



# **Examining UAE educators' perspectives on the condensed school week**

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## ABSTRACT

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This study examines the impact that the condensed school week has had on educators in the UAE. The goal is to provide insights into its effects on staff well-being, workplace productivity, student performance, and the wider community, with the ultimate aim of providing educators and policy makers with a greater awareness and understanding of the shortened school week. The investigation utilised a mixed-method approach, which included a survey questionnaire administered to the UAE teaching community in both private and public schools, with 71 participants responding. The results reveal several key findings around the effects of the shorter school week: firstly, the shortened school week positively impacts staff mental health, well-being, morale, productivity, and efficiency; secondly, parents express strong support for the shortened schedule; third, that variations in opinions exist within different demographic groups; and that younger students are more adversely affected by the compressed schedule than older students. Additionally, teachers working a four-day week in Sharjah report more favourable outcomes than those on a four-and-a-half-day week in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, indicating that the half-day Friday is detrimental to students and staff. These outcomes may be used by educational stakeholders both in the UAE and beyond to make more informed decisions on whether to adopt, continue, abandon, or possibly extend the shorter-school-week timetable. It is recommended that future researchers widen their respondent size, include academic and attendance data in their analysis and study the condensed school week over a longer timeframe in order to gain an even greater insight into the advantages and disadvantages of alternative school schedules.

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Keywords: shorter school week, teacher perspectives, mental health, wellbeing, productivity, efficiency, parents, SLT, Sharjah, Dubai, Abu Dhabi

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS**

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
UAE	United Arab Emirates
4DW	Four-Day Week
4.5DW	Four-And-A-Half-Day Week
5DW	Five-Day Week
SSW	Shorter School Week
USA	United States of America
US	United States

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The introductory section of this thesis will delve into the concept of a shorter school week by providing background information about it and exploring the research context and the questions that will be examined throughout the paper.

### 1.1 Background

The concept of a shorter working week (SWW) has been around for decades in government and business sectors (Facer & Wadsworth, 2016). Indeed, many large corporations and companies have recently initiated pilot programs on a four-day week (4DW) to investigate its effect on employee satisfaction, worker burn-out, staff retention and recruitment, and productivity and output (Gomes, 2023). Government entities have also recently begun following suit by allowing their staff more flexible and reduced working hours (Turner et al., 2017).

Due to and, possibly, exasperated by the pandemic and its associated fallout, many more businesses, governments and educational institutes are piloting or seriously considering moving to a 4DW or, at least, a SWW. A recent *Autonomy* (2023) study analysed the world's largest trial on a 4DW, and the results indicate highly favourable outcomes. Moreover, many countries and governments are starting to support and experiment with compressed working weeks, such as Iceland, Spain, Scotland, New Zealand, Japan, Ireland, Belgium, and the UAE (Coker, 2022).

These changes to the regular working hours are being driven by recent research suggesting increases in productivity (Barnes & Fariss, 2021), improved work-life balance (Kossek et al., 2006), well-being and job satisfaction (Naeem et al., 2021), reduced absenteeism (CIPD, 2019), better talent recruitment (Barnes, 2021), and cost savings (Barnes & Fariss, 2021).

Moving to a SWW is an essential first step in adopting what the Finnish politician Pirkko Mattila (2019) describes as an Economy of Wellbeing. She argues that the foundation of society and economy is human potential; therefore, the

economy and wellbeing are interlinked. Enhanced economic growth contributes to the well-being of individuals, while the well-being of the population in turn fosters economic growth and stability. Supporting this philosophy, a study by the World Bank Human Capital Index in 2018 found that participating companies had greater productivity and efficiency through investing in workforce wellbeing, which resulted in higher savings and economic growth on both the macro and microeconomic level.

Contrary to this, there are studies that point to the negative effects of a SSW within the world of business. For example, Gomes (2023) established that a SSW resulted in a decrease in workplace productivity and reduced availability for customers and clients, while others pointed to lower employee income (Sells et al., 2021), implementation challenges (CIPD, 2019), and the potential for more extended workdays (Laker & Roulet, 2019). While the advantages and disadvantages of SSWs have been thoroughly investigated in business, research appears scarce within the education sector (Plucker et al., 2012).

Traditional schools offer benefits such as human capital development, social-emotional growth, and healthy habits through regular access to academic instruction, nutritious meals, physical activity, and face-to-face social interaction with peers and educators (Thompson & Ward, 2022). Research shows that quality educational inputs, such as skilled teachers and smaller class sizes, and the amount of exposure to them, including instructional time, positively impact student outcomes from early elementary through adulthood (Jackson, 2020).

Therefore, it appears necessary to consider the theoretical implications of alternative school schedules, such as the 4DW, which reduces one day of required school attendance and (possibly) extends the remaining four days to meet governmental mandates. While some countries have implemented the 4DW model in schools, research on its impact is mixed – with some findings indicating notable benefits while others show significant drawbacks. As such, stakeholders should consider these ramifications before implementing the 4DW model.

The implementation of a shorter school week (SSW) is increasing in popularity lately. Many schools in the USA have introduced it to help reduce costs and increase student and staff wellbeing. Similarly, in January 2022 the UAE adopted



the condensed school week timetable, with six of the Emirates (Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Ras al-Khaimah, Umm al-Quwain, Ajman, and Fujairah) moving to a four-and-a-half-day week (4.5DW), while one Emirate (Sharjah) implanted a four-day-week (4DW). Addressing the possible benefits and drawbacks of this policy change is necessary if the new schedule is to be abandoned, adapted, or continued.

## 1.2 Research Context

Therefore, this investigation will examine educators' perspectives of a shorter school week within both private and public schools in the UAE. A key aim for the country is to provide a first-rate education system for all through its National Agenda Vision 2021. To help them achieve this aim, the country introduced a national working week shorter than the global five-day norm (theguardian.com, 2021). This led to the compulsory government directive stating that all schools must move to a four-and-a-half-day week (4.5DW), designating Fridays as half days (WAM, 2021). The UAE authorities stated that the main reasons for the move were to enhance the nation's work-life balance, social wellbeing, and economic competitiveness (WAM, 2021).

While six of the seven Emirates opted for a 4.5DW, Sharjah chose the 4DW option, as Friday is considered a day for prayer and rest in the more conservative Muslim Emirate. According to Arabian Business (2022), after six months feedback from colleagues is varied, but was predominantly positive – students and families, in particular, appreciated the additional time for relaxation and the pursuit of their interests during the extended weekend. However, much of the feedback is based on anecdotal evidence, and no official studies or papers appear to be written about the effects of a 4DW on UAE students, staff, schools, parents, or the wider community.

As already mentioned, although the condensed working week is typical in business and governments, it is less prevalent in education. In recent years, however, the adoption of shorter school weeks has been increasing, with a broader range of countries beginning to consider and implement a compressed school timetable. For example, many school districts in the USA have moved to a 4DW to meet

the ‘challenges’ in their schools (Turner et al., 2017, page 168). While many commentators believe the main reason to implement a shorter week is to help businesses and schools to cut costs, others comment that the move by schools to a 4DW has been exasperated due to the pandemic as educational institutions attempted to adopt a more wellbeing focused approach to teaching and learning (Turner et al., 2017).

The most up-to-date research on the 4DW shows advantages that include better teacher retention and wellbeing (Hansen & Quintero, 2018), reduced teacher burnout (Bas & Erdogan, 2020), increased student engagement (Mallette, 2018), improved attendance (Chaney, 2019) and cost savings (Jepsen & Rivkin, 2018). In comparison, the disadvantages mentioned in various studies include reduced instructional time (Wolfe & Nevarez, 2018), some report lower academic achievement (Chetty & Lovenheim, 2019), longer school days for students, and difficulties for working parents and guardians (Hewitt, 2011).

According to Thompson et al. (2021), there appears to be a limited understanding of a shorter school week’s impact on staff and students. While there is some existing research on the economic impact of four-day school weeks and their effects on academic outcomes for younger students at the Primary level (Anderson & Walker, 2015), studies on their causal effects on Primary *and* Secondary, also known as through schools, appear to be limited. Furthermore, few studies have explored the outcomes of a shorter school week across a wide range of schools within one country nor gauged the opinion of various stakeholders within each institution. This study aims to fill existing gaps in our comprehension of the impacts of 4-day workweeks (4DW) across a broader age spectrum and diverse perspectives within various schools. The findings from this research could hold significant implications for educators, management, and policymakers.

### **1.3 Research questions**

The most recent empirical evidence suggests that there have been many benefits to using a condensed school week in education. These include better teacher mental health and wellbeing, a better work-life balance for staff, favourable outcomes in teacher recruitment and retention, better productivity and efficiency, and

cost savings. However, based on the research, not all stakeholders advocate for a condensed working week – commenting that longer days actually lead to heightened stress and fatigue for staff and students, lower employee engagement, a drop in student performance levels, and parental concerns due to the lack and cost of childcare. This paper will therefore attempt to gather the views of UAE educators to gauge the advantages and disadvantages of a SSW and if they align with any of the above points by asking:

- 1. How do educators in the UAE feel about a shorter school week after its first 18 months of implementation?**
- 2. Are there differences in how different demographic groups view the condensed school week?**
- 3. What recommendations for implementing the shorter school week do staff have for other countries considering a condensed week in the future?**

These questions will attempt to gather the thoughts and opinions of educators who have been through and witnessed this process firsthand, which will be highly valuable for management and policy makers in deciding future schooling timetables. In addition, it will allow schools to consider the findings and possibly adapt their model to address staff points of view. Overall, this study is highly relevant to the current times, mainly with human wellbeing being such a hot topic post the C-19 pandemic.

#### **1.4 Research Aims and Methods**

This thesis will investigate the advantages and disadvantages of a condensed school week from the perspective of educators in the UAE. In line with the UAE's National Agenda Vision (2021), the study aims to provide educational institutions and policy makers with a better understanding of how the new scheduling has impacted staff wellbeing, workplace productivity, student performance, parents,

and the wider community. Outcomes of the study can then be used by educational stakeholders both in the UAE and beyond to make more informed decisions on whether to trial, continue or abandon the SSW schedule.

To achieve this, a mixed-method approach was conducted to incorporate a questionnaire comprising open, factual questions followed by quantitative response questions. Utilising a five-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree), supplemented by open-ended response questions, the questionnaire was distributed to educators in both private and public schools across the UAE. A total of 71 respondents participated in the survey. This research, which combined both qualitative and quantitative methods, delved into the relatively underexplored topic of the SSW as previous scientific inquiries have yielded inconsistent findings and often leave readers with more questions than answers regarding this subject (Plucker et al., 2012). This study holds importance because it employs a mixed-methods approach, aiming to comprehensively investigate the SSW from various angles, with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of its effects on the school environment. The insights gained will offer valuable data for educational institutions considering a transition to condensed school timetables. Based on the collected and analysed data, the paper will offer recommendations and considerations for other schools considering a similar policy change.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section will discuss the theoretical framework that this study utilised. It will also discuss the empirical literature and theories related to the shorter work and school week within different sectors, mainly focusing on the effect that the SSW has on schools.

Snyder (2019) emphasises that the fundamental cornerstone of all academic research endeavours, regardless of the field, is the incorporation of existing knowledge and its connection to the current study. She advocates that this connection must be established with precision to ensure the reliability and validity of research within academic circles.

A literature review, broadly defined, entails the systematic gathering and synthesis of previous research findings (Tranfield et al., 2003). It serves as a robust research method, providing a sturdy groundwork for advancing knowledge and aiding in the formulation of theories (Webster & Watson, 2002). Through the assimilation of insights and perspectives from various empirical studies, a literature review holds the capacity to delve into research questions with a depth that no individual study can attain.. Moreover, it aids in offering a comprehensive overview of areas where research is diverse and multidisciplinary, serves as an excellent means of amalgamating research finding, and plays a crucial role in identifying areas that require further research. This is essential for constructing theoretical frameworks and developing conceptual models.

This research aims to assess the various conflicting theories and evidence in the field of the condensed school week (SSW). It takes a comprehensive approach by examining all the available evidence related to this topic, with the goal of establishing a research agenda and pinpointing gaps in SSW research. The investigation follows what Wong et al. (2013) refer to as a *semi-systematic*, also known as a narrative, review approach (Figure 1). This choice is justified due to the SSW being a relatively new subject, characterised by diverse conceptualisations and approaches from different research groups. This semi-systematic approach strives to recognise and comprehend all relevant research traditions associated

with the SSW and synthesises them through meta-narratives, rather than focusing on measuring effect sizes. This approach is valuable for gaining insight into the complex subject area that is condensed school timetables.

Approaches to literature reviews.

Approach	Systematic	Semi-systematic	Integrative
Typical purpose	Synthesize and compare evidence	Overview research area and track development over time	Critique and synthesize
Research questions	Specific	Broad	Narrow or broad
Search strategy	Systematic	May or may not be systematic	Usually not systematic
Sample characteristics	Quantitative articles	Research articles	Research articles, books, and other published texts
Analysis and evaluation	Quantitative	Qualitative/quantitative	Qualitative
Examples of contribution	Evidence of effect Inform policy and practice	State of knowledge Themes in literature Historical overview Research agenda Theoretical model	Taxonomy or classification Theoretical model or framework

FIGURE 1: Approaches to Literature Reviews (Snyder, 2019)

The semi-systematic process used in this study incorporated the thematic/content analysis method with the intention of identifying, and reporting patterns or themes within various texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although his type of analyses is usually followed by qualitative methodologies, this study design drew inspiration Borman & Downlings' (2008) research whereby they combined a semi-structured literature collection method with a statistical meta-analysis approach. This analysis is essential for pinpointing themes, theoretical perspectives, or shared issues within a particular research field or methodology. Another contribution to this thematic approach is that it allows the researcher to map out a research area, synthesise the existing knowledge, and propose a research agenda. Additionally, it can offer a historical overview or timeline of a specific topic.

Utilising this thematic approach to the literature review, this study examined the perceptions of UAE educators concerning the move to a shorter school week. Data collection involved administering questionnaires to educators, including teachers, teaching assistants, middle leaders, and senior leaders in schools that currently implement the SSW structure in the UAE. Additionally, the SSW was described through diverse perspectives and value systems of the participants by utilising a mixed-method study approach that focused on the impact of the SSW on staff (mental-health, wellbeing, morale), students (academic, behaviour, attendance), parents and the wider community, and school finances.

## 2.1 Background to a four-day work week

The first theme identified through the semi-systematic approach concerned how the 4DW initially came about and how it is increasingly being considered, trialled and implemented in various sectors.

As mentioned previously, the idea of a 4DW has been around within the domains of business and government for quite some time (Facer & Wadsworth, 2010). Globally, employers across all sectors have strived to seek strategies that helped improve workforce productivity and working environments. Indeed, due to black swan events such as the 2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic, employers continue to seek creative strategies to save money by creating flexi-time, telecommunicating, or compressed work weeks (Facer & Wadsworth, 2016). These non-traditional workplace benefits within the public and private sectors have become more prevalent since the pandemic, when much of the labour market was forced to work from home.

The independent research group Autonomy (2023) recently conducted the largest ever 4DW week trial, which comprised 61 companies and approximately 3000 workers in the UK in December 2022. This was mainly instigated as a business response to the Covid-19 pandemic due to the concept of the 'Great Resignation' (Autonomy, 2023, page 17) that saw many companies struggle with recruitment and retention as a fallout of the pandemic. One company CEO stated that many employees came out of the pandemic with 'a new outlook on life' (page 51) and there is a greater expectation around flexible or hybrid working. Overall, the trial was a 'resounding success' (page 6), with 92% of the participating companies permanently changing to a shorter working week following the trial. A key finding from the report was that most employees' mental and physical health improved, with 39% reporting less stress and 71% reduced burnout – resulting in lower anxiety, fatigue, and sleep issues. Moreover, 54% reported an improved work-life balance and found it easier to balance work with time spent with family and socialising. Companies also reported an increase of 1.4% in revenues, indicating healthy financial growth. Staff retention also improved – the number of staff leaving during the trial dropped by 57% during the trial period.

In line with the findings of *Autonomy* (2023), the economist Paul Samuelson famously described the 4DW as a momentous social invention (Poor, 1970). Similarly, Gomes (2023) is a leading public-sector economics researcher who argues that a 4DW is not only a victory for the labour market but a social innovation that can improve economic organisation in the modern world. Similar to the *Autonomy* (2023) report findings, Barnes (2020) established that the benefits of a shorter work week include enhanced employee wellbeing, productivity, and reduced burnout. Gomes (2023) proposes new government legislation making it mandatory across European countries – he goes on to say that a shorter working week for society will, in the long run, safeguard jobs vulnerable to automation, boost wages, diminish inequality, grant people greater flexibility in their work, enhance efficiency within the four working days, provide more leisure time for socialising with family and friends, or allow individuals to utilise the extra day off for retraining and acquiring new skills

## **2.2 Background to a four-day school week**

Secondly, a further theme identified in the research focused on how the four-day school week has recently crept into education. Although the concept of a 4DW has been around for a long time in business and government, it has only recently become more prominent in schools and universities. The USA has been the main driver of this new school scheduling framework, with a 600% increase in schools opting for a shorter school week over the past two decades (Thompson et al., 2021). This has come about mainly due to financial reasons, with schools trying to cut costs due to tightening government budgets and austerity measures implemented by the government following the 2008 financial crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic led to the additional adoption of this 4DW policy across more states and districts in the USA – in response to economic and logistical challenges that the pandemic brought (Altavena, 2020). In addition, with many schools moving to partial or complete remote learning during the peak of the pandemic, some districts found it easier to continue this atypical schedule when things returned to normal, opting to extend the four-day hours and give students and staff the Monday or Friday off (Mazur, 2022).



The shorter school week has recently been gaining momentum in other countries too. For example, the UAE adopted 4.5DW in January 2021 in line with its National Agenda Vision 2021 to help it achieve a world-class education system for all (WAM, 2021). The government's main reasons for the move were to enhance the nation's work-life balance, social well-being, and economic competitiveness. Interestingly, one of the more conservative Muslim Emirates, Sharjah, chose a four-day week instead.

There have been many perceived advantages and disadvantages of a shorter school week. These range from topics linked to student and staff wellbeing, attendance; student academic achievement and behaviours; impact on at-risk or disabled students; school finances; and childcare. In the USA, the 4DW has been pushed mainly because it will cut school costs and improve student performance. Studies by Sikes and Millsap (2016) have found evidence to support the idea that the 4DW can reduce school district expenses, while studies by Al Hazaa (2021) have shown that it may also lead to improved student attendance and academic achievement. More recently, school leaders have cited additional reasons for considering the 4DW, including the potential for increased staff professional development and collaboration time and using the shortened week to recruit and retain high-quality staff (Den Ouden, 2016).

The following sections will discuss the literature arguing for and against these topics. They will also delve into the impact of a shorter school week on students, staff, schools, parents, and the wider community. These sections help form the survey questionnaire that will allow the primary researcher to gather more data and build on previous studies.

### **2.3 Impacts of a 4DW on Staff**

Perhaps the most striking and prominent theme synthesised from the previous research related to the impact the a SSW has on the employees. As outlined in the introduction section of this paper, the 4DW gained significant popularity in the business world, only to fall out of favour due to mixed research results and implementation challenges associated with alternative work schedules (Turner et al.,

2017). Today, workers across all sectors are seeking greater opportunities to balance their work and personal lives, leading to increased interest in alternative work schedules. Research focusing on alternative work schedules within government agencies has unveiled that the most frequently mentioned motivations for adopting such timetables include enhancing employee morale, improving work/life balance and workplace productivity, reducing costs and staff absenteeism, and attracting a more skilled workforce (Facer & Wadsworth, 2010). Studies conducted in business and government employment sectors on the 4-day work-week (4DW) model have demonstrated that employees, irrespective of their job classification, experience significantly increased job satisfaction following the transition to a 4DW (Facer & Wadsworth, 2010). The most prominent example of this is seen in Facer & Wadsworth's (2010) paper in which they found that nearly 80% of employees in the Utah community experienced positive outcomes when they shifted to a four-day, ten-hour work model. Moreover, almost two-thirds of staff reported being more productive.

### **2.3.1 Staff Mental-Health, Wellbeing and Morale**

Teachers consistently face higher risk of experiencing mental health challenges and decreased wellbeing when compared to other professions (Harding et al., 2019). According to recent statistics from the UK Health and Safety Executive (2019), teachers working in Primary and Secondary education reported a significantly higher prevalence of self-reported work-related stress, depression, or anxiety when compared to the average across all industries. Teachers confront various stressors in their work environment, encompassing factors related to workload, relationships, and external influences - these stressors include administration tasks, a lack of time for planning, and accountability (McCallum et al., 2017). External influences also play a role, including policy initiatives and changes in the education system (Acton, 2015), therefore it seems appropriate to examine how the SSW effects staff wellbeing, morale and overall mental health.

Wellbeing can be described as the 'complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health' (Better Health Channel, 2020). Diener (2000)

suggests that good wellbeing relates to greater coping ability, creativity, relationships and immune responses. Therefore, teacher and student wellbeing should be a priority for schools in order for them to achieve their outcomes. Indeed, staff and student wellbeing has become more of a focus in the international school scene, particularly due to the Covid-19 pandemic when schools were closed and classes were moved online. Research by Day & Qing (2009) proved direct links between staff wellbeing and job satisfaction, commitment and overall health. Several other studies have assessed teacher wellbeing and highlighted that it should be a cause for concern globally. As an illustration, close to 40% of teachers in the United States plan to resign within their initial five years in the profession (Kidger et al., 2016). Additionally, almost three-quarters of teachers in the United Kingdom have encountered anxiety or depression to some extent (NASUWT, 2016). Nordic educators have similarly communicated heightened workloads and strained relationships, resulting in exhaustion and diminished motivation, ultimately affecting their quality of life (Mykletun, 1984, as cited in McCallum et al., 2017).

Research suggests that the move to a shorter school week has increased teacher (Juneau, 2011) and student (Hanson, 2007) morale in schools. Their research argues that the shorter school week increases all stakeholders' affinity for attending school, leading to better outcomes for students and staff. Similarly, shorter school weeks in the US state of Colorado showed a decrease in substance abuse and screen time, while there were increases in sleep time, breakfast consumption, and physical activity (Israel et al., 2020). This study will therefore attempt to add to the current literature on how a shorter school week positively affects staff and student mental health, wellbeing and morale.

### **2.3.2 Planning, Efficiency, and Professional Training/Development**

The literature review highlights several studies reporting that teachers who work the 4DW have much more time for planning, administration work, and professional development. It appears that the extra time on the fifth day allows teachers to plan for upcoming lessons, mark and give feedback, and reflect on their practices, according to Turner et al. (2017). Their study found that extra preparation time was vital as it allowed them to choose 'quality over quantity' and cut out the

'fluff' (page 57). Additionally, the extra day off gave them more time to collaborate and share ideas with one another. Another paper by Yarbrough & Gilman (2006) concluded that staff following a four-day schedule rarely needed to meet after school hours, and instead used the spare fifth day for meetings, research, committees, and group planning.

Studies show that a further by-product of the shorter school week relates to positive impacts on teacher instruction and class time because teachers must teach the curriculum and material more efficiently (Donnis-Keller & Silvernail, 2009). A study in South Dakota by Kingsbury (2008) reported that teachers were able to provide 20% more instruction time given the longer lesson times and reduced student absences. Additionally, there were fewer opportunities for interruptions during lessons.

According to Musselman et al. (2014), creating a school culture that values collaboration and teacher leadership is closely associated with the outstanding performance of schools. With most international schools assigning multiple roles to teaching staff, they are often spread thin and struggle to find a balance – the 4DW allows staff to plan, communicate and collaborate more and more often (Willis & Templeton, 2017). The extra time and consistency of teacher professional development in US schools with a shorter week could enable them to offer more effective and targeted training that caters for the unique needs of the individual teachers. This, in turn, may lead to better academic outcomes for students (Turner et al., 2019).

### **2.3.3 Staff Views**

School staff were perhaps the most studied group in relation to a 4DW as they are the people on the front line that have gone through the process first hand. Therefore, their opinions matter significantly and, for the purposes of this paper, their views are summarised to allow the reader to gain a better understanding for justification of the literature review and approach. These views can be summarised through research conducted by Turner et al. (2017), who found that the overwhelming majority of teaching staff reported optimal outcomes of the four-

day school week. Although there were some concerns, they were minimal when compared to the whole. Their findings are summarised below:

*Advantages of a SSW*

- The 4DW model provides an extra day for teachers to work on grading and planning, allowing them to have more time for personal and professional development without sacrificing their weekends with family.
- The model has resulted in fewer absences of both students and staff during the week, leading to a more consistent and efficient learning environment.
- Extended class periods provide teachers with the opportunity to delve into subject matter more deeply and address student questions thoroughly, ultimately leading to a reduction in homework assignments.
- Extended instructional periods contribute to teachers feeling more focused on their teaching and less rushed.
- The model reduces commute time for teachers, leading to less time spent on the road and more time for planning and instruction.
- The morale of staff and faculty has increased due to the improved work-life balance and increased job satisfaction.
- The model allows for easier scheduling of doctor and counselling appointments for students and staff without missing important school days.
- The model has the potential to save money in the transportation department by reducing the number of days buses are needed

*Disadvantages of a SSW:*

- The adoption of the new model has resulted in increased scrutiny of the school system, leading to additional pressure to succeed.
- Local youth clubs, churches, or community centres may face additional costs to provide food for students in food programs due to the extra day of school.
- The 4DW model may be blamed for declines in test scores, even if other factors are responsible.

**2.4 Impacts of a 4DW on Students**

The next theme that was evident from previous empirical research centred around student performance during a 4DW schedule. In particular, much of the data focused on academic achievement, behaviour and attendance.

### **2.4.1 Academic Achievement**

A hot topic that is contested within the current literature studies is whether student academic performance is enhanced or diminished in a 4DW calendar. Existing data appears inconclusive as some districts in the USA report student academic gains while others report only slight increases or no changes at all. For example, Mahoney et al. (2003) report that such outcomes of a four-day school week include decreased academic performance, while Morton (2022) found no detectable effects of moving to a shorter week on ACT scores.

In other recent studies, researchers used the difference-in-differences (DID) approach to investigate the effects of switching to a 4DW on academic achievement. For example, in examining high school students in Oregon, Thompson et al. (2021) found that the 4DW resulted in a decrease of 0.09 standard deviations (SD) in math test scores among 11th graders, with significant impacts only among students in urban areas. However, he also found no significant impact on reading performance for students between rural and non-rural areas.

Anderson and Walker (2015) observed positive impacts of the four-day schedule on maths and English Language Arts (ELA) scores in the Colorado state test for fourth and fifth graders. In contrast, four other studies reported average effects of the schedule on standardised maths and ELA achievement, ranging from approximately -0.03 SD to -0.10 SD (Kilburn et al., 2021; Morton, 2021; Thompson & Ward, 2022). Similarly, Morton (2022) noted some adverse average effects on standardised maths and ELA achievement; however, these effects did not reach statistical significance.

Thompson (2021) discovered that the transition to a 4-day workweek (4DW) in Oregon resulted in statistically significant average decreases of 0.06 SD in math and 0.04 SD in reading test scores for students in Grades 3 to 8. Similarly, Kilburn

et al. (2021) identified negative but non-significant average effects of the schedule on math and ELA scores in Idaho, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and South Dakota. Lastly, an investigation by Thompson and Ward (2022) utilised district-level data from 12 districts to estimate a statistically significant average negative effect of the 4DW on maths achievement (-0.03 SD) but a non-significant average effect on ELA achievement (-0.02 SD).

These studies suggest that the effects of switching to a shorter school week may vary depending on the policy implementation. Thompson (2021) identified varied effects based on special education status, noting that special education students performed better under the schedule, while English Language Learners (ELL) students experienced poorer outcomes. The study also suggested that older students in the sample were more negatively affected, particularly eighth graders who exhibited the most significant negative impact. In a related vein, Thompson and Ward (2022) found that the significant adverse effects of the four-day week on maths and ELA achievement were observed primarily in 4DW districts that ranked in the lowest percentile for time spent in school, measured by weekly instructional hours. Overall, the discrepancies in outcomes across states likely stem from substantial variations in the policy's implementation and its impact on academic performance at the district level.

#### **2.4.2 Behaviour**

Student behaviour was another underlined theme extracted from previous investigations. Numerous studies have established a clear link between increased unsupervised out-of-school time and adverse outcomes for older adolescents (Posner & Vandell, 1999). These consequences encompass heightened antisocial behaviour and a greater frequency of risky actions such as delinquency and substance use (Mahoney, 2000). To illustrate, Fischer and Argyle's study in 2018 revealed that a 4-day workweek (4DW) led to an almost 20% increase in juvenile crime among high school students in Colorado, especially when these students were not attending school. Moreover, research indicates that participating in antisocial and risky behaviors outside of school correlates positively with the display of such behaviours within the school setting (Fabelo et al., 2011). Consequently,

the extension of out-of-school time through a 4DW may significantly elevate the risk of negative behaviours and disciplinary infractions for high school students.

On the contrary, more recent anecdotal reports suggest that a by-product of a shorter school week is increased student morale and behaviour (Hansen, 2014). In addition, he argues that 4DWs increase students' desire to focus, resulting in fewer disciplinary incidents. This is because students were less likely to skip school, use drugs, smoke, or drink alcohol. Similarly, Thompson et al. (2021) found no detectable effect of a 4DW on the fraction of days that Grade 3 to 8 students miss for disciplinary reasons such as suspensions. Likewise, Morton (2022) studied district-level panel data in Oklahoma and found that shorter school weeks decreased pupil bullying incidents by nearly 40%, while student fighting incidents decreased by approximately 31%. There is anecdotal evidence suggesting a decline in incidents such as alcohol and drug possession, vandalism, bullying, fighting, and school bus issues due to the implementation of a shorter school week (Morton, 2022). Understanding the effect of a condensed school week on student behaviour is essential because it can profoundly affect both short and long-term student outcomes and trajectories (Schoeler et al., 2018). Furthermore, insight into the effect that school scheduling has on student behaviours can allow policymakers and practitioners to understand potential consequences better, which should enable targeted policy reform, if necessary.

### **2.4.3 Attendance**

Several studies have explored the impact of a 4-day workweek (4DW) on student attendance, and while anecdotal evidence suggests positive effects, recent research has mostly found no or negligible impacts on attendance rates. Current evidence, primarily derived from interviews and opinion surveys, suggests that attendance may increase as the extra day allows for activities and appointments that would otherwise result in missed school days (Morton, 2022). This investigation found no discernible effect of a shorter school week on attendance rates in any high school grade, contradicting claims that a shorter school week improves attendance.



In a national study, Thompson et al. (2021) reported that 29% of districts cited attendance issues as a primary motivation for adopting the 4DW. However, empirical quasi-experimental research contradicts these claims. Thompson et al. (2021) concluded that 4-day weeks significantly reduced high school attendance rates by 1 to 2 percentage points, specifically in 10th and 11th grades, with urban students driving these decreases. Additionally, the age of chronically absent students increased significantly by 6 to 12 percentage points only in urban schools. However, Anderson and Walker (2015), Kilburn et al. (2021), and Thompson (2021b) reported a small and statistically insignificant effect of the 4DW on attendance rates among students in Grades 3 to 8. The disparities between anecdotal and empirical evidence could be attributed to perceived improvements in attendance not aligning with reality, the populations experiencing improved attendance not being represented in empirical samples, or attendance improving in ways not captured by traditional measures like average daily attendance.

#### **2.4.4 'At risk' students**

A recurring theme in previous research revolves around the concerns related to students with special needs or those from low-income backgrounds regarding the implementation of a 4-day workweek (4DW). Some investigators and educators express worry that a 4DW may not be suitable for at-risk students or those with special needs, as they might struggle to retain academic information with one less day of reinforcement in school (Plucker et al., 2012). This concern is exemplified by instances where schools serving low-income students in the US attempted to switch to a shorter week but reverted to the original five-day school week due to apprehensions about the potential negative impact on the academic performance of low-income students and their families (Cummings, 2013). Turner et al. (2017) propose that this reversal may be influenced by affluent communities having more resources outside of school to support and guide students on the fifth day, whereas schools in isolated, rural areas may have fewer resources to assist families outside the school setting. This resource disparity can affect families' access to childcare and free or reduced-price student meals provided by the federal National School Lunch Program (Callahan, 2011).

Furthermore, educators and parents voice concerns that a shorter school week may be inappropriate for students with special needs, primarily due to the perceived challenge of extended days off for students with learning difficulties (Hale, 2007). Turner et al.'s (2017) investigation reveals that parents of children receiving special education services are less supportive of a shorter school week, with 33% of those families preferring to return to the original five-day week compared to 12% of families without a child with special needs. Moreover, a higher percentage of parents with special education students (29.4%) disagreed that it had a positive impact, in contrast to parents without students receiving special education services (10.1%).

In terms of families of students receiving free school meals, Turner et al. (2017) concluded that there were not many significant differences between families who received free or reduced lunches and those who did not regarding their perceptions of the 4DW. However, parents with children receiving meal support were more likely to believe that the shorter school week allowed teachers more time to prepare. Additionally, parents with children receiving free or reduced lunches were more likely to perceive that the lack of a school lunch program had a negative impact on their family. Despite these considerations, parental support for the 4DW remained strong among families receiving meal subsidies.

#### **2.4.5 Longer School Days**

A common theme gathered from previous research concerned how the condensed schedules meant longer days for some schools. In many schools across the US, the move to a 4DW schedule resulted in schools increasing the school day hours to meet the minimal instructional time set out by the authorities. Advocates for these longer school days say that longer lessons allow teachers to go into more depth in each topic, meaning a deeper student understanding, less homework, and ultimately better academic outcomes for students (Turner et al., 2019). Morton (2022) reported that adolescents have a particular advantage when participating in longer school days – this is due to the developmental capacities relating to their pre-frontal cortex undergoing significant development, which increases its ability to deal with complex cognitive functions like planning, sustained attention, working memory and goal-directed behaviour (Thillay et al.,

2015). This may result in better academic outcomes for older students as they can focus more over a longer school day and retain more information. While there has been some evidence that longer days result in short-term academic benefits, these eventually wane over time (Tharp et al., 2016).

In Oklahoma, the four-day school week has been quite controversial (Ferguson, 2020). Although the change garnered huge support from school teachers, students, parents and administration, the State Superintendent opposed the move, arguing that fewer and longer days do not create the optimal learning environment for children. Dahl & Lewin (2002) claim that children of all ages are likely affected by longer school hours due to changes in the circadian rhythms during puberty. These rhythms dictate the release of the hormone melatonin, so adolescents are naturally inclined to sleep later and struggle to adapt to earlier bedtimes. This means that some students may get less sleep as they are forced to wake earlier due to the longer day (Edwards, 2012), resulting in poor academic performance, reduced attention, and increased disciplinary infractions (Heissel & Norris, 2018). Similarly, Newman et al. (2016) found that a shorter school week and longer school days were detrimental to elementary-level children as they struggled to pay attention and stay awake during the school day.

## **2.5 Impacts of a 4DW on Schools**

A further theme to emerge from the previous research related to the financial implications that a 4DW had when compared to a traditional five-day-week model.

### **2.5.1 Cost saving**

Many studies report that schools move to a 4DW mainly to try to save money due to budget cuts and constraints (Anderson & Walker, 2015; Bitton, 2016; Tobias, 2016). Indeed, some states in the US shortened their school weeks during the Great Depression of the 1930s (Donis & Silvernail, 2009) and the Arab Oil Embargo in 1973 (Cummings, 2013). Similarly, the 2008 global financial crisis triggered many schools in Hawaii to designate 'Furlough Fridays' for many public schools (Hering & Poncet, 2010). In times of recession, authorities and school leaders are forced to find creative and, sometimes, unorthodox ways to reduce

school expenditure on heating and transportation. Griffith (2011) reports that the biggest savings are in operations, transportation, maintenance, administration, student support and food services. Similarly, Dam (2006) found that schools that offered extra-curricular activities on the fifth working day did not experience the same savings as those that only completed a four-day week. One school in the US was able to save 39 teaching positions due to the savings associated with opting to a 4DW (Dixon, 2011). They said that although they were only saving \$85,000 in an annual budget of \$7 million, it was a significant saving (Post, 2008). Additionally, some school districts have discovered they can reduce their expenses on substitute teachers due to increased teacher attendance (Juneau, 2011).

On the contrary, despite many US school districts citing budgetary constraints as the main reason to switch to a 4DW, most schools do not save what they had originally anticipated. Data from the Education Commission of the States showed that the maximum potential savings for any district was just over 5%, with some schools only saving as little as 2.5% (Griffith, 2011). Some research also points out that there is often public opposition to a 4DW school week to save money (Ray, 2003).

## **2.6 Impacts of a 4DW on Parents & Wider Community**

Only a limited number of studies led by independent researchers have assessed parents' opinions regarding the transition to a 4-day workweek (4DW). In the conducted research, a primary concern identified was the availability of childcare on the additional day out of school (Dam, 2006; Juneau, 2011). Parents have also expressed reservations about the appropriateness of the new school calendar for at-risk or special needs students (Plucker et al., 2012). Another common concern, particularly for younger students, is the extended length of the school day (Newman et al., 2016).

Conversely, Dam (2006) reported that parent satisfaction surveys distributed by the Colorado Department of Education indicated that 80 to 90% of community members preferred to continue the 4DW in school districts where the model had been operating for several years. Similarly, in a survey of all 32 schools in Montana using the 4DW, constituents reported positive responses to the timetable

change (Juneau, 2011). Furthermore, in an exploration of parental perceptions of the shorter school week model within its first year of implementation, Turner et al. (2019) determined that the majority of parents strongly supported the move, with most reporting it to have had a positive impact on their families, their child, and their overall community.

One prominent issue in several studies is the challenge of childcare during the fifth day when students are not in school (Dam, 2006; Donnis-Keller & Silvernail, 2009). Despite this concern, several school districts in the US have reported that parents have been able to secure suitable childcare arrangements for their children on an additional day, sometimes relying on high school students from their community to provide childcare services (Dam, 2006). However, the risk of unsupervised children at home during the fifth day remains a valid concern among a minority of parents (Turim, 2011).

The most pertinent investigation pertaining to this section of the paper was conducted by Turner et al. (2019), wherein data were collected from 71 community and business leaders across various school districts in the US to ascertain their perceptions of the economic impact of a shorter school week within the community. The community and business leaders exhibited a divided stance on the issue, with slightly more disadvantages highlighted by them. The research revealed a close interconnection between local businesses and schools, particularly in small rural school districts that provide jobs and revenue within the community and attract customers to small-town businesses during school events. The decision of a local school district to reduce the number of school days it operates can thus impact local businesses.

According to this research, the decision to switch to a four-day school week can be a polarising one for community and business leaders. While the overall results indicate a neutral stance about the impact on their businesses and community, a closer examination reveals divided perceptions of the 4-day workweek (4DW) calendar, with some strongly in favour and others opposed. Regarding the economic impact of the switch to a four-day school calendar, 44% of community and business leaders were neutral about whether it positively impacted the community, while 22% felt that it positively impacted the profitability of businesses within the community. Interestingly, when asked if the school district should return to the

traditional five-day week school calendar, 44% of community and business leaders preferred a return to the traditional calendar, while 43% preferred to remain on the 4DW schedule.

The research also identified a notable trend among community and business leaders based on their parental status. Those with children enrolled in a school tended to support the 4-day workweek (4DW) school schedule, while those without children in school expressed a preference to return to the traditional five-day timetable. This division in opinions extended to their perspectives on the impact of the four-day calendar on the profitability of their businesses and the overall economy of their community. Individuals with children in school were more likely to perceive that the shortened school calendar had a positive impact, whereas those without children in school did not share the same sentiment.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

This section will examine the research methods that will be utilised as part of this thesis. Additionally, participant demographics, ethical considerations and data analysis methods pertinent to this study will also be explained.

#### **3.1 Methodological approach**

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate UAE educators perspectives of a SSW in order to provide governments, policy makers and educational institutions a greater insight into school scheduling change. The research employed convenience sampling, leveraging the researcher's connections within both the educational and sporting communities in Dubai. Initially, the survey was distributed among colleagues at the researcher's current institution and subsequently expanded to include educators from different schools through social media and various teacher-related WhatsApp groups. The researcher encouraged their educational peers to further disseminate the survey across multiple teacher groups to ensure a comprehensive reflection of the teaching population in the UAE. While the precise final sample size is unknown, the survey received responses from 71 participants.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the research study, a mixed methods approach is commonly deployed (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). In this particular study, survey questionnaires containing closed questions was supplemented by open questions and responses. This approach facilitated a comparative analysis of the educators perceptions of a SSW among both private and public school educators' across the UAE. The utilisation of questionnaires served several objectives, including validating the research topic and questions, and uncovering common themes and trends that were also emphasised in the semi-systematic approach to the literature review. Expanding upon the quantitative data collected, the open-ended questions were formulated to delve deeper into the themes that surfaced, enabling participants to offer more nuanced insights into their personal experiences with the shorter school week (SSW). These methodologies were employed with the aim of addressing the primary research questions that had been previously identified.

The survey was structured using the convergent mixed-methods approach, a well-recognised and widely used methodology among various mixed-method approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this approach, data collection occurred in a single phase, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative data. The collected data was then independently analysed and the subsequent findings from each analysis were compared to see if they supported or contradicted each other, as illustrated in Figure 2.

This approach is grounded in the understanding that qualitative and quantitative data provide distinct types of information. Qualitative data offers an in-depth perspective from participants, while quantitative data provides numerical scores from instruments. By combining these two sources of data, the assumption is that the results should be consistent. This approach builds upon the foundational concept of the multi-method, multi-trait approach originally proposed by Campbell and Fiske (1959), which suggests that a comprehensive understanding of a psychological trait can be achieved by collecting diverse forms of data.

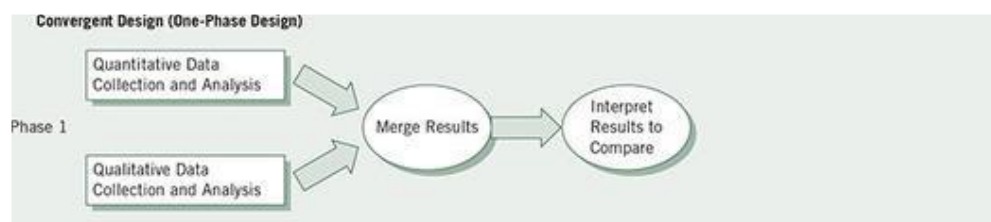


FIGURE 2: Convergent mixed methods design by Creswell & Creswell (2018).

(Moilanen et al., 2022) advocate the use of a survey questionnaire in this type of research as it allows a large amount of data to be gathered and statistically analysed in a fast and efficient manner. There are many advantages to using an online questionnaire, including its low-cost, fast and easy use, anonymity of respondents, and self-administration which allows respondents to complete at any time and under no pressure, which in turn gives them time to thoroughly reflect on the questions and answers. Self-administration therefore increases response accuracy and thus provides better quality data.



### 3.2 Participants

All participants were employed in schools within the UAE. At the commencement of the survey, participants were provided with information stating that the questionnaire aimed to gather data on the effects of the transition to a four/four-and-a-half-day school week in UAE schools. It was clarified that the results would be incorporated into an MBA in Educational Leadership, and the thesis would be accessible online upon its completion. Additionally, participants were assured that all collected data would be treated anonymously and used solely for academic research purposes. It was emphasised that their involvement in the survey was voluntary, and they retained the option to withdraw from the study at any point. There was no incentive provided to the respondents for completion of the questionnaire. All data was collected and stored on Microsoft Office 365 One Drive to comply with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and follow common instructions of Tampere University and TAMK. The average time to complete the survey was six minutes.

The research utilised convenience sampling, taking advantage of the researcher's position within the Dubai teaching and sporting communities. The survey was initially sent to colleagues within the researchers current institution, then expanded to colleagues in other schools via social media and sent to various teacher WhatsApp groups. The researcher asked educational colleagues to share the survey with as many teacher groups as possible so that it was a true representation of the UAE teaching population. This method also ensured that all respondents remained anonymous. Blandford (2013) recommends researchers to deploy a wide range of recruitment measures during a research investigation in order to gain a suitable and appropriate sample size. Furthermore, Cohen et al (2018, p.204) recommends a sample size of at least 30 for the data to be reliable and valid, so that more sophisticated data analysis could occur. Although final sample size is unknown, however, 71 respondents completed the survey.

Table 1 below outlines the demographic of the survey participants. Due to confidentiality, anonymity and ethical reasons, only necessary information was asked and provided. Of the sample, 69 (97%) worked in private schools while only 2 (2.82%) worked in public schools. Respondents from three out of seven Emirates replied, with 56 (78.87%) stating they worked in Dubai, 3 (4.23%) in Abu Dhabi and 12 (16.90%)

from Sharjah. There was a wide variety of age ranges taught, with 5 (7.04%) teaching nurse level, 43 (60%) Foundation Stage, 51 (71.83%) Primary School and 49 (69.01%) teaching Secondary level. There were multiple respondents that taught across multiple age ranges. 15 (21.13%) respondents had children that went to school in the UAE, while 56 (78.87%) did not. Finally, the sample consisted of 30 (42.25%) class teachers, 2 (2.82%) teaching assistants, 23 (32.39%) middle leaders, 12 (16.90%) senior leaders, and 1 (1.41%) SEN (Special Educational Needs) teacher.

TABLE 1. Demographic distribution of survey population

Demographic Variable	Total number	Percentage (%)
<b><i>What type of school do you work in?</i></b>		
Private	69	97.18
Public	2	2.82
<b><i>In which Emirate is your school located?</i></b>		
Dubai	56	78.87
Abu Dhabi	3	4.23
Sharjah	12	16.90
<b><i>What age range is taught within your school?</i></b>		
Nurse/Pre-School (age 0 - 3)	5	7.04
Foundation Stage/Kindergarten (3 - 5)	43	60.56
Primary (5 - 11)	51	71.83
Secondary (11 - 18)	49	69.01
<b><i>Are you a parent with a child that currently attends school in the UAE?</i></b>		
Yes	15	21.13
No	56	78.87
<b><i>What best describes your position within your current school?</i></b>		
Class Teacher	30	42.25
Teaching Assistant	2	2.82
Middle Leader (Head of Year/Key Stage/Department)	23	32.39
Senior Leader (Principal/Vice-Principal/Head/Deputy Head)	12	16.90
SEN Teacher	1	1.41
Other	3	4.23

### 3.3 Survey Instrument

The 20-item survey was an amended version of those used in recent similar studies by Turner et al. (2017) and Turner et al. (2019), which contributed to the validity of the questionnaire. The survey was reviewed multiple times by the primary researcher to refine the wording and structure before administering. Section 2 and 3 of the questionnaire followed a Likert-type scale response option (1 - Strongly Disagree; 2 – Disagree; 3 – Neutral; 4 – Agree; and 5 - Strongly Agree) and was developed based on the themes identified in the semi-structured approach to the literature review. Section 4 asked open-ended questions and answers to allow respondents to build on their previous answers in the closed sections.

Additionally, the items were split into two divisions – one section for teachers and the other for senior management that no longer worked directly with the wider student population and who may have had greater access and insight into school data. Indeed, items were modified to suit the two different sets of participants. Moreover, senior leaders had access to certain school data that was unavailable to the other respondent groups, and therefore two additional questions were added to their item section. It seemed reasonable that branching off these two sections allowed both sets of respondents to answer questions relating to them. Respondents completed the survey electronically via Tampere University's recommended survey tool, Microsoft Office 365 Forms. Once a four-week window to respond has surpassed, the data was analysed.

A Likert scale is a psychometric tool designed for assessing a range of attitude-related statements (Likert, 1932, as referenced in Chyung et al., 2017, p. 15). The inclusion of Likert scale-based questions in the survey brings numerous benefits in gauging sensitivity levels and distinguishing responses, while also generating quantifiable data for analysis. However, a drawback of Likert scale-based questions is the absence of a provision for respondents to provide additional comments. To address this limitation, open-ended questions were added at the end of the survey. The primary researcher chose a Likert-scale from 1-5 as this can be easily converted into percentages for quick analysis. A similar 1-5 type scale

was also used in previous related investigations by Turner et al. (2017) and Turner et al. (2019) which allowed for direct comparison of the data and results.

Section 1 of the survey collected generic information from the respondents, including the type of school (private/public), which Emirate the school was located, age range taught, and whether the respondent had children at school in the UAE. This information was critically important as it allowed the primary researcher to address the research questions outlined in the previous sections. Furthermore, one of the seven Emirates, Sharjah, recently moved to a four-day week and therefore it was beneficial to compare that to Emirates working a four-and-a-half-day week. Section 2 and 3 of the survey consisted of quantitative closed questions whereby respondents were limited to a Likert-scale responses – this provided meaningful and accurate comparison to take place during the data analysis phase. Section 4 of the survey drew upon the convergent mixed-methods design approach, in that open-ended questions and answers gave the opportunity for participants to elaborate, develop, and delve deeper into their responses in Section 2 and 3. Open-ended questions hold significance in qualitative research by offering "authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty, and candor" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 330). The decision to restrict these open-ended questions to three stems from Cohen et al.'s (2018) recommendation to keep them concise, preventing respondents from feeling discouraged or deterred by lengthy and intricate answers.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The data analysis adopted Cohen et al.'s (2007) three-phase convergent analysis approach. Phase one involved content analysis of the qualitative data to count the frequency in which certain statements or words were used in the response. This semi-quantitative approach then categorised them into themes (Marks & Yardley, 2004). These themes were then colour-coded for easy extraction of information and to supplement the quantitative findings in Section 2 and 3. Phase two involved analysing the quantitative data in Section 2 and 3 of the questionnaire. This was done through Microsoft Excel, whereby descriptive statistics were examined for all responses, with values assigned from -2 (Strongly Disagree) to +2 (Strongly Agree). Phase three integrated the two databases to allow for a side-

by side comparison. Excel was then utilised to generate bar graphs which acted as a visual representation which could be easily understood by the reader. In the subsequent section, the analysis delves into the emerging patterns and trends observed within the collected data.

## 4 RESULTS

In this section, the frequency distribution and descriptive statistics were presented in relation to impact, concern, and approval items within the survey. This approach facilitated the unveiling of findings derived from both quantitative and qualitative research. Initially, each item was scrutinised based on the survey responses and supplemented with relevant remarks provided by the respondents in their answers to open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were analysed within the framework of the major themes encompassing the research questions of the thesis. The researcher then proceeded to compare the perceptions based on demographic variables. The results indicate that educators' perceptions of a shorter school week in the UAE appeared positive and favourable.

### 4.1 Impact items

Impact items refer to how the changes directly impacted staff. In this section, respondents expressed predominantly positive perspectives regarding the direct effects of a SSW on themselves, their students, or their student's parents (Table 2).

TABLE 2: Overall frequency distribution of responses and descriptive statistics of all impact items (N=71).

Questionnaire Item	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
6.1 My mental health (your mind's condition) has improved due to the shorter school week.	4.3	5	0.94	1	5
6.2 My morale in school (your level of job satisfaction) has improved due to the shorter school week.	4.3	4	0.83	1	5
6.3. My well-being (your state of feeling happy and healthy) has improved due to the shorter school week.	4.4	5	0.88	1	5
6.5. I have extra time for planning and administration tasks due to the shorter school week.	3.0	3	1.22	1	5
6.6 I have more time and opportunities to seek and undertake professional development due to the shorter school week.	3.3	4	1.15	1	5
6.7. I am as productive or more productive with the shorter school week as I was with the original five-day school week.	4.1	4	1.03	1	5
6.8. The shorter school week has improved the academic outcomes for my students.	3.5	3	1.04	1	5

6.9. The shorter school week has improved the attendance of my students.	3.1	3	1.26	1	5
6.10. The shorter school week has improved the behaviour of my students.	3.5	3	1.03	1	5
6.11. The shorter school week has improved the academic outcomes of my 'at risk' students e.g., low ability, SEN, EAL, or ELL learners.	3.3	3	1.02	1	5
6.12. The longer school days and/or additional lessons condensed into a shorter week has been beneficial for my students.	3.5	4	1.16	1	5
6.13. The longer school days and/or additional lessons condensed into a shorter week has been beneficial for me.	3.9	4	1.12	1	5
6.14. The shorter school week has been well received by your students' parents.	3.9	4	0.91	1	5
<b>Senior Leadership Impact Items</b>					
6.18.1 The shorter school week has improved national and international opinion of the quality of the UAE education sector.	4.2	4	0.87	3	5
6.19.1 The shorter school week has saved my institution money (due to reduced staff absenteeism, less need for supply teachers, lower electricity/transportation costs etc).	2.9	3	1.3	1	5

#### 4.1.1 Staff mental health, wellbeing, and morale

The first three questions on the Impact items section of the survey related to staff mental health, morale and wellbeing as a result of the shortened school week (Table 3, appendix 6). The results indicate that the majority of staff agreed that the SSW had a positive impact on them, as highlighted in Figures 3, 4, and 5 below. 91% (mean = 4.3) of staff either agreed or strongly agreed that their mental health had improved (Figure 3), 88% (mean = 4.3) that their morale in work had gotten better (Figure 4), and 89% (mean = 4.4) felt their wellbeing had been enhanced (Figure 5).

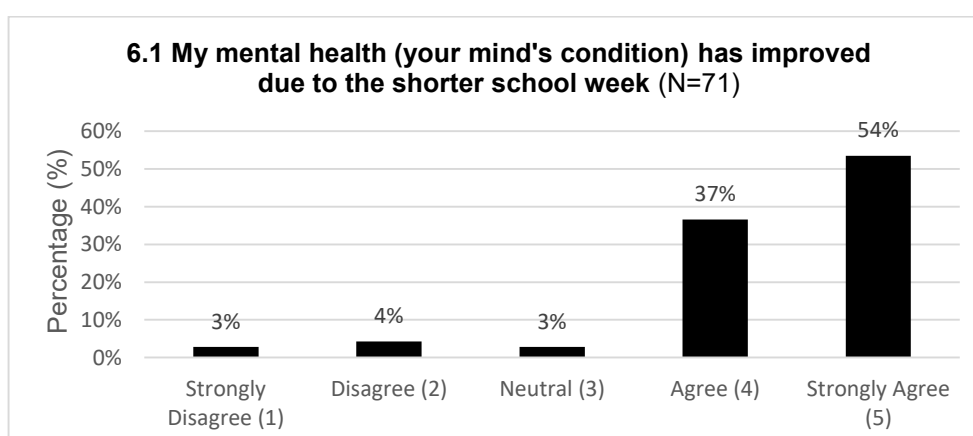


FIGURE 3: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.1.

Additionally, the open-ended questions confirmed that staff mental health had improved drastically since moving to a SSW. There were many comments relating to mental health, some of which include:

*“Better mental health benefits for staff & students.”*

*“Better mind set towards the end of the week.”*

*“Positive Mental health.”*

*“Better well-being, morale and mental health.”*

*“Mental health - everyone is more productive.”*

Again, the overwhelming majority (88%) of staff responded positively (mean = 4.3) to item 6.2 relating to increased morale in school (Figure 2).

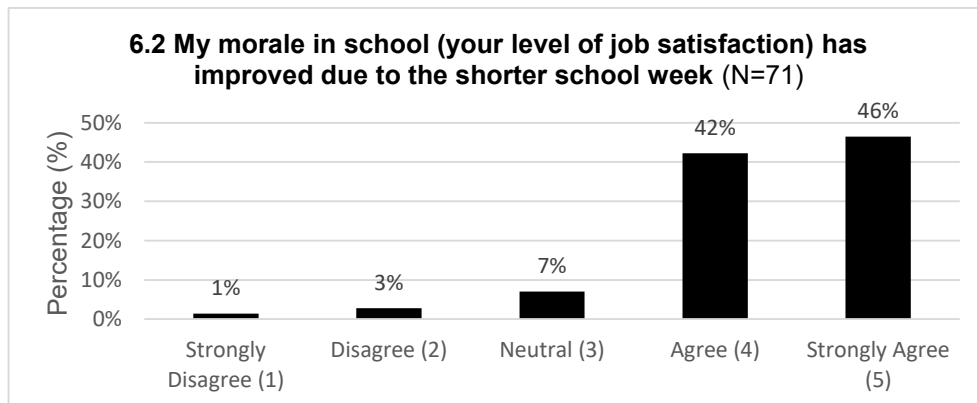


FIGURE 4: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.2.

This further backed up by many statements relating to increase school morale, of which included:

*“Better well-being, morale and mental health.”*

*“Staff morale.”*

*“Happier work environment.”*



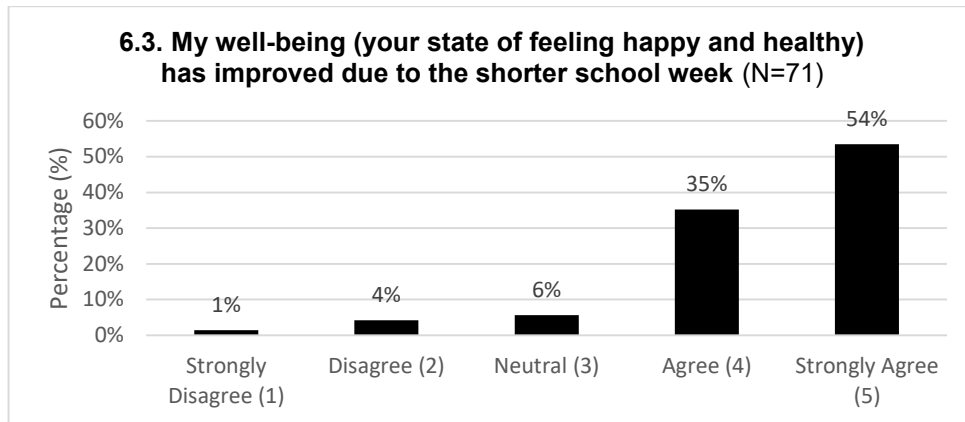


FIGURE 5: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.3.

Figure 5 shows that 89% (mean = 4.4) of staff believed their wellbeing had improved since moving to a SSW. This was reaffirmed through the following responses:

*“Better well-being, morale and mental health.”*

*“Wellbeing for both teachers and families - more time spent with friends and families. Feeling more rested when Monday comes back around.”*

*“Better wellbeing for staff in school”*

*“[Improved] student wellbeing.”*

*“More time to focus on own well-being and happiness.”*

*“[Improved] teacher well-being.”*

Of the staff that responded negatively (4%), one commented on the adverse effect that longer days are having on their school community:

*“Longer school days Mon - Thurs are burning out staff and students.”*

#### 4.1.2 Staff planning, administration, training, and productivity in school.

The next set of questions on the impact items agenda related to how the SSW affected staff planning and administration time, PD (professional development) training, and their overall productivity and efficiency in work (Table 4, appendix 7). The percentage of staff agreeing, disagreeing or answering neutral on items 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7 was distributed more evenly – however, staff still answered somewhat positively to the SSW relating to these items.

Figure 6 on the following page shows a more even distribution (mean = 3) of answers relating to teachers having extra time for planning and preparing resources for lessons and administration work such as marking, feedback, reports etcetera – 40% of staff answered negatively, 40% positively and 21% choosing neutral.

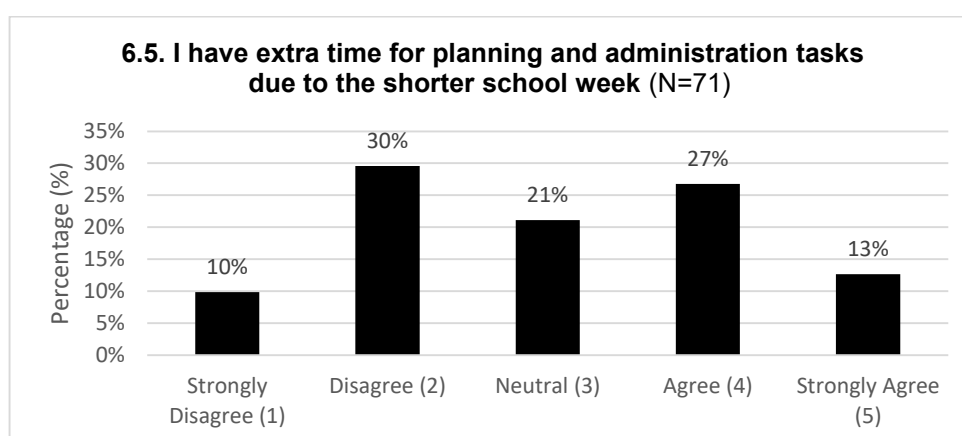


FIGURE 6: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.5.

This more even distribution of results was reflected in staffs open-ended answers, with some reporting positive experiences:

*“Fridays can be used for additional prep time ahead of tough weeks (such as inspections) without the distractions of students.”*

*“Extra time to complete admin tasks and personal chores on a Friday.”*

*“Staff have time for life admin that they do not have time for during the week due to exhaustion and long working hours.”*

*“Can get extra admin tasks done if necessary on a Friday.”*

Alternatively, some staff that responded negatively followed up by saying:

*“Teachers [not] having enough time to do everything.”*

*“...time is condensed which means most afternoons are taken up by meetings/fixtures.”*

*“No time for planning.”*

*“Not a lot gets done on a Friday.”*

Staff entered a range of responses when asked about professional development opportunities under the new schedule (mean = 3.3), as evident in Figure 7 below. The slight majority (51%) answered positively, while a quarter (25%) responded negatively with the remaining quarter neutral (24%)

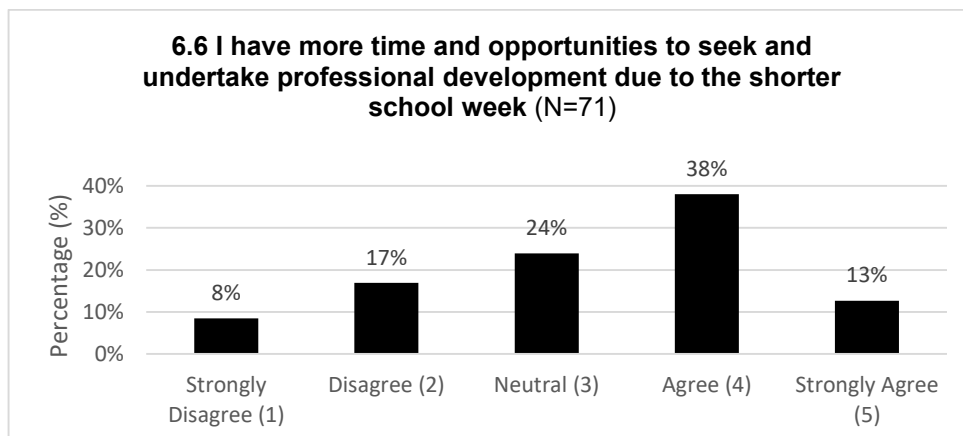


FIGURE 7: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.6.

Following up on their closed answer responses, some staff mentioned that:

*“CPD time is condensed which means most afternoons are taken up by meetings/fixtures.”*

*“ [We should have] actual CPD, not spend an hour or so on a Wednesday having a lecture about things we already know (not at uni anymore).”*

*“If we have CPD let it be beneficial and rewarding (such as a certificate as part of a course etc).”*

The final item in this section related to staff productivity. Figure 8 below highlights that the majority answered positively (76%), with only 7% answering negatively and 17% neutral.

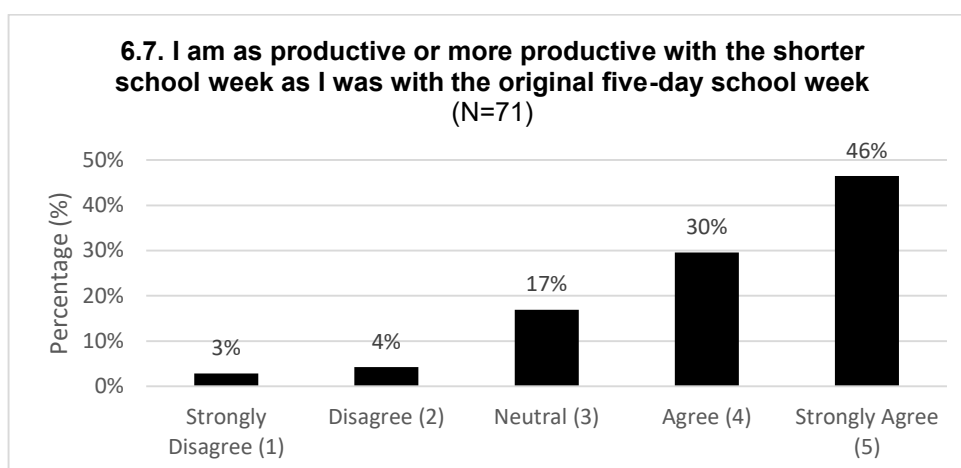


FIGURE 8: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.7.

Many staff added to their positive closed-question replies by mentioning the following:

*“...everyone is more productive.”*

*“Most productive as a result of shorter working hours.”*

*“[Higher] productivity during other 4 days.”*

*“More efficient.”*

*“More rest and recovery over the weekend meaning teachers and are more energised and productive during the week.”*

However, the open ended section relating to staff productivity also yielded some negative responses, such as:

*“Teachers [not] having enough time to do everything.”*

*“Not a lot gets done on a Friday.”*

*“Workload still remains same. “*

*“Less time to plan/mark during the week.”*

#### 4.1.3 Student academics, attendance and behaviour.

Part 3 of the impact items asked staff how the new schedule directly affected their students' academic performance, attendance, and behaviour (Table 5, appendix 8). Again, there was a fairly even distribution of results for items 6.8, 6.9, and 6.10.

Regarding student academic performance, Figure 9 (mean 3.5) illustrates that the majority of staff were unsure if the SSW improved student attainment levels (45%), with 44% responding positively and 11% negatively. Similarly, Figure 10 (mean 3.3) highlights that staff were uncertain, with 51% answering neutral, 35% positively, and 14% disagreeing.

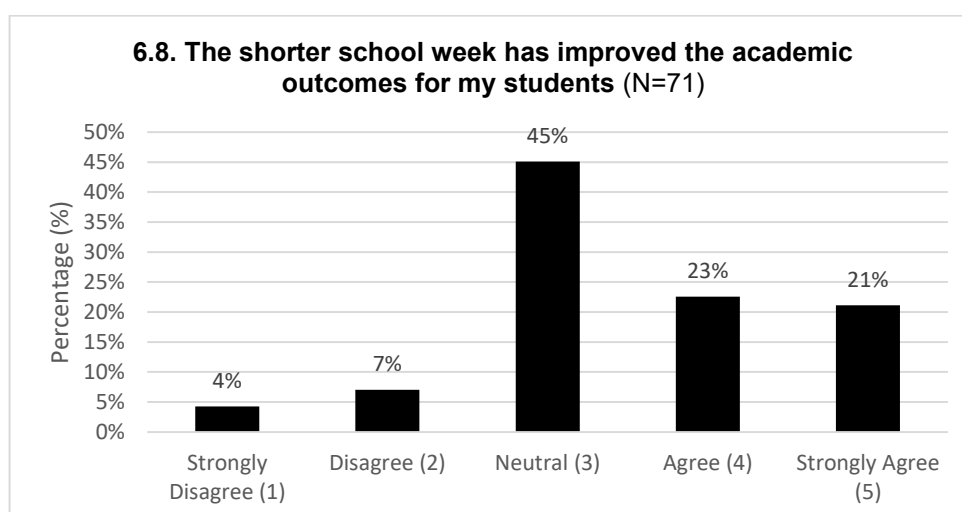


FIGURE 9: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.8.

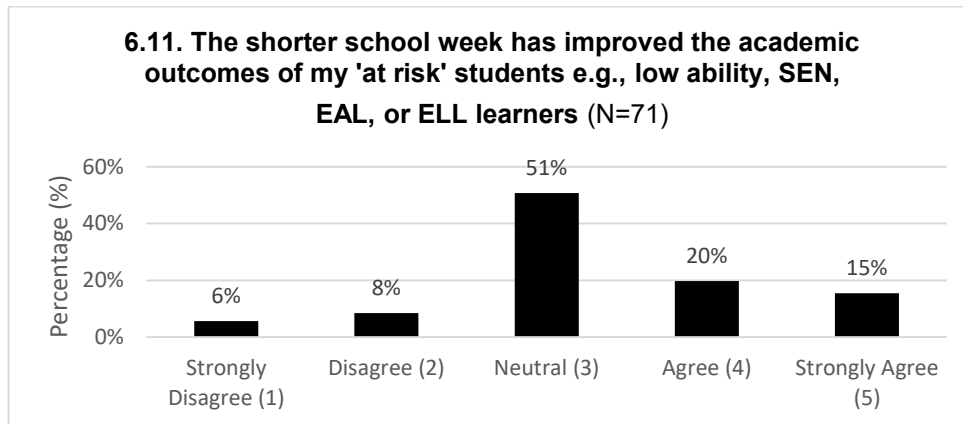


FIGURE 10: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.11.

Staff's positive sentiment towards the SSW supporting better student academic attainment can be summarised in their statements below:

*“Students are less exhausted and therefore more productive in generating quality work.”*

*“Pupils concentration is so much better on a Friday. The normal day is far too long for them and overload is caused come Friday.”*

*“Attention span of learners is improved.”*

*“Better [student] concentration.”*

*“Better student outcomes.”*

*“Students are less tired and are more productive in these lessons.”*

Ironically, and in direct opposition to the results derived from the quantitative data findings viewed in Figure 10 above, a large number of staff commented on the negative impacts that the move has had on their students' progress and attainment. This may be due to staff not having academic data to compare from before and after, and thus the majority that answered negatively below may have answered this question neutrally. It could be argued that their comments below both directly and indirectly affect their students' attainment:

*“The attendance on a Friday is awful which makes it difficult to deliver new/beneficial content to pupils.”*

*“Less time to get work completed with students, and students not very motivated to do work on a Friday since it is such a short day.”*

*“Students tend to miss school on a Friday as it is a ‘half day’ and can sometimes be deemed unimportant - this affects attainment.”*

*“Curriculum is rushed as Friday is basically a write off.”*

Figure 11 below shows a fairly even distribution of replies to how staff think the new schedule has affected student attendance (mean = 3.1). A majority – 35% answered neutrally, 34% positively, and 31% negatively.

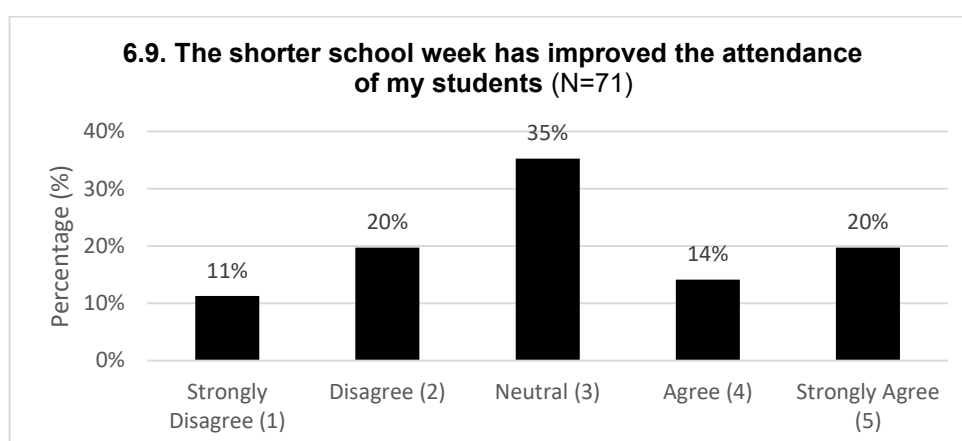


FIGURE 11: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.9.

This fairly even spread of answers was reflected in the open ended replies below:

*“Better attendance for students.”*

*“Students tend to miss school on a Friday as it is a ‘half day’ and can sometimes be deemed unimportant - this affects attainment.”*

*“The attendance on a Friday is awful which makes it difficult to deliver new / beneficial content to pupils.”*

There was also a lot of negative answers regarding student attendance, some of which included:

*“Attendance on Fridays.”*

*“Some students don't attend the half day Friday.”*

*“Student attendance is lower as many students don't bother coming in on half day Fridays.”*

*“Attendance is poor on Fridays. Curriculum time missed on Fridays if there's events on.”*

*“Absence levels on a Friday have increased.”*

Staff perceptions towards improved student behaviour was in the slightly more positive side (mean = 3.5), as illustrated in Figure 12. A slight majority of 45% answered favourably, with only 12% disagreeing and 44% unsure.

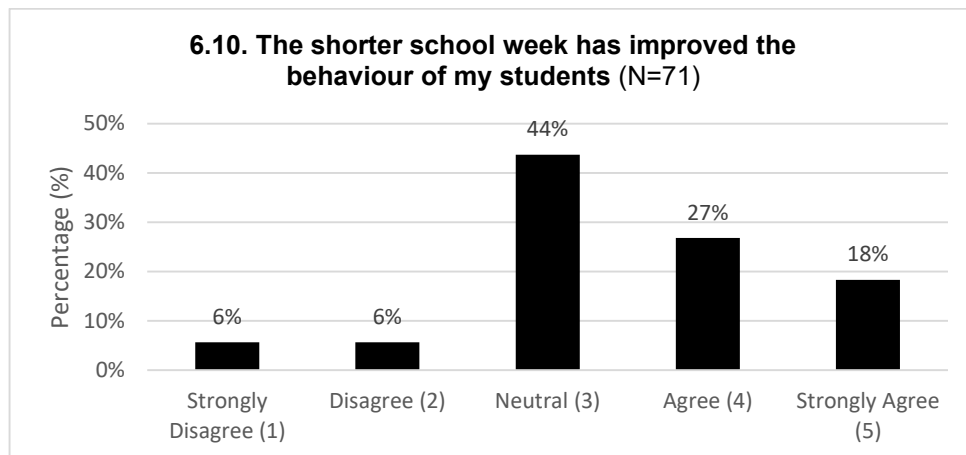


FIGURE 12: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.10.

The qualitative data included comments such as:

*“Better student behaviour.”*

*“Students not very motivated to do work on a Friday since it is such a short day.”*



#### 4.1.4 Extended school days and more condensed timetables

The next set of impact items related to the effect the SSW had on school timetabling and curriculum delivery. Table 6 (appendix 9) demonstrates that respondents had a range of different opinions on this, with a fairly even distribution of answers for item 6.12 relating to the students, and a more positive set of responses for item 6.13 when it comes to the staff themselves.

The mean for item 6.12 was 3.5, indicating a more even distribution of perceptions on how the longer school days from Monday to Thursday affected students. The bar graph below (Figure 13) illustrates that the majority of school staff answered positively (52%), around one fifth negatively (21%) and a just over a quarter of respondents (27%) were unsure.

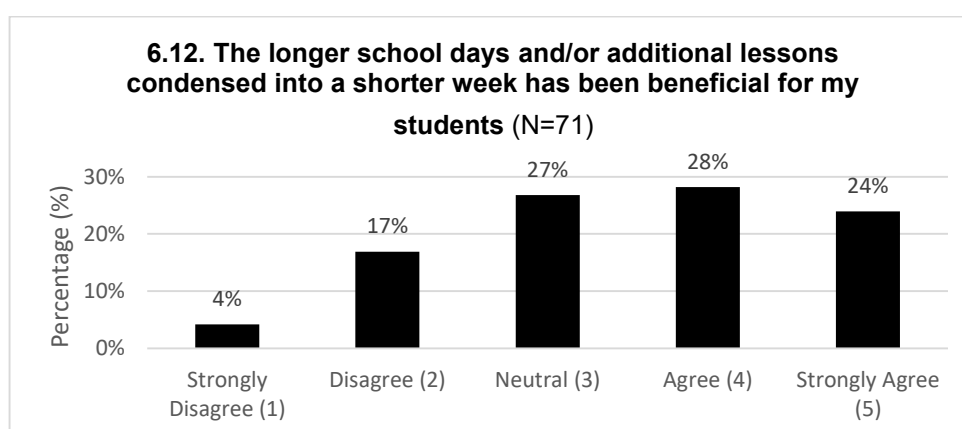


FIGURE 13: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.12.

The open-ended responses highlighted the more neutral or negative aspects to the new school schedule, with many commenting that the longer school days were difficult for students to manage, some of which included:

*“Days being stretched to make up for the time which would not benefit students unless satisfactory breaks were in place.”*

*“Longer days are difficult for young children. The day is already long.”*

*“Children more tired due to longer days.”*

A mean score of 3.9 for item 6.13 indicates more positive perceptions towards how the condensed lessons and longer days have affected staff. Figure 14 reveals that 67% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that it was beneficial for them, while only 12% responded negatively and 20% unsure.

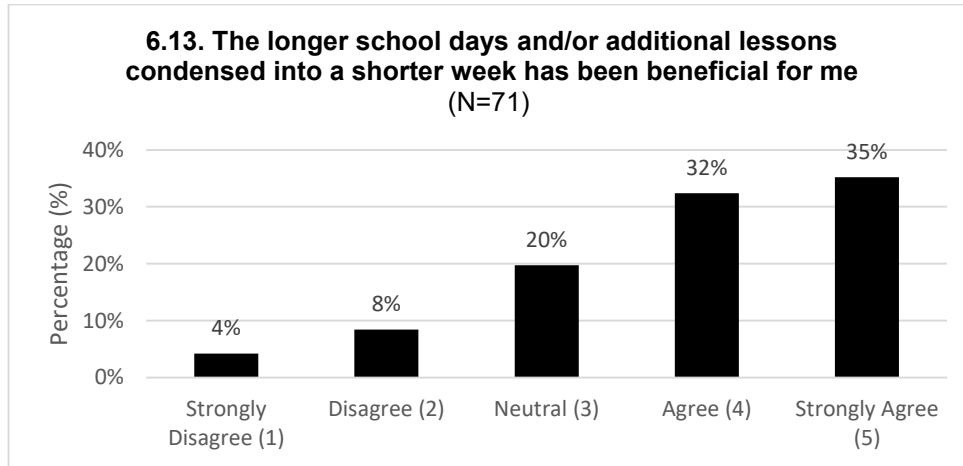


FIGURE 14: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.13.

Interestingly, this was not reflected in the open-ended replies, with many staff citing concerns about how they have been adversely affected by the new working week:

*“Staff have time for life admin that they do not have time for during the week due to exhaustion and long working hours.”*

*“Increase in working hours if it was to go to a full 4 day week potentially.”*

*“Same amount of hours required for certain subjects but condensed into the 4 day week.”*

*“Trying to ‘squeeze everything in’. Curriculum expectations remain the same (in-line with National Curriculum for England) so it can be difficult to balance the additional UAE MOE subject requirements.”*

*“Week often feels rushed.”*

#### 4.1.5 Parents perceptions

The final question within the impact items related to how parents perceived the SSW, although this was from the perspective of the teaching staff (Table 7, appendix 10). Overall, staff replied positively (mean = 3.9), with figure 15 highlighting a large majority of 68% in agreement, 5% in disagreement, and 27% answering neutrally. This high percentage of neutral answers may indicate that teaching staff may be unaware of parents views on the topic.

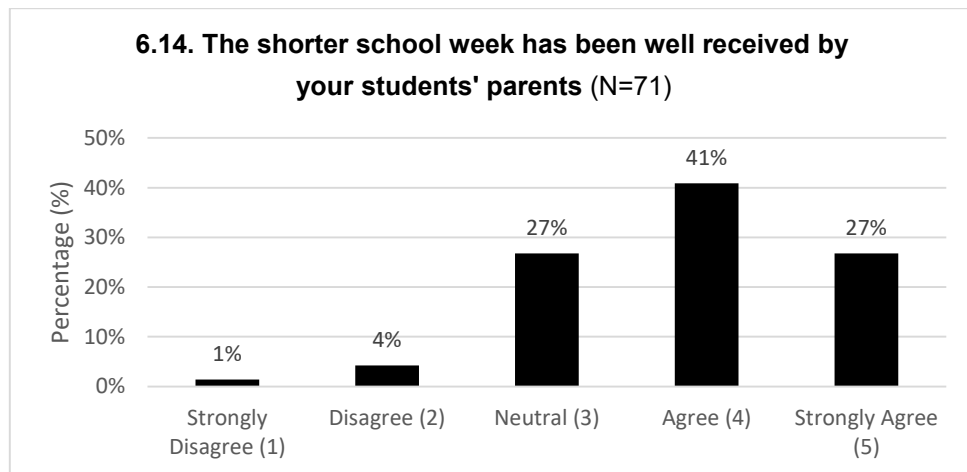


FIGURE 15: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.14.

The open-ended questions mainly cited parent complaints and concerns relating to finances, childcare logistics and student loss of learning time.

*“For working parents who are not teachers childcare is a problem.”*

*“As a parent I worry that my children are missing out on valuable learning time as a half day on a Friday is generally not very productive.”*

*“Parents complaining about lack of childcare.”*

*“The school had to deal with a few parents asking for discounted fees to reflect the reduced hours.”*

*“Parents demanding money back.”*

#### 4.1.6 SLT only Impact Items

The final set of impact item questions in this section were answered by members of the Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) only (Table 8, appendix 11). This was due to the fact that they had access to more data and had greater, more knowledgeable insights into the respective questions regarding the international standing of the UAE school sector and how the move to a SSW has impacted school finances. Table 8 demonstrates that SLT perceived both these questions favourably, with the national and international standing improving since moving to the SSW (mean = 4.2) and most schools appear to have saved money since the school scheduling change (mean = 4).

Figure 16 below shows that 80% of SLT agreed that the shorter school week has helped improve the national and international standing of UAE schools. 20% were unsure and no respondents answered negatively.

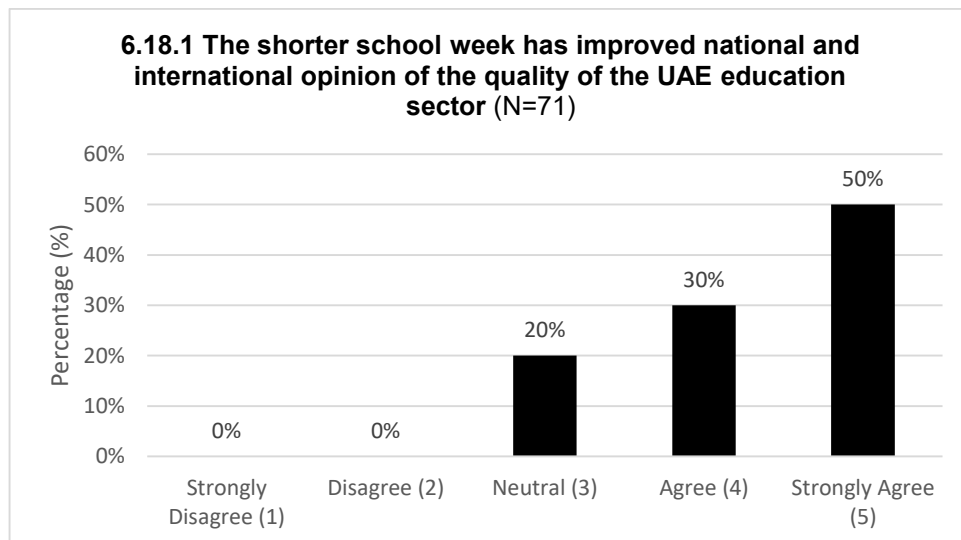


FIGURE 16: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.18.1.

Similarly, a majority of 75% of senior staff said that the move had saved their institution money, with 25% remaining neutral and none disagreeing (Figure 17).

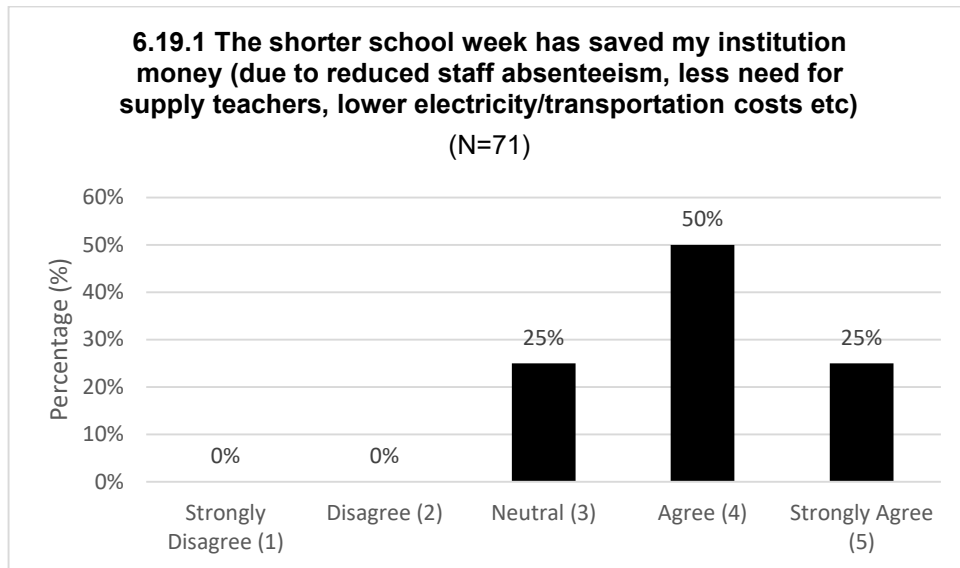


FIGURE 17: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.19.1.

## 4.2 Concern items

With respect to the items that implied concern, or that staff may have been concerned about – staff perceptions were still relatively positive (Table 9, appendix 12). The staff scored a mean of 2.7 when asked if their workload had increased due to the SSW and 2.9 when asked if it would have been best to wait an additional year before suddenly converting to a SSW .

Figure 18 reveals that 48% of respondents did not see an increased workload, while 19% had, and 31% answered neutral.

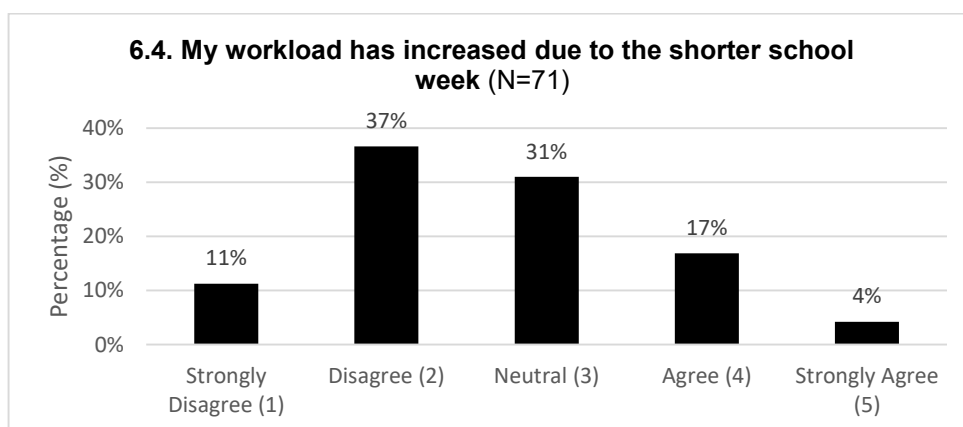


FIGURE 18: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.4.

There were many negative staff responses to this question, including:

*“Workload still remains same.”*

*“More of the schools expectations and pressures have to be done within a shorter time frame.”*

*“Teachers are still over worked. People think that with the shorter week we work less, but we work the same as before, just at different times.”*

*“Much busier 4 days in school.”*

Figure 19 below shows that the 53% of staff disagreed that it would have been best to wait a while longer before moving to a SSW in order to allow schools more time to prepare effectively. 30% agreed and 17% remained neutral.

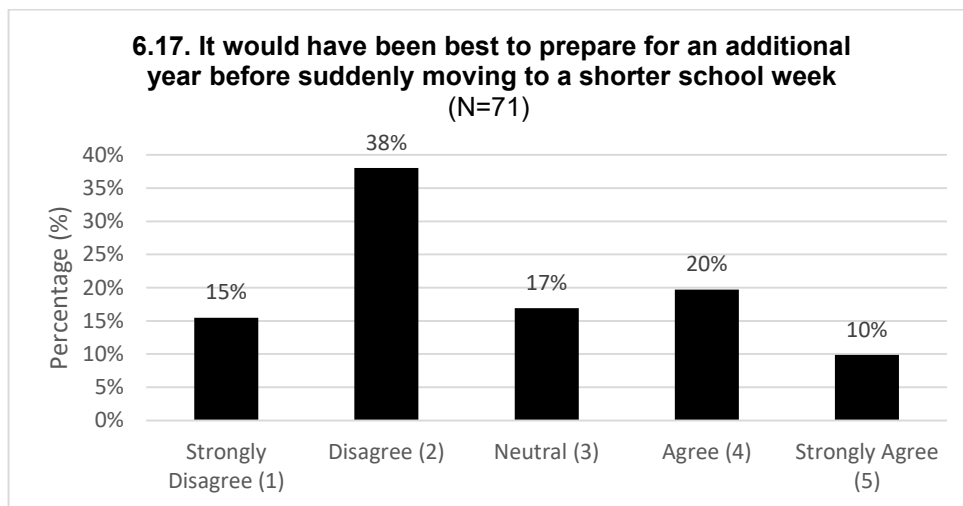


FIGURE 19: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.17.

One member of staff commented positively:

*“It’s been a smooth transition for such a large change in a small timeframe.”*

While others were unconvinced that the sudden change was a smart move:

*“[There was a] lack of time to prepare for such a change.”*

*“A good idea but badly executed by the authorities.”*

### 4.3 Approval Items

The final set of items in the survey asked staff directly about their approval and support of the SSW (Table 10, appendix 13). Answers here were almost all positive – Table 10 shows a mean of 4.6 for both when asked if staff preferred to work in a school with a SSW and if the SSW should always be used in the UAE in future.

Figure 20 below demonstrates that the overwhelming majority (85%) of staff preferred to work in a school with a SSW, while a small minority (6%) disagreed. Similarly, Figure 21 on the following page establishes that 84% of staff believe the SSW should always be used in the future, with only 6% thinking otherwise.

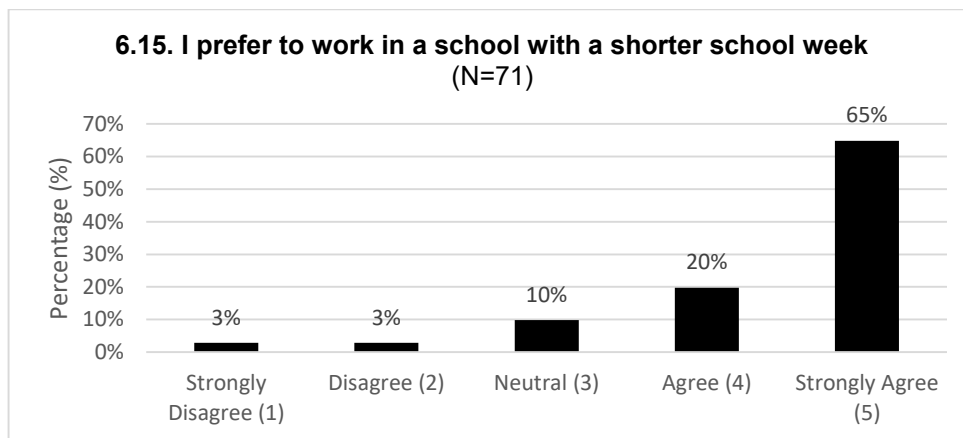


FIGURE 20: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.16.

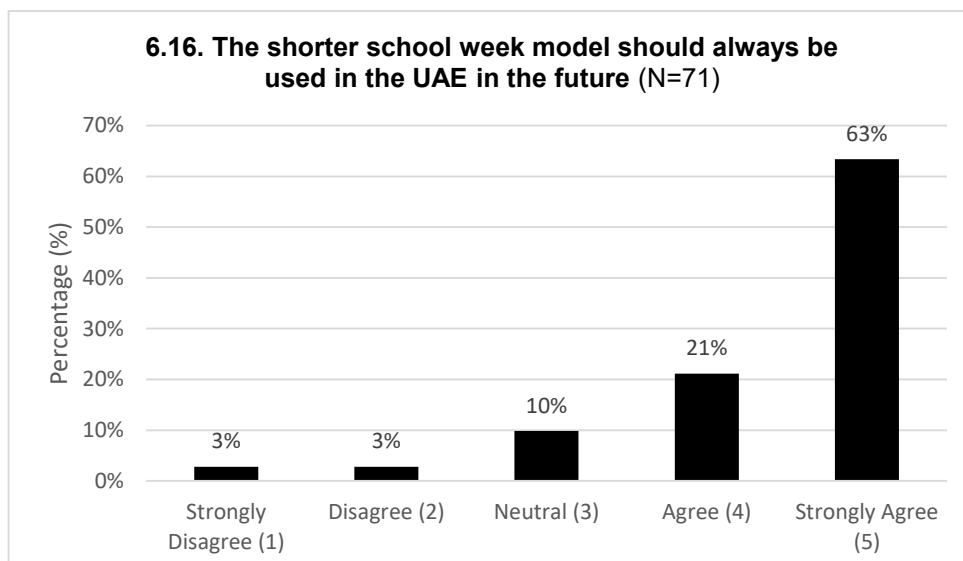


FIGURE 21: Bar graph showing the responses to survey item 6.16.

Positive responses to this question included:

*“4 day working week would benefit students and teachers.”*

*“Move to a 4 day week like Sharjah.”*

*“I would prefer to keep the 4.5 day week. Sharjah does a 4 day week but does not get half terms. There’s been talk of Dubai moving to a 4 day week but I prefer to keep it as it is.”*

One responded who disagreed with the move commented that:

*“My preference is to work 5 days.”*

#### **4.4 Demographic Comparisons**

In the next section of the results, we compared the perceptions of different demographic groups within the study due to significant differences synthesised from the results. Notable differences were highlighted between Teaching Staff Vs Senior Leadership (SLT), Staff Parents Vs Non-Parents, 4-day-week Vs 4.5-day-week and between teachers that taught ages ranges of 0-11 Vs 11-18. The results are presented below.

##### **4.4.1 Teaching Staff V SLT**

Teachers and senior leadership appeared to have differences of opinion on whether the longer school days condensed into a shorter working week was beneficial for their students. This is highlighted in Figure 22, with 34 (56%) teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that the SSW was beneficial for the students, while only 4 (33%) members of senior leadership thought the same. Likewise, Figure 23 demonstrates that a large majority of 10 (83%) senior managers would have preferred an additional year to plan for the move to a SSW while a minority of 16 (27%) teaching staff did.



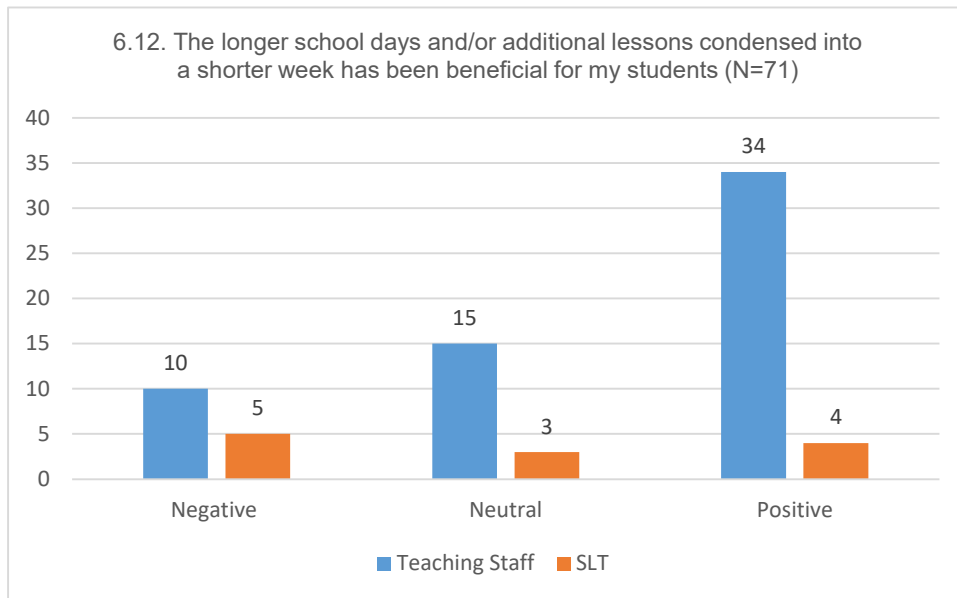


FIGURE 22: Bar graph showing the differences in responses between Teaching Staff Vs SLT relating to item 6.12.

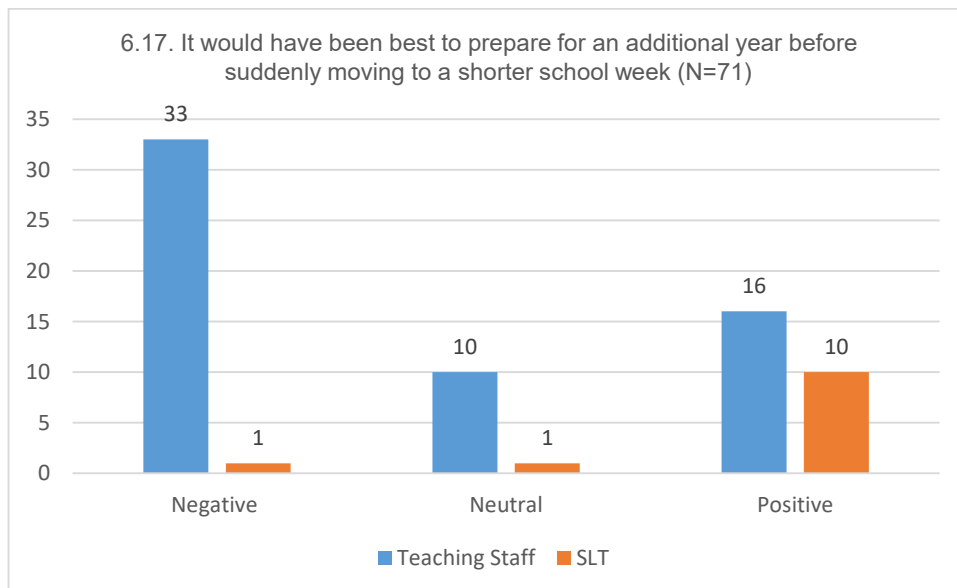


FIGURE 23: Bar graph showing the differences in responses between Teaching Staff Vs SLT relating to item 6.17.

#### 4.4.2 4-day-week (4DW) Vs 4.5-day-week (4.5DW)

The most significant differences were seen between UAE educators who worked the 4DW (in the Emirate of Sharjah) compared to those that worked the 4.5DW (in the other UAE emirates). Figure 24 shows that the 4DW in the Emirate of

Sharjah improved staff morale in the majority of respondents (11/12 – 92%), as opposed to 23 (39%) who worked in the Emirates that deployed a 4.5DW. Similarly, 10 (84%) of 4DW staff felt their wellbeing had improved, while 30 (49%) of 4.5DW staff felt their wellbeing had improved (Figure 25). Figure 26 determines that a majority of 8/12 (67%) of 4DW staff would have preferred if they had an additional year to prepare for the SSW, while only 13 (22%) of 4.5DW staff thought the same.

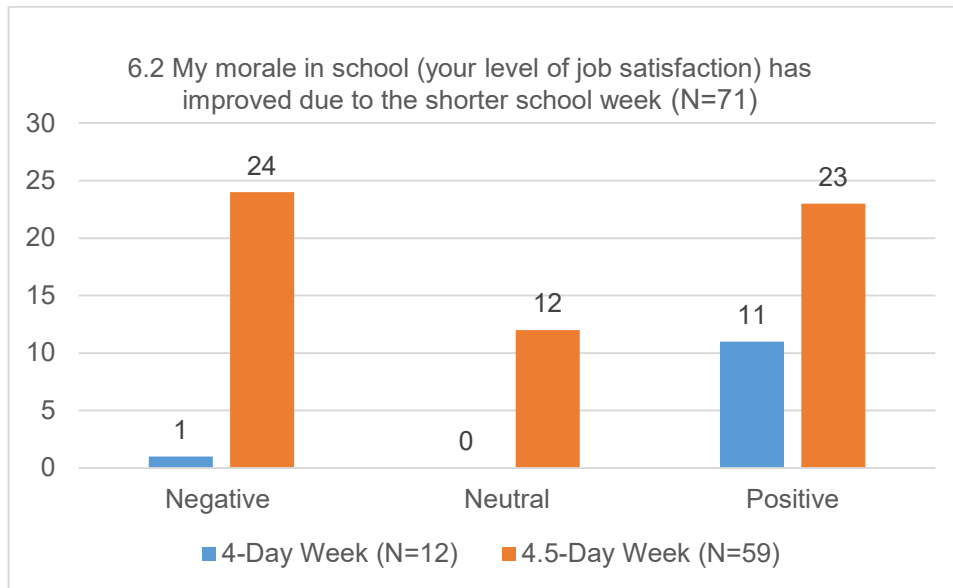


FIGURE 24: Bar graph showing the differences in responses between staff that worked a 4-day-week in Sharjah compared to staff that worked a 4.5-day-week in the other six Emirates relating to item 6.2.

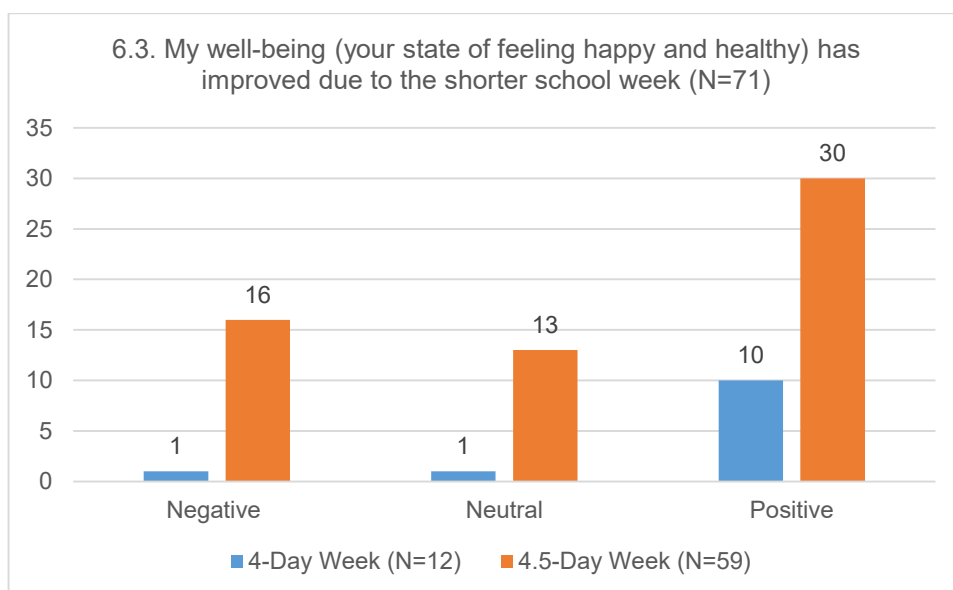


FIGURE 25: Bar graph showing the differences in responses between staff that worked a 4-day-week in Sharjah compared to staff that worked a 4.5-day-week in the other six Emirates relating to item 6.3.

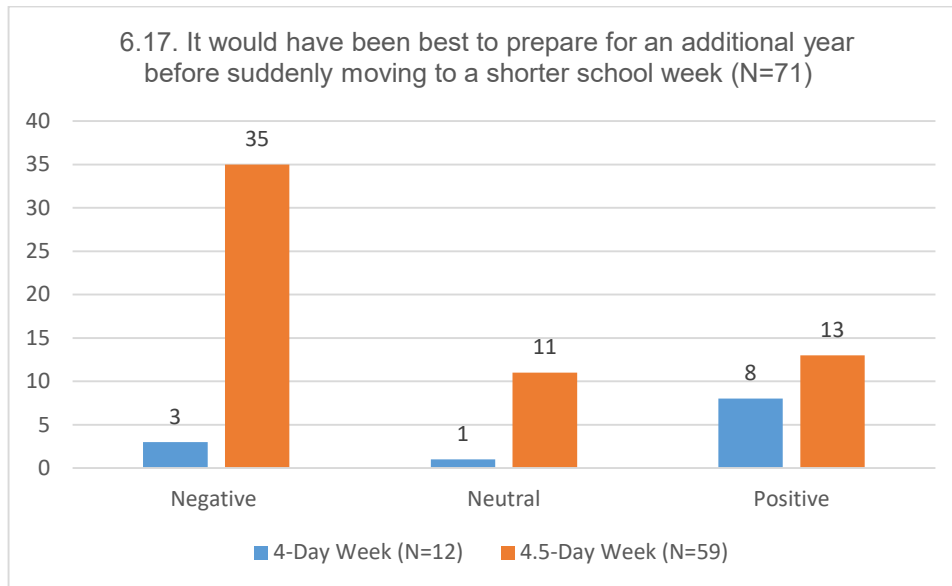


FIGURE 26: Bar graph showing the differences in responses between staff that worked a 4-day-week in Sharjah compared to staff that worked a 4.5-day-week in the other six Emirates relating to item 6.17.

#### 4.4.3 Age Range

There were also variances found between staff that taught particular age groups. 51% of Foundation/Kindergarten/Primary level teachers answered that their student attendance had gotten worse since moving to a SSW, while only 25% of Secondary level staff thought the same (Figure 27). Regarding opinions on whether it would have been best to wait an additional year before changing to a SSW, only 14% of staff teaching ages 0 – 11 agreed, whereas 38% of Secondary staff would have preferred an extra year (Figure 28).

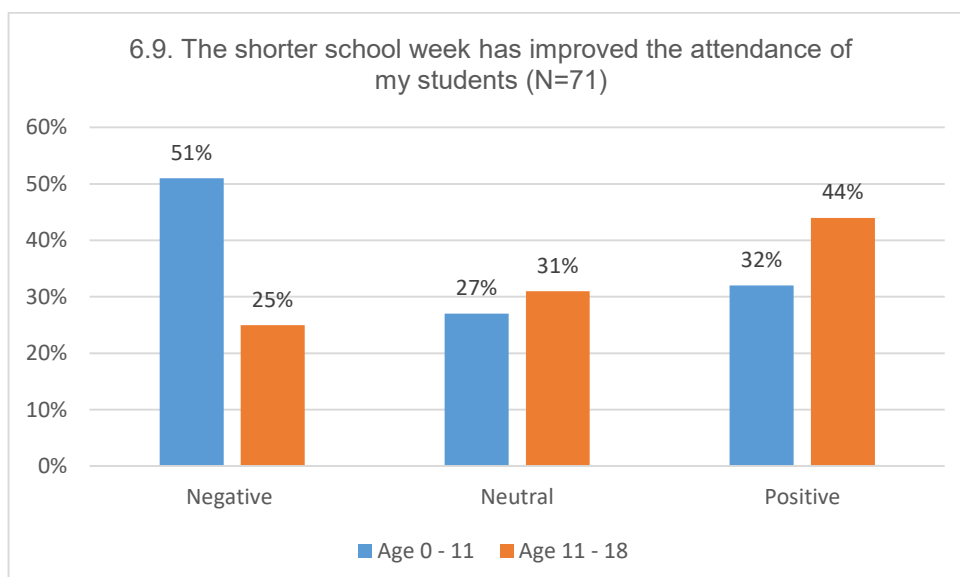


FIGURE 27: Bar graph showing the differences in responses between age ranges relating to item 6.9.

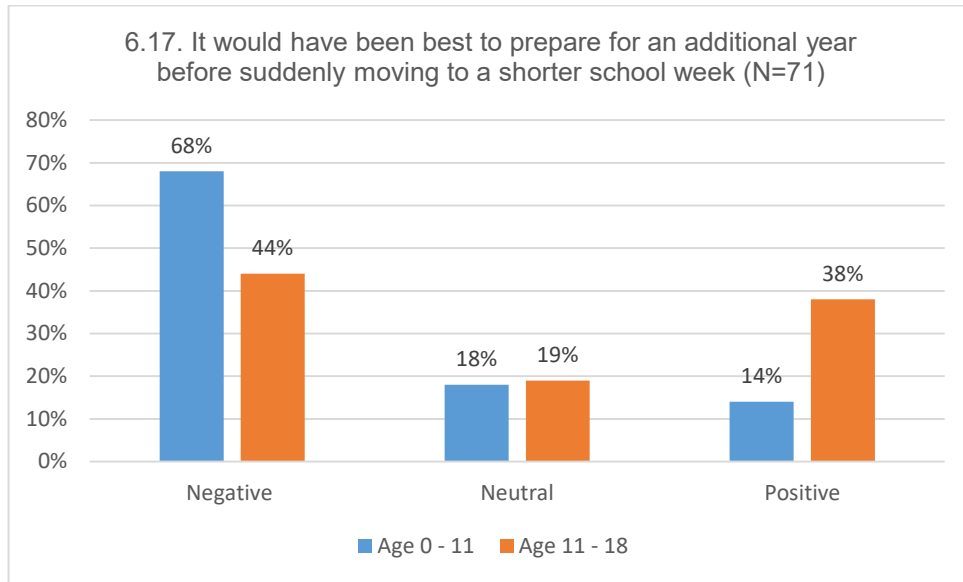


FIGURE 28: Bar graph showing the differences in responses between age ranges relating to item 6.17.

## **5 DISCUSSION**

The aim of this research was to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of a shorter school week from the perspective of educators in the UAE. The study findings suggest that the move to a shorter school week has positively impacted staff, students, parents, and schools themselves. The study further confirms findings from similar studies conducted in the business and government sectors highlighting strong employee support for a condensed working week. The paper reverts back to the research questions in this section.

### **5.1 Research question 1: How do educators in the UAE feel about a shorter school week after its first 18 months of implementation?**

#### **5.1.1 Improved Staff Mental Health, Wellbeing, Morale**

Improved staff mental health, wellbeing and morale are perhaps the most significant findings of the study. Therefore we can conclude that the majority of educators prefer to work shorter hours in order to have a better quality of life both in and outside of work. This is in line with the findings of a very recent study by Shao (2022) in the Home Economics review that revealed a negative and significant correlation between hours of work and life satisfaction among Europeans. Considering 44 – 60% of Scottish teachers frequently feel stressed (White, 2020) and 40% of USA teachers are considering quitting within the first five years (Kidger et al., 2016), the outcomes of the study read well for institutions and leaders considering the move to a condensed working week. Indeed, these findings can be used to help guide and positively influence similar change across countries and schools attempting to keeping and retaining staff. Additionally, it is further evidence that leadership should highly prioritise mental health and wellbeing in order to get the most out of their staff, which will ultimately benefit the students and overall school performance.

Increased staff mental health, wellbeing and morale implies that staff are much happier employees and, thus, more productive and efficient in the workplace.

Turner et al. (2019) also concluded that 89% of their surveyed staff were as productive or more productive in their work under the shortened work week. This will be discussed in the next section.

### 5.1.2 Improved Staff Productivity and Efficiency

The investigation findings highlight an increase in staff productivity in work as well as efficiency in tasks. This is similar to the results of many previous studies (Yarborough & Gilman, 2006; Beesley & Anderson, 2007; Donnis-Keller & Silvernail, 2009), whereby many schools reported positive impacts on teaching and use of classroom time, as staff felt they should teach the material more efficiently given the shorter timeframe. Kingsbury (2008) found that teaching staff were able to provide 20% more instruction in the SSW given that there were less student absences, longer lesson times, and fewer opportunities for interruptions. This result also confirms the findings in the Autonomy study (2023) that we talk about at the beginning of this paper, with one CEO commenting that:

*“When you realise that [extra] day has allowed you to be relaxed and rested, and ready to absolutely go for it on those other four days, you start to realise that to go back to working on a Friday would feel really wrong - stupid actually.” (CEO, consultancy company, page 65)*

It is possible that the attitudes of employers and management are slowly shifting as we move to a more innovative and dynamic workplace environment – in the past, working long hours has persisted largely as a performance tool to signify an employee’s productivity and commitment. However, this has been proven to be the main cause of many problems in the workplace, including staff wellbeing, labour market inequality and a decline in social cohesion (Chung, 2022). Indeed, since the pandemic, there is much greater emphasis on reducing staff burnout to help increase productivity – for example, Microsoft recently conducted a trial in Japan whereby it closed its offices on Fridays for one month and found a 40% increase in productivity as a result (The Human Capital Hub, 2023).

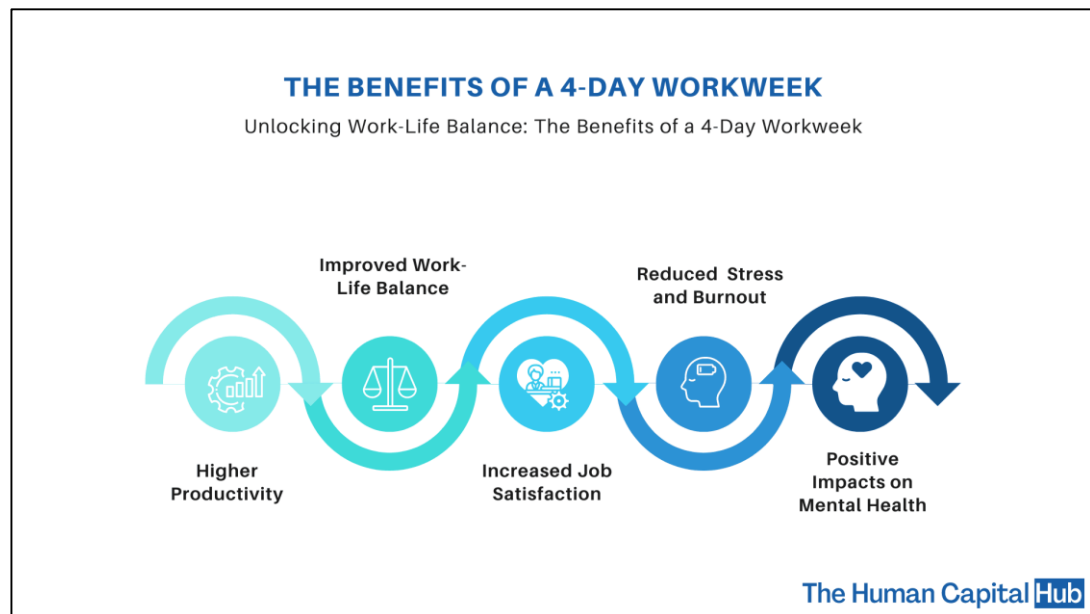


Figure 29. The Human Capital Hub (2023) benefits of a 4-day workweek.

### 5.1.3 Staff Unable to Gauge if Student Performance was Impacted

Another thought-provoking outcome of the study suggests that educational staff remained uncertain about whether a shorter school week had any impact on student academic performance, behaviour, and attendance. It can be argued that the primary reason behind these neutral responses from teachers stems from their lack of access to academic, behavioural, or attendance data that would have enabled them to draw definitive conclusions. This limitation in the study is noteworthy—having the ability to measure and compare performance and attendance data before and after the transition could have allowed staff to provide more informed answers and, perhaps more importantly, could have contributed to the establishment of a more robust, dependable, and valid set of questions and results.

Interestingly, Gower's (2017) research paper discovered that composite ACT scores before and after the shift to a shorter school week did not exhibit statistically significant changes. Furthermore, in some of the sampled schools, there were actual declines in mean ACT scores. Similarly, Knapp's (2014) study yielded mixed and inconclusive results, while another investigation even reported an increase in ACT scores to the highest levels in over a decade after the transition to a shorter school week (Preston et al., 2013).

This research indicates that staff were unable gauge if student attendance had improved since the condensed school week was implemented, as they did not have access to attendance data. It should be noted that much of the empirical data is inconclusive when it comes to improvements in student attendance, with some studies seeing an improvement (Cardinale, 2013; Anderson and Walker, 2015) while others saw no difference (Delisio, 2004). It should also be noted that none of the established literature shows a decrease in student attendance during a SSW, however, the majority of studies focus on a 4DW and not a 4.5DW.

#### **5.1.4 Parental Support**

The results of this investigation suggest that there is strong parental support for a shorter school week and that the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. Indeed, the closed questions asking whether parents reacted positively to the move to a SSW indicate high support for the condensed school week. The open answers suggest that the SSW allows parents to spend more time with their children and families, which again, has a significant impact on their overall mental health and wellbeing. This coincides with the outcomes of Turner et al.'s (2019) investigation in that parents strongly supported the transition to a four-day school week within their districts. The study does, however, also reveal that there were many initial concerns when the move was first announced and implemented, with a number of respondents making reference to childcare (of lack of), finances and others demanding money back.

### **5.2 Research Question 2: Are there differences in how different demographic groups view the condensed school week?**

#### **5.2.1 Teachers Vs SLT**

The study reveals that there were differences in opinion between ordinary staff and senior management suggest that both of their experiences were quite different. Although teaching staff are usually on the front line and in direct contact with parents, it is senior management that usually have to deal with any parental complaints or concerns. The move to a SSW would have come as a major shock



to the many families and therefore many parents may have reacted negatively towards SLT when the announcement was officially made.

Teacher bias may explain why they thought the move to a SSW was more beneficial for their students compared to SLT. Given that respondent morale, wellbeing and productivity had all increased, teachers may have answered this question without being able to gauge the real outcomes of the move. This argument is enhanced in that they were unable to answer the questions relating specifically to student performance, attendance and behaviour. Furthermore, senior school staff have greater access and a more in depth understanding of the data and results of their school. It could be argued, then, that SLT are in a much better position to answer this question and they, in fact, have seen a decline in student academic results and attendance. This may explain the differences found between the two groups.

### **5.2.2 4DW Vs 4.5DW**

Perhaps the most significant findings of this investigation are the differences found between staff that work a four-day-week and those that work a four-and-a-half day week. When the move was first announced, schools in the Emirate of Sharjah decided to only work Monday to Thursday, with Friday a designated holy day in which people could focus on prayer and attend mosque. The remaining six Emirates decided to work a half-day Friday to ensure the curriculum time was still met. The differences found between the two contrasting work weeks, suggest that the extra day off at the weekend provides a huge boost to the population morale and wellbeing. The fact that the 4.5DW staff have to even attend work on the Friday as opposed to being off completely, highlights that there may be no benefit to the half-day whatsoever. Therefore, this study combined with the plethora of empirical evidence documenting the benefits of the 4DW highlights the possible need for the other six Emirates to follow suit and consider dropping the half-day Friday.

Interestingly, the outcomes of this study also point to 4DW staff having less time for planning and administration tasks. This may be due to more condensed timetables and staff members spending less time in work and more time spent doing

leisure activities on their days off. Alternately, 4.5DW staff timetables may be less condensed and therefore staff in the other Emirates have more student non-contact time to plan and prepare for lessons. Furthermore, 4.5DW staff may use the remaining hours on Friday to complete tasks while they are in the school building anyway.

### **5.2.3 Age Range**

Another major result of the study shows that the SSW affects groups differently depending on their age. The attendance of younger students appears to have been negatively affected which may indicate that parents feel that a half day Friday is less significant and the students do not learn much on that day. This is further backed up through the staff comments regarding attendance, with various staff members stating that Friday attendance is poor and that Fridays are usually designated for events.

Interestingly, these results diverge from the conclusions drawn by Turner and colleagues in their 2017 study. In their research, they asserted that parents of younger students were notably less inclined to endorse the four-day school week when compared to parents of middle school/high school students and parents with children in both elementary and secondary schools. Although all demographic groups of parents expressed support for the four-day school week in their investigation, just over half of parents with exclusively elementary school students indicated a desire to continue using the four-day school week in the upcoming school year, when compared to parents with only middle school/high school students (68%) and parents with children in both elementary and middle school/secondary (79%).

The contrasting results of this study may be due to the nature of those surveyed in that the majority of respondents work in private, fee-paying schools. School fees in the UAE are usually much less for the younger year groups when compared to Secondary school, thus implying that parents (and students) want to get the most out of their high fees and time spent in school in order to perform better in official exams as they move up through the school. Therefore, it would make sense to send their children into school every possible day.

### **5.3 What recommendations for implementing the shorter school week do staff have for other countries considering a condensed week in the future?**

This research question is answered in the above text relating to feedback from the open set of survey questions. It is also threaded throughout the discussion section.

### **5.4 Limitations**

This study contains several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. Firstly, although the number of respondents was 71, which is significantly above what Cohen et al. (2018) recommend for valid and reliable results – it is relatively small in the grand scheme of things. The most recent statistics report states that there are over 70,000 teaching staff working in both private and public schools in the UAE (Gulf News, 2020). Furthermore this number does not factor in administration staff, teaching assistants, and other stakeholders working in schools. Therefore, 71 may not be a true reflection of the general population.

A second limitation concerns the length of time that the four-day school week has been in use. At the time of writing, the new model was only in place for 18 months and therefore the full affects may not have been fully felt yet nor appeared apparent.

The next set of limitations relates to the methodology used. The questionnaire was formulated based on an overall review of the four-day week literature, and was an adapted and shortened form of the questionnaire used by Turner et al. (2017, 2019). Given that the measurement instrument was not the same as those carried out by Turner et al.'s previous two investigations), the results were difficult to compare with them.

Perhaps the most glaring limitation to the study is that it did not interview respondents which would have gathered an even deeper understanding of the topic. While the open questions allowed the researcher to delve deeper through quali-

tative research analysis, it would have been much better supported through qualitative interviews. Cann (2019) advocates the use of interviews to shore up and secure the quantitative data by ensuring accurate selection of participants to fully address the research data and make it even more rich.

Finally, the data only focussed on 'educators' views of the shorter working week, and not the opinions of the students or staff. Gathering data on more stakeholders would could enhance the argument for or against a condensed school week even further.

## **5.5 Ethical Considerations**

It should be mentioned that due to the restraints put on the researcher from an ethical perspective, the thesis outcomes may have been somewhat skewed. For example, participants may have had concerns about answering truthfully and honestly if they knew the researcher directly. Respondents may have had an agenda or bias towards advocating for a shorter school week, without taking into consideration the needs of the pupils, parents, or whole school. A further concern relates to the respondents relationship to the primary researcher, in that the questionnaire was administered via social media and WhatsApp to his main contact groups – participants may have felt obliged to provide favourable answers to assist the researcher in finding specific outcomes. Additionally, participants may have been wary of offending their employer or the country in general and therefore may not have answered truthfully in some instances. To alleviate this, the researcher tried to mitigate these factors by following TAMK's strict guidelines and ensuring the respondents that their responses were completely anonymous and data was kept completely confidential with the hope that this would increase participation rates while ensuring reliability and validity.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

This study was designed to examine the UAE educators perspectives on the condensed school week that was introduced in the country in January 2022. The study sought to examine the positives and negatives associated with this sudden move to a shorter school week with the aims of providing educational institutions, leadership teams, and governing bodies with a comprehensive review of the move so that they may be more informed when deciding future school schedules. At the time of writing this paper and administrating the questionnaires, every school in the UAE had adopted the SSW model for a period of 18 months. This, therefore provided sufficient time for the SSW to be embedded in schools and for the possible benefits and drawbacks to be properly examined.

The main outcomes derived from the investigation indicate that a shorter school week significantly improves staff mental health, wellbeing, morale, productivity, and efficiency in school and that parents are highly supportive of the condensed school schedule. There were notable differences of opinion within demographic groups, mainly: that teachers and members of SLT had opposing views due to levels of access to data; that the condensed schedule negatively impacts younger students more than older students; and teachers working a four-day week in Sharjah report better outcomes than those working a four-and-a-half-day week in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

### **6.1 Future Recommendations**

A respondent size 71 may not accurately represent the broader population. To mitigate this limitation, future research in this domain should endeavour to secure a significantly larger sample size. This could be achieved by allowing participants more time to respond and by expanding outreach through various social media and community platforms.

To address concerns regarding the relationship between researchers and participants, forthcoming studies should consider maintaining anonymity by distributing

questionnaires through alias email addresses or utilising the affiliation of an organization or institution.

At the time of composing this report, the new model had been in place for only 18 months, and therefore, the full extent of its impact may not have fully manifested or become evident. Future research should focus on examining similar phenomena over a more extended timeframe to enable a more comprehensive understanding of its effects, potentially yielding more dependable results.

One of the most conspicuous limitations of this study is the absence of respondent interviews, which could have provided deeper insights into the topic. Incorporating interviews can enhance the quantitative data's accuracy and participant selection, enriching the research findings.

This study exclusively concentrated on educators' perspectives regarding the shorter working week. Future research could consider targeting specific demographic groups, such as students, parents, and the broader community, to gain a more profound understanding of how the new model impacts a diverse range of stakeholders. Additionally, it's worth noting that this investigation did not include any student achievement data due to ethical and confidentiality constraints. It is recommended that future research includes a comparative analysis of school-level data from national databases before and after the change implemented in January 2022, if permissible. This would enable staff to respond more effectively to inquiries regarding student academic performance, behaviour, and attendance.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Survey Questionnaire: background information



## UAE educators' perspectives of a shorter school week

The following voluntary questionnaire is intended to collect data regarding the impact of the move to four/four-and-a-half-day week in UAE schools.

The results will be part of an MBA in Educational Leadership, which I (Paul King) am pursuing at Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland, and the thesis will be available online upon completion.

Please answer the questions as they relate to your experiences.

All data collected will be handled anonymously for academic research purposes only.


The estimated completion time is about 7 minutes.

#### Section 1


### Section 1: Respondent Information

Please answer all questions

1. What type of school do you work in? \*

Select your answer 

2. In which Emirate is your school located? \*

Select your answer 

3. What age range is taught within your school? Select multiple if applicable. \*

Noursey/Pre-School (age 0 - 3)


Foundation Stage/Kindergarten (3 - 5)

Primary (5 - 11)


Secondary (11 - 18)

Other

4. Are you a parent with a child that currently attends school in the UAE? \*

Select your answer 

5. What best describes your position within your current school? \*

Select your answer 

## Appendix 2. Survey Questionnaire: teaching staff perceptions towards a shorter school week

### Section 2: Teaching staff perceptions towards a shorter school week

Please answer the following questions as they relate to your own experiences.

If you are unsure, select 'Neutral'.

All answers remain entirely anonymous.

6. It is recommended that you rotate to landscape if you are completing on your mobile device.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6.1 My mental health (your mind's condition) has improved due to the shorter school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.2 My morale in school (your level of job satisfaction) has improved due to the shorter school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.3. My well-being (your state of feeling happy and healthy) has improved due to the shorter school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.4. My workload has increased due to the shorter school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.5. I have extra time for planning and administration tasks due to the shorter school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.6 I have more time and opportunities to seek and undertake professional development due to the shorter school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.7. I am as productive or more productive with the shorter school week as I was with the original five-day school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.8. The shorter school week has improved the academic outcomes for my students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.9. The shorter school week has improved the attendance of my students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.10. The shorter school week has improved the behaviour of my students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6.11. The shorter school week has improved the academic outcomes of my 'at risk' students e.g., low ability, SEN, EAL, or ELL learners.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.12. The longer school days and/or additional lessons condensed into a shorter week has been beneficial for my students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.13. The longer school days and/or additional lessons condensed into a shorter week has been beneficial for me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.14. The shorter school week has been well received by your students' parents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.15. I prefer to work in a school with a shorter school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.16. The shorter school week model should always be used in the UAE in the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.17. It would have been best to prepare for an additional year before suddenly moving to a shorter school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.18. I spend more money at weekends due to the shorter school week.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



### Appendix 3. Survey Questionnaire: additional questions asked to senior leadership

6.19. The shorter school week has saved my institution money (due to reduced staff absenteeism, less need for supply teachers, lower electricity/transportation costs etc).

6.20. I spend more money at weekends due to the shorter school week.

## Appendix 4. Evidence of the number of respondents

The screenshot shows a survey results interface. At the top, there is a teal header with 'Forms' on the left and 'UAE educators' perspectives of a shorter school week - Saved' on the right. Below the header, there are tabs for 'Questions' and 'Responses' (with '71' in a teal circle next to it). On the right side of the header, there are icons for 'Preview' and 'Style'. The main content area has a teal sidebar on the left and a white main panel. The main panel title is 'UAE educators' perspectives of a shorter school week'. Below the title, there is a light gray box containing three statistics: '71 Responses', '06:23 Average time to complete', and 'Active Status'. At the bottom of this box, there is a teal 'View results' button. To the right of the button, there is a green Excel icon and the text 'Open in Excel' followed by three dots.

Metric	Value
Responses	71
Average time to complete	06:23
Status	Active

## Appendix 5. Examples of qualitative exert thematic analysis

In your opinion, what are the main benefits of a shorter school week?
Better well-being, morale and mental health
Work life balance
A week of work doesn't seem as 'intimidating' or stressful. Getting through a tough week is much more achievable
Well being for both teachers and families - more time spent with friends and families. Feeling more rested when Monday comes back around
Positive mental health
Students are less exhausted and therefore more productive in generating quality work
Less planning and preparation
- more free time during a weekend for 'down time'.
- easier to get through a tough working week, knowing that it's shorter.
- Fridays can be used for additional prep time ahead of tough weeks (such as inspections) without the distractions of students.
Mental health
Children are more engaged during the week knowing they finish earlier on Fridays
Strain on staff has decreased. Most productive as a result of shorter working hours.
Better well being for staff in school
Better attendance for students
More time for students to be involved in non academic activities outside of school
Better work life balance
More family time at weekends
Concise planning and teaching.
Better work life balance.
Friday afternoon socials!
Better mental health benefits for staff & students.
Mental health - everyone is more productive
Better work life balance
Children are better rested and happier
Streamlining of the curriculum
Work-life balance
more time with family kids get to rest
Extra time to complete admin tasks and personal chores on a Friday
Feeling like you have a longer weekend and a proper full weekend.
Mental health
Well-being
Pupils concentration is so much better on a Friday. The normal day is far too long for them and overload is caused come Friday.
Staff have time for life admin that they do not have time for during the week due to exhaustion and long working hours.
Morale of teachers and students has significantly improved.
Better mindset towards the end of the week
More family time. More time to do recreational activities
As a teacher I love that we have a shorter day on a Friday as I do a shorter week.
Better student behaviour
Happier work environment
Teachers are more productive
Better staff mental health
More or less a three day weekend
Less hours
More time to spend with family
More family time.
Staff well-being, work/life balance
-Staff morale
-student well being
More of a weekend to relax and focus on things you enjoy. My mental well-being has improved.
More flexibility on Fridays to do the things that I want to do.
More time to take part in stress reducing activities.
Less stress
Efficiency, well being better outcomes
Improved well-being and work life balance
Better morale
More down time for hobbies/family time
Better atmosphere
Recharge
Na
Students are less tired and are more productive in these lessons.
More rest and recovery over the weekend meaning teachers are more energised and productive during the week.
Teacher well being
More time to complete tasks and plan accordingly
Healthier balance between work & home
Attention span of learners is improved
You get a longer weekend

## Appendix 6. TABLE 3

Frequency distribution of responses and descriptive statistics of impact items 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 (N=71)

Questionnaire Item	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
6.1 My mental health (your mind's condition) has improved due to the shorter school week.	4.3	5	0.94	1	5
6.2 My morale in school (your level of job satisfaction) has improved due to the shorter school week.	4.3	4	0.83	1	5
6.3. My well-being (your state of feeling happy and healthy) has improved due to the shorter school week.	4.4	5	0.88	1	5

## Appendix 7. TABLE 4

Frequency distribution of responses and descriptive statistics of impact items 6.5, 6.6, 6.7 (N=71).

Questionnaire Item	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
6.5. I have extra time for planning and administration tasks due to the shorter school week.	3.0	3	1.22	1	5
6.6 I have more time and opportunities to seek and undertake professional development due to the shorter school week.	3.3	4	1.15	1	5
6.7. I am as productive or more productive with the shorter school week as I was with the original five-day school week.	4.1	4	1.03	1	5

## Appendix 8. TABLE 5

Frequency distribution of responses and descriptive statistics of impact items 6.8, 6.11, 6.9, 6.10 (N=71).

Questionnaire Item	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
6.8. The shorter school week has improved the academic outcomes for my students.	3.5	3	1.04	1	5
6.11. The shorter school week has improved the academic outcomes of my 'at risk' students e.g., low ability, SEN, EAL, or ELL learners.	3.3	3	1.02	1	5
6.9. The shorter school week has improved the attendance of my students.	3.1	3	1.26	1	5
6.10. The shorter school week has improved the behaviour of my students.	3.5	3	1.03	1	5

## Appendix 9. TABLE 6

Frequency distribution of responses and descriptive statistics of impact items 6.12, 6.13 (N=71).

Questionnaire Item	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
6.12. The longer school days and/or additional lessons condensed into a shorter week has been beneficial for my students.	3.5	4	1.16	1	5
6.13. The longer school days and/or additional lessons condensed into a shorter week has been beneficial for me.	3.9	4	1.12	1	5

## Appendix 10. TABLE 7

Frequency distribution of responses and descriptive statistics of impact items 6.14 (N=71).

Questionnaire Item	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
6.14. The shorter school week has been well received by your students' parents.	3.9	4	0.91	1	5



## Appendix 11. TABLE 8

Frequency distribution of responses and descriptive statistics of impact items 6.18, 6.19 (N=71).

Senior Leadership Impact Items					
Questionnaire Item	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
6.18.1 The shorter school week has improved national and international opinion of the quality of the UAE education sector.	4.2	4	0.87	3	5
6.19.1 The shorter school week has saved my institution money (due to reduced staff absenteeism, less need for supply teachers, lower electricity/transportation costs etc).	4	4	0.77	3	5

## Appendix 12. TABLE 9

Frequency distribution of responses and descriptive statistics of impact items 6.4, 6.17 (N=71).

Questionnaire Item	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
6.4. My workload has increased due to the shorter school week.	2.7	3	1.02	1	5
6.17. It would have been best to prepare for an additional year before suddenly moving to a shorter school week.	2.9	3	1.32	1	5

## Appendix 13. TABLE 10

Frequency distribution of responses and descriptive statistics of impact items 6.15, 6.16 (N=71).

Questionnaire Item	Mean	Median	SD	Minimum	Maximum
6.15. I prefer to work in a school with a shorter school week.	4.6	5	0.67	3	5
6.16. The shorter school week model should always be used in the UAE in the future.	4.6	5	0.67	3	5