full-day risks creating burnout. Parental preferences show sharp polarization: urban capable groups support full-day, rural limited-resource groups prefer half-day. Aliyah & Prasetyaningrum, (2018) also found that family socio-economic factors strongly influence the choice of school time system and children's learning achievement (Aliyah et al., 2018).

The findings clearly show that no single school time system is universally superior for all areas of Lampung Province. This is consistent with the meta-analysis by Strietholt et al (2015) in Germany using PIRLS, TIMSS, and PISA data, which concluded that after controlling for social composition, region, and school type, all-day schooling has no significant effect on achievement or inequality (Strietholt et al., 2015). In other words, system effectiveness is more determined by contextual factors such as teacher quality, infrastructure readiness, parental support, and socio-economic characteristics, not duration alone. Ulhassan et al (2022) in Pakistan also found that although full-day students achieved statistically better academic performance, this improvement came at the cost of socio emotional well-being *(low peer interaction, irritability, emotional imbalance*) (Ulhassan et al., 2022). Hernández et al (2023) in Mexico showed that the benefits of full-day vary greatly depending on implementation quality; students from lower socio-economic backgrounds benefit more if the program is well designed (Cabrera-Hernández et al., 2023). Therefore, any effort to implement full-day en masse in Lampung must be based on in depth assessment of each school's and region's readiness, not merely following trends or top-down policies.

The findings confirm the relevance of the three main theories. The half-day system, which gives children more time to play, explore their environment, and interact with family in the afternoon, aligns with (Piaget, 1970) principle that elementary children need concrete, direct experience. Conversely, the full-day system provides more time for teacher scaffolding and peer collaboration, aligning with (Piaget, 1970). However, the finding of afternoon cognitive fatigue among full-day students reminds us of Sweller's warning that children's working memory is limited; extended learning without adequate breaks causes cognitive overload. Children aged 7–9 are still highly dependent on external support to manage cognitive load (Dong et al., 2022). The implication is that an ideal school time system should integrate the three perspectives: sufficiently long for scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1980), yet with breaks and varied activities to avoid cognitive overload and allow concrete experience (Piaget, 1970; Sweller, 2024).

From a critical sociology of education perspective, the findings confirm Anyon, (1980) concern about the hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980). Anyon found that working-class schools teach obedience and mechanical repetition, middle-class schools teach procedural correctness, professional-class schools teach creativity, and executive-class schools teach leadership. In this study, full-day schools accessed by affluent children in Bandar Lampung tend to provide enrichment activities that build cultural capital *(coding, English, debate, music),* while full-day schools accessed by disadvantaged children in rural areas only extend drill and strict discipline without meaningful enrichment. This phenomenon aligns with the critique by (Webb et al., 2014). of neoliberal education policies that use the concept of *epimeleia heautou (care of the self)* to place responsibility for educational success on individuals while ignoring unequal social structures. Optional policies tend to benefit wealthy families who can choose high quality full-day schools, while poor families are forced to choose half-day or low quality full-day, thus widening educational inequality.

The findings also reveal dimensions of gender and individual differences that are often overlooked. Consistent with (Driessen & Langen, 2013) this study found that boys have shorter attention spans, higher movement needs, and are more impulsive, making it more difficult for them to adapt to the prolonged sitting requirements of full-day. This is also consistent with (Gömleksiz, 2012) findings on elementary students' perceptions of the science and technology curriculum by gender, showing that students' perceptions and interactions with learning are strongly influenced by gender. Espelage et al (2015) also found that boys are more vulnerable to bullying when frustrated due to limited movement space. Teachers reported that boys in full-day are often restless and receive more reprimands, which can lower motivation and self-concept. Furthermore, teacher well-being is a critical factor (Espelage et al., 2015). Full-day teachers complained of physical and mental fatigue, lack of preparation time, and minimal additional compensation. Faizah et al (2020) found that burnout levels among full-day teachers are significantly higher than among half-day teachers (Faizah et al., 2020). Without serious attention to teacher well-being, full-day risks creating burnout that damages the quality of teacher-student interactions. Full-day policy must be

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accompanied by improved teacher well-being, both financial compensation and psychological and professional support, in line with the humanistic, dialogical, and liberating educational ideas of (Freire, 2000).

Based on the findings, this study recommends a hybrid model that combines the advantages of half-day and full-day as the most rational and equitable solution for Lampung's highly diverse context. The proposed hybrid model: compulsory core learning in the morning (4–5 hours) for all students, followed by optional afternoon/evening activities (*extracurriculars, tutoring, religious practices, or other enrichment*) according to students' interests, talents, and parents' financial ability. This model offers flexibility: full-time working parents can leave children in optional activities until afternoon; parents needing children at home can pick them up earlier. The hybrid model is more friendly to schools' limited infrastructure readiness, as schools are not forced to provide full-day facilities instantly but can gradually build capacity. The hybrid model gives teachers flexibility to manage workload through a shift system for afternoon optional activities, thereby minimizing burnout risk. Implementing the hybrid model requires strong policy support from local government, including subsidies for disadvantaged students to continue accessing quality optional activities, as well as teacher training in critical, dialogical, and participatory pedagogy (Freire, 2000) not just boring lectures.

The findings have several important policy implications for the Lampung Provincial Government. First, local government must develop minimum standard policy guidelines for schools choosing the full-day system, including adequate rest breaks (at least 1 hour for lunch and free play), varied activities covering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in balance, maximum teacher-student ratio of 1:20, and availability of school counselors. These standards prevent full-day practices that only extend duration without improving quality. Second, the government needs to allocate affirmative budgets to help public schools in underdeveloped (3T) regions that want to improve capacity toward quality full-day, including provision of nutritious lunch facilities, proper rest rooms, internet access, and continuous teacher training. This affirmative policy aligns with the principle of social justice and long-term investment to reduce educational inequality between regions. Third, further research is needed to longitudinally examine the long-term effects of various school time models on children's cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health development, given that most current research is cross-sectional. Fourth, the Lampung Provincial Education Office together with universities in Lampung needs to establish a center for elementary education policy studies that specifically researches curriculum implementation and school time systems in Lampung, so that policies are always based on valid data and research.

This phenomenological study of half-day and full-day implementation in Lampung Province has successfully revealed the complexity, dynamics, and diversity of educational actors' experiences in undergoing and interpreting the dualism of school time policy. The main findings affirm that no single system is universally superior for all contexts; half-day is superior in family togetherness, self-development, and prevention of cognitive fatigue; full-day is superior in structured supervision, intensive character development, and convenience for working parents. The hybrid model combining compulsory morning core learning with optional afternoon activities is recommended as the most rational and equitable solution to accommodate the diverse socio-economic, geographical, and cultural conditions of Lampung society. The successful implementation of the hybrid model greatly depends on the political will and resource allocation of local government, as well as the commitment of all stakeholders (principals, teachers, parents, community) to collaborate in creating a safe, comfortable, and empowering learning environment for all children in Lampung Province.

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study in Lampung Province concludes that no single school time system is universally superior. The half-day system is more suitable for rural areas where children need help at home and to prevent cognitive fatigue in early grades. The full-day system is superior for structured character development and for urban working parents, but requires adequate infrastructure, varied activities, and attention to teacher and child well-being. The hybrid model with core morning learning and optional afternoon activities is recommended as the fairest solution. Local governments need to provide affirmative subsidies, minimum standards for full-day (*adequate breaks, variety, counselors)*, and critical pedagogy training for teachers. Choosing a school time system is not merely about duration, but about a vision of education that respects local context diversity and prioritizes children's holistic well-being.

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