

## Teachers' and School Administrators' Views Regarding the Role of Recess for Students

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### Abstract

This study aimed to determine school administrators' and teachers' views regarding the role of recess for students. Phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in this study. Maximum variation sampling method, a purposeful sampling method, was used to identify the research sample. The research data were collected through a semi-structured interview form and the collected data were analyzed by content analysis. The participants expressed their opinions about the effects of recess in terms of its cognitive, social, affective and physical effects. Participants stated that recess enables students to effectively participate in lessons cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally and that academic learning continued during recess. In addition, it is stated that recess has social effects such as forming friendships, learning about self, social skills and life. The participants stated that recess helps students to feel happy and relieve their tensions. Participants stated that recess can have positive effects on health since it provides students with the opportunity to move physically and it can decrease undesired behaviors. Participants stated that students can also experience negative emotions such as feelings of exclusion and loneliness during recess.

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## INTRODUCTION

Each individual, regardless of age and field of work, needs a break/recess during routine activities. By their nature, it is not possible for children to sit and listen to classes for extended periods of time. Therefore, at schools, students need a break/recess after classes in which intensive cognitive activities are performed (Beard, 2018; Grevengoed, 2017). These breaks at schools are provided for students by “recess”. *Recess* is one of the most beloved times of the school day for students who spend an important part of their days at school. Pellegrini and Smith (1993, p. 51) define recess as “a break for children, sometimes in fresh air”. Parrish, Okely, Stanley and Ridgers (2013) define recess as an extra-curricular time between classes set by school authorities for children to participate in physical and leisure activities. In the global context, Holmes, Pellegrini and Schmidt (2006) define recess as “an important period of school day in which children can have conversations and physical activities with their peers that are relatively independent from adult interventions and in which they find opportunities for education” (p. 735-736). Similarly, in literature, recess is regarded as a scheduled period between school hours in which students can do physical activities and play games in an unstructured manner without adult intervention (Beard, 2018; Ramstetter & Murray, 2017). In a policy statement titled “The Crucial Role of Recess at Schools”, The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (2013) defines recess as “a necessary break to optimize a child's social, affective, physical and cognitive development”.

When students take breaks between mentally challenging tasks, they focus on understand better what is offered (Sohn, 2015). In experimental studies with especially younger primary school children, Pellegrini and Davis (1993) found that they became more careless as the lesson hours extended, while Pellegrini, Huberty and Jones (1995) reported that recess had positive contributions to classes in terms of both attention and classroom management (Cited in: Jarrett, Maxwell, Dickerson, Hoge, Davies, & Yetley 1998).

Recess provides students with opportunities to have *social* interactions with each other. Learning is a social and collaborative activity where people create meaning through interactions with each other and with the objects around them. During recess, children interact through play. Social development and learning of a child can be affected by play activities. With an entertaining and fun socialization process, the child learns the basic rules such as sharing, helping, respecting the rights of others and taking responsibility (Ünal, 2009).

Research shows that play has cognitive benefits for children and young people (Erin Vaantaja, 2016). Burriss and Burriss (2011) found that during play, children can negotiate, communicate and compromise and that play helps them interpret the signals and clues offered by others. Therefore, during recess, playing offers children stimulating cognitive activities both inside and outside the classroom. The cognitive processes used by children to play are very similar to the processes used by children who participate in learning activities. Recess periods provide opportunities for children to learn how to manage their unstructured time and how to use their time well during breaks. Activities performed during recess provide students with skills to help with time management (Beard, 2018). Therefore, play activities that are performed during recess contribute to both social development and cognitive development of children.

Recess offers children an opportunity to physically engage (Grevengoed, 2017). Today, childhood obesity rates are regarded as one of the significant public health problems in the world. Especially, lack of physical activity is an important factor in increasing the obesity rates among children (Massey, Stellino, Claassen, Dykstra & Henning, 2018; Skinner & Skelton, 2014). Research conducted over a four-year period in French and Canadian schools shows the positive effects of time spent on physical activity. The results demonstrated that time spent on physical activity increased fitness, developed positive attitudes and improved test scores. These results are also consistent with the findings of the meta-analysis about 200 studies on the effect of exercise on cognitive functionality, which suggests that physical activity supports learning (Jarrett, 2002). In this context, it is important for children to do physical activities. Children's active participation in adequate physical activities positively affects cognitive skills, attention, behavior, affective and social development and

instrumental in prevention of obesity. Recess periods at schools are timeframes in which children participate in physical activities (Frank, Flynn, Farnell & Barkley, 2018; Ginsburg, 2007).

Recess not only enables students to improve themselves physically, cognitively and socially, but also affectively by improving their self-esteem and self-confidence. Recess improves students' ability to overcome negative peer pressure and increases their general public acceptance (Biddle & Asare, 2011 cited in Beard, 2018). Recess is an institutional environment that ensures safe positive relationships at school with peers and adults, learning support and school engagement and participation (Parker, 2015). During recess, children are given the chance to control their own movements and activities; not being controlled by others makes the recess periods fun. Hence, recess also reduces stress which negatively affects not only health but also learning. During breaks, unstructured physical play acts as a mediating force in reducing stress (Pica, 2010).

Although literature refers to the cognitive, social, affective and physical benefits of recess (AAP, 2013; Beard, 2018; Chen, 2017; Erin Vaantaja, 2016; Grevengoed, 2017; Ramstetter & Murray, 2017) it is still thought that recess is a waste of time. At schools, there are times when people choose to devote more time to a subject that has not been sufficiently accomplished or to reduce the time reserved for another activity for this reason. Teachers may think that engaging in academic activities during recess periods will increase achievement and some countries discuss shortening or even taking away recess (Salberg, 2018). The Regulation that Introduces the Amendments on the Regulation on Pre-School and Primary School Education Institutions of the Ministry of National Education in Turkey published in the Official Gazette No. 30827 dated 07.10.2019 states in Article 4, paragraph (a) that: "The duration of one class period is 40 minutes. For recess, the school administration allocates a minimum of 15 minutes in schools where normal education is provided and at least 10 minutes in schools where dual education is provided". It is believed that the views of education administrators and teachers working in primary and secondary schools on how recess affects children will be instrumental in their practices related to the right of recess given to children which is specified in the above legislation. With this rationale and in the light of the relevant literature, this study aimed to determine the opinions of the school administrators and teachers working in primary and secondary schools on the role of recess for students.

## METHOD

Phenomenology, one of the qualitative research designs, was used in this study. With the help of experiences of individuals or a group, this design allows defining the phenomena that we are aware of but do not have an in-depth and detailed understanding (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The phenomenon in this study is the experience of "recess for students". In this direction, phenomenology design was selected in order to reveal the views of school administrators and teachers working in primary and secondary schools on the role of recess for the students based on their experiences.

### Study Group

Teachers and education administrators employed at 2 state primary schools and 2 state secondary schools with medium socio-economic levels participated in the study. "Maximum variation sampling method", a purposeful sampling method, was used to identify the research groups. Purposeful sampling allows studying the situations that are thought to have in-depth and rich experiences in regards to the subject that is studied. Maximum variation sampling allows including the participants who may have different viewpoints regarding the situation that is addressed (Patton, 2014). In this study, school administrators and teachers selected with the purposeful sampling method were included in the study since they were considered to have rich experiences that would ensure in-depth investigations of the topic. In order to reflect the diversity of "experiences related to recess" to a maximum extent, different participants were reached in the study based on school, gender, branch, and seniority. The following participants were included in the study: All educational administrators in both primary schools (n=5) and both secondary schools (n=6), a total of 10 classroom teachers from both primary schools (5 per primary school), and a total of 10 subject matter teachers from both secondary schools (1 English, 1 Turkish, 1 Social Studies, 1 Mathematics and 1 Science teacher per participating

school). 19 of the participants were female and 12 were male. The seniority of the participants varied between 7-32 years. All of the participants taught in more than one school and in different provinces since they started teaching. Table 1 provides information regarding the gender, seniority and subject matters of the education administrators and teachers participating in the interviews.

**Table 1. Information on Participants**

Participant	School	Gender	Subject Matter	Seniority
S1	Secondary school	Male	Assistant Principal	12
S2	Secondary school	Male	Principal	22
S3	Secondary school	Male	Assistant Principal	18
S4	Secondary school	Male	Assistant Principal	14
S5	Secondary school	Male	Turkish	15
S6	Secondary school	Male	Assistant Principal	14
S7	Secondary school	Female	Social Sciences	15
S8	Secondary school	Female	English	12
S9	Secondary school	Male	Mathematics	14
S10	Secondary school	Female	Science	21
S11	Secondary school	Male	Principal	11
S12	Secondary school	Female	Mathematics	8
S13	Secondary school	Male	Turkish	15
S14	Secondary school	Female	Social Sciences	14
S15	Secondary school	Female	Science	7
S16	Secondary school	Male	English	26
P1	Primary school	Female	Classroom Teacher	22
P2	Primary school	Male	Classroom Teacher	20
P3	Primary school	Male	Assistant Principal	28
P4	Primary school	Male	Classroom Teacher	15
P5	Primary school	Male	Assistant Principal	17
P6	Primary school	Female	Classroom Teacher	13
P7	Primary school	Female	Classroom Teacher	8
P8	Primary school	Male	Principal	29
P9	Primary school	Male	Principal	22
P10	Primary school	Female	Classroom Teacher	21
P11	Primary school	Female	Classroom Teacher	28
P12	Primary school	Female	Classroom Teacher	30
P13	Primary school	Male	Classroom Teacher	14
P14	Primary school	Male	Assistant Principal	16
P15	Primary school	Male	Classroom Teacher	32

### Data Collection Tool and Data Collection Process

In phenomenology studies “features of inspection provided to researchers by interviews such as interaction, flexibility and probing should be used in order to reveal the experiences and meanings relevant to what is experienced” (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 80). Therefore, the data were collected in this study, through semi-structured interviews with education administrators and teachers working in primary and secondary schools. Two experts, a teacher who was studying for a master's degree in educational sciences and an expert in qualitative research were consulted to ensure the reliability and validity of the interview questions. A subject matter teacher employed at a secondary school was interviewed in order to determine the comprehensibility and clearness of the interview questions developed for this study. After this interview, the interview form was finalized. There are 5 open-ended questions in the interview form. These questions are;

1. How do you define recess?
2. In your opinion, what is the role of recess in school?
3. Please think of your students’ behavior before and after recess;

- a. How do they behave during the period before the recess?
  - b. How do they behave during the period after the recess?
4. What differences do you observe in your students that are noteworthy before and after the recess?
  5. What are the positive or negative aspects of recess for your students?

Before the interviews, each participant was given information about the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation was sought. The participants were told that the interviews would be recorded with a voice recorder. The interviews were held in the schools where the participants worked, in areas where the research can be carried out robustly. Attention was paid to select rooms with no noise, no access during interviews, where the participants would feel comfortable (such as principal's room, assistant principal's room). So as not to disrupt education and training at participant schools, interviews with secondary school teachers were held during periods they were free from their teaching duties and interviews with primary school teachers were conducted during the classes which were taught by subject matter teachers.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed by content analysis in this study. Content analysis aims to reach the concepts and relationships that can explain the data collected during the study. In content analysis, the data are subjected to a deeper analysis; the data that are similar to one another are combined around specific concepts and themes and presented in a format that the reader can understand (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Accordingly, all interviews with the participants were transferred to the computer environment in the form of texts (58 pages, 20569 words).

The interview data were coded separately by taking the research questions into consideration. The list of codes created for the questions showed that the categories reflecting the contents of the codes were collected under four main themes: cognitive, affective, physical and social effects of recess. In addition, literature also pointed to the same themes in regards to the role of recess. For this reason, research data were processed under these 4 themes in general, more detailed codes that can be included in these themes were identified in the data analysis and grouped under sub-themes that best reflect their contents. Findings related to teachers' and educational administrators' views about the role of recess were explained and organized according to the themes and sub-themes which were identified with a holistic approach.

### **Validity and Reliability Studies**

Members' check was provided by presenting research findings to the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participant statements were conveyed exactly as they were. Examples of participant statements were provided about the generated themes. In addition, the codes, sub-themes and themes generated in the framework of this study were examined by a faculty member experienced in the field of qualitative study and educational sciences and peer debriefing was ensured with the help of provided suggestions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Consistency between research questions and codes, consistency between data and codes, consistency between codes and themes, and consistency between main themes and sub-themes were confirmed with the help of peer assistance.

## FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of participants' views on the "role of recess for students", four themes were created: "cognitive", "social", "affective" and "physical" effects.

### Cognitive Effects of Recess

The theme "cognitive effects of recess" includes 5 sub-themes: cognitive participation in the lesson, behavioral participation in the lesson, affective participation in the lesson, continuation of academic learning and negative effects.

According to participants, recess had an effect on students' "cognitive participation in classes". They expressed that students' attention spans were short and that recess provided a break after intensive lesson periods and relaxed students. In this vein, P9 expressed that, "Even adults can pay attention for a specific period of time, even to favorite writers etc.... Then again, this period is even shorter for children. Their attention span is shorter. Attention span is even shorter in primary school. Even though children love their teachers and want to listen to them with rapt attention, their nature does not allow that; therefore, breaks are required. Attention is renewed and improved after recess" and P14 stated that "Attention span of primary school children does not exceed 10 minutes. If children are kept focused on the task after the first 10 minutes, if their brain is not relaxed by focusing their attention on something else and if they are not relieved of the task, a 40-minute non-stop lesson will not help either the teacher or the students. It will even be harmful". According to participants, students came to class with renewed attention after recess. S2 expressed that students who discharged their energy during recess started the new lesson fresher: "These children come to class with renewed energy, after having emptied their brains; they are more vigorous and fresh".

Participants stated that recess had an impact on students' "behavioral participation in the classroom". S14 stated that students who met their physical needs during recess had improved participation during classes: "In the morning, our students can be a little sleepy, we want them to have breakfast, but some of them say they couldn't get up in or they did not want to eat (when they woke up). Then, when they eat and drink something during the first break for 10 minutes, when they chat with their friends, they are more alert. The second class can pass a little livelier". The participants stated that students were relieved of mental fatigue during recess and came to the next class fresher. S10 expressed that "After the recess, students are more pulled together. When they are out for 5 minutes, they are more collected together; it is a transition to the class. They do the given activities more rapidly".

Participants stated that recess had an impact on students' "affective participation in the classroom". The following participant views show that recess provided relaxation for students, allowed them to discharge their energy and therefore they could participate in following lessons with more motivation, elation, enthusiasm and higher spirits: "They come back from recess happier. They come back with smiling faces. They are more motivated; they have discharged their excess energy. They are more motivated for the lesson. It is easier to engage a happy student during the class" (P1), "Students relieve their stress during recess and come to class more relaxed. When they return, they do their tasks more enthusiastically" (P15) and "A child who has a very productive recess, a child who has played during recess, a child who has re-charged himself/herself, a child who is happy will be more motivated and more channeled" (S4).

Participants stated that recess provided students with an opportunity for "continued academic learning". With the following views, participants expressed that while playing during the recess, students reinforced what they have learned in class, shared with their friends and checked their shortcomings, that is, their academic learning continued: "I mean recess is a period in which learning actually takes place. Training and education are not provided only during class hours, learning also takes place during recess. Some of the students can even discuss what they have learned in class during the break. For example, a student may mention that he/she has already heard about a subject they have just studied during the lesson, another may state that it is the first time he/she has heard this

*topic or he/she claims that this (information) is from the internet. There is an interaction in this manner. In the lesson, you initiate a topic and the children develop it themselves” (P9) and “Especially after exams, they discuss questions. Such as “how did you answer, I answered this way, etc”.” (S3).*

Participants expressed that recess may have a “*negative effect*” on the students, albeit a little. With the following view, P2 stated that recess would have a negative effect on students who were distracted by the recess in terms of motivation for the next class: “*Students can be distracted by recess, they can be focused in class only for 3-5 minutes; if they really enjoy the game outside, they are really distracted and would prefer to be outside*”.

### **Social Effects of Recess**

The theme “social effects of recess” includes 9 sub-themes: “forming friendships”, “learning about life”, “self-knowledge”, “opportunity to play”, “social skills”, “being accepted”, “getting to know the student”, “sharing” and “negative effects”.

On the theme of social effects of recess, participants emphasized the role of recess on “*forming friendships*” the most. The following views show that participants regard recess as a period in which students can form friendships: “*Recess, in my opinion, is a period in which students socialize; recess regulates friendships*” (S10); “*Children are a bit more passive in the classroom. At recess, they can select their own playmates with their peers. Recess establishes more effective friendships*” (P2). According to following views, participants thought that recess provided students with opportunities such as getting to know other students in their class and in other classes, forming relationships and choosing friends, etc.: “*They have the chance to get to know each other, they have opportunities. They get to know each other during games, they run, and they fight. I think these are the areas where they can get to know each other. Besides, they cannot get to know each other unless there is recess at schools. In my opinion, students cannot know each other in the classroom setting*” (S10), “*Recess is an occasion for them to get to know each other. Students may compete in the class atmosphere and their friends in class may not be the same ones in the recess*” (S4).

Participants stated that recess provides students with the opportunity to “*learn life*”. With the following views, participants expressed that the games played during recess also provide life experiences and teach about life in regards to social roles: “*Sometimes, they learn about defending their rights during recess, I mean, learning the rules of the game. When the rules are learned, in my opinion, the real struggle starts there*” (P12); “*When he/she is kicked out of the game, he/she gets angry and says it is not fair; but then I say that your friends are right, you did not follow the rules. This is also a life experience. We are adults; you are kicked out when you don't follow the rules of the game. Hence, they're experiencing life*” (P13); “*The child falls during recess, but he/she can fall anywhere anytime. There are fights during recess. But children learn to defend themselves in this way. They learn to struggle with hardships when they fall*” (S10).

Participants stated that recess provided students with the opportunity to “*get to know themselves*” in social settings without the control of an authority. With the following views, participants stated that recess contributed to students’ getting to know themselves in social and physical areas outside the class and to realize their shortcomings: “*When they are not accepted into the game, they are upset at first; but then they question themselves. They ask themselves why they are not in the game. They wonder if they have a shortcoming. Recess offers students an opportunity to improve themselves*” (P2); “*Recess is a problematic process for students who are not accepted in groups. This age group can be very cruel to each other. They may exclude each other. The excluded child should get to know himself/herself*” (S10) and “*The child for example is good at classes, but when he/she realizes that he/she is not good at recess, he/she understands that it is necessary to improve himself/herself in that area as well*” (S2).

Participants stated that recess created the setting and provided opportunities for “*playing games*” for students. According to participants, children did not have chances to play outside and

recess provided a setting and opportunity for them to play: *“They cannot play at home; there are no children in this era that can go to their gardens or to the street to play, there are no children who can play comfortably in their neighborhoods throughout the day. They come to school by school bus or their families drive them to school. The way back home is the same as well. The children have no place to play. They come here with pleasure to play here in the school yard”* (P6) and *“They do not have time to play at home with their friends like the old times. Streets, parks are not as safe as they were before; the children are not let out to play anymore. The children who are here all came from kindergarten. They are the ones who do not know the streets (how to play on the streets). They are the ones who play under the supervision of their parents even when they are out. They are under constant surveillance. They are always interfered with. Recess settings provide them with a safe play environment”* (P7).

Participants stated that recess provided students with a setting to develop their *“social skills”*. With the following view, S6 expressed that students shared through play and socialized through forming relationships during recess: *“I believe the school yard is different for bilateral relations; children form relationships in a wider setting in which the authority inside the school does not exist and they socialize through play”*. With the following statement, S7 expressed that students found the chance to socialize during recess independently: *“(Recess is) a setting in which they can socialize; at homes or in parks everyone hesitates a bit; warns not to approach this or that child or asks who these are. The only place children can socialize is the school and the recess is when children can socialize. We do not leave children alone in the parks either, we wait for them. We keep children under constant observation. But during recess, there are no mothers, no fathers, there is nobody to tell them “don’t, stop” and therefore the children can socialize to their hearts’ desire”*. With the following views, some participants stated that recess allowed students to improve their social skills such as leadership, taking turns and appreciating others: *“They express themselves. Students with leadership quality stand out, they can gather their friends around themselves”* (P15) and *“They learn to take turns, such as taking turns in the canteen queue and they learn to express themselves. They express their emotions. They appreciate one another for instance by saying that you are very good at the game”* (P8).

Participants stated that recess provided an opportunity, especially in some situations, for students to be *“accepted”*. With the following views, participants stated that students with special educational needs were accepted by their friends during recess: *“Recess is an opportunity to make friends or an opportunity for students who cannot form friendship to make friends. I have an inclusion student in my class and he is having problems making friends. He cannot form friendships during class because we are busy studying. Recess is an opportunity for him. His friends also help him”* (P8) and *“I have a son, he is special, he has Asperger syndrome. I can say that I bring him here mostly for the recess. Because they integrate a lot, during recess, it is incredible. The only place where my son can form relations and maintain them is recess, that’s where he can communicate with other children. Recess is perfect for being accepted”* (S7). P9 expressed with the following view that newcomers can be accepted at school with the help of recess: *“Recess is where a newcomer to school can extensively socialize with the class, with peers or friends”*.

Participants also expressed that recess provided an important opportunity and setting for teachers, administrators, families, etc. in *“getting to know the student”*. With the following views, the participants stated that recess allowed opportunities to get to know the student from personal, social, psychological etc. perspectives which would be difficult to undertake during classes: *“You need to observe the recess periods. If one of our children is standing alone on the side without forming friendships with anyone, if our teacher becomes aware of the situation, he/she intervenes right away. I mean, the child is not interested in Turkish. Mathematics, he/she manifests himself/herself during recesses. Recess is actually one of the best ways to get to know children”* (P9); *“There are students who are not accepted in groups. We observe them. They are by themselves during recess. Authority is important too, of course. The time when they are on their own and when they can be independent is the recess period”* (S8); *“I don’t think they will display themselves under the supervision of adults. The child fully displays his/her character in play, in a place where he/she is relaxed and happy”* (S10) and *“Recess is very important for me. During recess, the child is free and can express himself/herself better”* (P14).

Participants stated that recess provided students opportunities for “sharing”. With the following views, the participants expressed that recess allowed students to share their food, drinks, emotions etc. during recess: *“For instance, a child shares his/her food with his/her favorite friend; sharing is talking with others, sharing what has happened at home with friends, giving information about loved ones. There are conversations during class hours but emotions are not emphasized much. Also, children share private information among themselves”* (P8); *“During class, students are not supposed to talk with their friends but during recess, during these ten minutes, they eat a bagel together, they meet each other, they play, they both learn what friendship is and they do group activities; they play volleyball etc. in secondary schools. These activities also develop feelings of belonging to a group and sharing. They share the social life”* (S8) and *“They speak with friends, they share their feelings, they share their positions in lessons”* (S9).

The participants stated that recess also had “negative effects” for the students socially. With the following views, participants expressed that children may copy negative behaviors from one another in their interactions during recess: *“Children can swear at each other during recess. Children learn some negative things at school. Perhaps they hear those things (swear words) before they understand what they mean”* (P16), *“Some of the children express themselves by pushing each other. They do not learn good things in this manner, they internalize bad behaviors in such bad situations”* (P8).

### **Affective Effects of Recess**

The theme “affective effects of recess” includes 2 sub-themes: *“positive feelings”* and *“negative feelings”*.

Participants stated that recess mostly created *“positive feelings”* for students. With the following views, participants expressed that recess made students happy: *“During recess, children are relaxed, their faces are smiling, and they are more enthusiastic, kidding around during recess follows them to the corridors and even to the classrooms. Children are much happier”* (S2) and *“Recess is a reason to come to school. When children come to school in the morning, you can just see by looking at them coming that they may not have enough sleep. When children enter the building, they go up steps slowly. But when they go out for recess, all children rush out running and try to make the best of their time. Recess is what students like. If you ask them to select the recess or the lesson, 80-90% in every 100 students will select recess”* (P2). The happiness generated by recess was reported by S13 in the following statement by associating it with the friendships formed during recess: *“We can associate it with the bond of friendship. The children who regard themselves to be accepted in a group will form affective ties in that respect. They will feel connected both to their classes and their schools and therefore, they will feel happy. They are very cheerful and merry during recess, and naturally it is reflected in the lessons as well”*. With the following statements, participants expressed that recess increased school commitment: *“Recess ensures commitment to friends. We grew up in villages, in the past. There were playing ground in village life to play with friends; we grew up playing in the village, parks and streets. But children now do not have the chance to grow up like this. Since children mostly play with their friends during recess, it will create commitment to school”* (P4); *“It increases commitment to school. Children play games and become motivated for classes”* (S6) and *“The more they have fun times at school, the more they will like school. Hence they want to come to school a lot. Therefore, recess is useful in affective terms. Children can present themselves at school, they do enjoyable things, they like school very much. Otherwise, no children will come to school just for the classes. I don’t believe any child will come to school only for lessons”* (S7).

Very few of the participants stated that recess had *“negative effects”* on students affectively. With the following views, participants expressed the negative effects of recess on the students who could not spend recess periods as they would like to do: *“If children have shown the desired performance in the games they played during recess, they keep talking with their friends until the teacher comes into class. If they are satisfied, they become ready for the class easily. The children who played during recess keep talking, some children become furious about issues related to playing and not playing during recess. The ones who cannot do as they desire get stressed about it”* (P10), *“Some*

*children in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade want to have their way, they cannot accept other ideas, they constantly cry for this, saying that they did not do what I suggested, I was not made captain etc., but in time, this feeling is suppressed” (P12), “This age group can be very cruel to each other. They may exclude each other” (S9) and “Children who cannot participate in the recess with their friends will become lonely. They will feel empty” (S13)*

### **Physical Effects of Recess**

The theme “physical effects of recess” includes 4 sub-themes: “*movement*”, “*health*”, “*reduction in undesired behaviors in class*” and “*negative feelings*”.

Under the theme physical effects of recess, the participants expressed that recess provided students with the opportunity for “*movement*” the most. With the following views, the participants stated since today’s children could not play on the street, they had the opportunity for movement only during school recess: “*Today, children always come to school either with school buses or private cars, they have weight issues. During recess, there is energy discharge, to some extent. Hence, I think recess also provides activities in that respect*” (P1) and “*Children who do not even go down in front of their apartments in today’s living conditions are at least running and playing during recess*” (S13). They also stated that children moved during recesses in the following statements: “*They climb up and down the stairs. The children who sit in the class for 40 minutes go one storey down to the restroom, to their teachers or to buy food, they run*” (S10); “*First of all, when the child goes out the classroom, the will go down the stairs, he will go out, that will definitely contribute in physical aspects. When they do activities such as running, these activities will also have physical effects*” (S15).

Participants stated that recess will positively affect students’ “*health*”. With the following opinions, the participants expressed that physical activities performed during recess will have positive effects on health in regards to issues such as weight loss, physical development, metabolic rate, etc.: “*The students who are good during recess, the students who run, play, jump, they at least climb stairs. They climb 50-60 steps. If we think that children do that at least 5 times a day, we can regard it as a sports activity. It contributes to children’s physical development*” (P2), “*Children definitely move, I do not think it in terms of losing weight. They will at least move. Movement is healthy* (P6) and “*Children who sit and work on computers spend time with snacks mostly. Hence they are inactive and gains excessive weight. Then we try to correct it by going to one dietician after another. Recess contributes to movement*” (S16).

Participants stated that recess provided “*reduction in undesired student behaviors*” in the classroom. In the following statements, the participants expressed that undesired negative in-class behaviors of children with special educational needs and children with normal developmental patterns decreased after recess: “*Undesired behaviors decrease. When students discharge their energy, they participate in class and they are calmer*” (P1); “*Hyper active children are like trucks with bad brakes, they cannot control themselves. Even when they do nothing, they make noises and sway in their seats. They discharge their energy during recess. They are relaxed* (P13); “*Some of our students are very active, there are some students who cannot stand still, they always fidget. Students may act differently for different teachers. For example, there is a student who receives support classes. One of our friends say that he/she will not keep still, he/she jumps from place to place, speaks to friends during class, but when he/she is in my classroom, he/she goes to back of the classroom and sleeps. These children experience relaxation after recess*” (S14).

Very few of the participants stated that recess had “*negative physical effects*” on students. In the following statements, the participants expressed the negative physical effects during recess in case of accidents: “*During recess, they usually run, they play different active games. Children may fall while running. They may accidentally hurt their friends. They may trip*” (S1) and “*Children are independent. There may be problems when we cannot control them, they may fall. It happened to my nephew, his jaw was fractured and he had 2 stitches. Actually it is a momentary disadvantage; recess can create an undesired outcome just for this moment*” (S8).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study explored the views of classroom teachers at primary schools and subject matter teachers employed at secondary schools and the education administrators of these schools (school principals and assistant principals) on the role of recess for students. Based on the findings obtained in the study, the role of recess for students was combined within the framework of 4 main themes: "cognitive", "social", "affective" and "physical" effects. *The theme of cognitive effects of recess* includes 5 sub-themes: "*cognitive participation in lesson*", "*behavioral participation in lesson*", "*affective participation in lesson*", "*continuation of academic learning*" and "*negative effects*". According to participants, recess ensured that students "*cognitively participated in the lesson*". Participants stated that when the students came to class after recess, their attention was more directed; they were more concentrated and more adapted to the lesson. In her study, Grevengoed (2017) determined that educational professionals regarded recess as a period to refocus students' attention.

The reason why student attention is re-focused after recess is that "attention" requires renewals periodically. The brain needs a downtime to transfer what it has learned to long-term memory. As a matter of fact, previous studies have shown that primary school students become more careless as the recess is delayed, or in other words, as lesson periods are lengthened (Jarrett, 2002). In order for students to have optimal cognitive processing, they need a break period after an intensive teaching period. Transition from one class to another does not provide the necessary recess/break required for active participation of children in academic affairs (Beard, 2018). Experimental research on memory and attention demonstrated that concentration is better when teaching is intermittent rather than provided as intense practices performed at once (Beard, 2018; Erin Vaantaja, 2016; Grevengoed, 2017; Jarrett, 2002; Sohn, 2015) and that when there is recess/break during cognitively challenging academic tasks, student learning in the classroom can be maximized (Beard, 2018; Danaher, 2018; Erin Vaantaja, 2016). The participants in this study expressed that recess prevented students from detachment during the lesson and that the students started the lesson fresher and ready to learn after the recess. In addition, the participants stated that recess increased academic success. Literature indicates that the physical activities students are engaged in during recess support learning. It was found that elementary school students who are given more recess time perform better in mathematics (Danaher, 2018; Fedewa, Ahn, Erwin & Davis, 2015). Foran, Manion and Rutherford (2017) reported that teachers perceived that students to be more focused after participating in physical activity. Meta-analysis findings of 200 studies also showed that exercise had an effect on cognitive functionality (Etnier, Salazar, Landers, Petruzzello, Han & Nowell, 1997). Physically active students get better grades, participate more, display positive classroom behavior and have better cognitive functionality. Recess helps students by improving their memory, concentration and attention by offering them the opportunity to be physically active (Beard, 2018)

The participants in this study reported that students' behavioral participation increased after recess as well. This increase was due to the break period provided by recess. Literature demonstrates that academic subjects are learned more effectively when learned in short intervals. In addition, it is stated that the students perform academic tasks both more quickly and more carefully and their active participation increases during the academic tasks following recess (Erin Vaantaja, 2016; Smith, 2017). In a study on 5<sup>th</sup> graders, Smith (2017) observed students' behaviors related to academic tasks (answering the questions asked, looking at the teaching materials or writing in the specified time period, getting help from teacher or teacher's assistant, lifting hands) and unrelated to academic tasks at hand (staring, playing with their hair, writing on paper, talking with classmates during group work) before and after recess periods. Research results shows that behaviors related to academic tasks increased after recess while behaviors unrelated to academic tasks decreased.

The participants in the research stated that the students who relaxed by discharging their energy during recess were more enthusiastic and more motivated in academic tasks in the following lesson. The studies in the literature show that recess animates children who get back to class willing and ready to take academic tasks in the classroom (Beard, 2018; Erin Vaantaja, 2016; Holmes et al. 2006).

The theme “*social effects of recess*” in the study includes 9 sub-themes: “*forming friendships*”, “*learning life*”, “*social skills*”, “*being accepted*”, “*knowing the self*”, “*getting to know the student*”, “*sharing*” and “*negative effects*”. Learning that takes place during recess is different from the learning that takes place in the classroom. During recess, in social context, students perform verbal and non-verbal peer interactions through which they can experience social skills that may be necessary in life and learn social roles (AAP, 2013). As a matter of fact, according to the study conducted by Santistevan (2011) education professionals (teachers, principals) believed that recess provides children with a great opportunity to play with their peers, to have peer relationships and to practice social competencies. During recess students play unstructured games which offer them a relaxing break after school’s structured daily routines. With the help of this relaxation, students both cognitively participate in the following classes and meet their socialization needs. Children can discuss, communicate, and negotiate with their peers through play during recess (Burriss & Burriss 2011). Children develop additional competencies through unstructured play to help with the flexibility needed to face the challenges they will encounter later in life (Ginsburg, 2007). In this sense, recess provides students with an opportunity to experience real life. During their interactions with their peers, students learn to solve problems arising from differences of opinion, to look at problems from other perspectives apart from their own, to deal with problems and to control themselves. In addition, recess provides opportunities to develop basic skills such as discussing problems, compromising, problem solving, collaborating, sharing, abiding by the rules of the game, respecting the rights of others, taking responsibility and building relationships. Learning these skills is a requirement for students to continue playing and interacting with each other during recess.

Therefore, recess offers students the opportunity to demonstrate their social abilities and competencies (Beard, 2018; Sohn, 2015). Therefore, students learn and practice social skills during recess. While those who practice these social skills are more popular among friends, students who are rejected by their peers (who are not accepted in games, etc.) are those who lack these skills. Recess also helps students to recognize these shortcomings. In this sense, children are given the opportunity to get to know themselves during recess. While popular children tend to cooperate and have different perspectives, rejected children display aggression and are often withdrawn. These rejected children have social emotional problems (Beard, 2018). Teachers can observe which students are interacting with their peers during recess or if they are participating in physical activities (Grevengoed, 2017). Therefore, recess creates an important opportunity for these students to be noticed by their teachers and parents.

The theme “*affective effects of recess*” includes 2 sub-themes: “*positive emotions*” and “*negative emotions*”. The participants in this study stated that recess mostly provides students with “*positive emotions*”. Previous studies show that children who play outside experience less stress and anxiety and have a developed sense of self-worth. Recess offers the opportunity of giving a break to children who need time for themselves (Chen, 2017). Children learn justice and how to properly express and cope with feelings such as anger, frustration and fear. Recess also reduces the tension children feel while learning or trying to achieve. Children playing during recess can relax without the intervention of adults (Beard, 2018).

The theme “*physical effects of recess*” includes 4 sub-themes: “*Movement*”, “*Health*”, “*Decrease in undesired behaviors in the classroom*” and “*Negative effects*”. The participants in this study stated that recess allowed students to “*move*” physically the most. Children spend most of their days sitting in schools (Beard, 2018; Frank at al., 2018). During the school day, physical education classes and recess offer students the opportunity to move. Children can undertake 40% of their daily physical activities during breaks (Beard, 2018). If children do not have the chance to be active during the school day, they do not tend to compensate after school (Jarrett, 2002). Students consume energy by playing games with their peers during recess. Ünal (2009) explains from a physiological perspective that when children play games involving leaping, running, jumping and climbing, these games help maintain normal functioning of the circulatory, respiratory, digestive and excretory systems. Studies found that physical activity during recess is positively associated with improving the children’s bone health, increasing their psychological well-beings and increasing their motor skills. Participation of students in adequate physical activity during recess helps the prevention of obesity and

ensures healthy weight loss (Chen, 2017; Frank et al., 2018). Physical activity, which is performed during recess, nourishes the brain by activating most areas of the brain. Movement, in the form of physical activity, increases the number and capacity of blood vessels in the brain; this speeds up the delivery of oxygen, water and glucose (Pica, 2010). In addition, it was determined that hyperactive children participate more in academic affairs after recess and there is a decrease in their undesired behaviors such as inability to stand still (Jarrett, 1998). Grevengoed (2017) also stated that children with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder can calm down in the following lessons as a result of activity they experience during recess. In this sense, it can be argued that recess contributes to both students' attention and classroom management.

During the research, the participants expressed a few thoughts that would fall under the category of negative effects of recess under each of the main themes: cognitive, social, affective and physical effects. In regards to *negative cognitive effects of recess*, participants stated that some students had difficulty for a short period (3-5 minutes) to re-motivate themselves for the class after recess. In general, the literature and the results obtained in this research present positive results regarding the positive effects of recess in the cognitive domain (Beard, 2018; Erin Vaantaja, 2016; Holmes et al., 2006). However, some educators have reported that recess distracts students, diverts their attention and alienates them from classes (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). The teachers stated that they have difficulty in re-adapting students to the lesson or having students contribute to class due to fatigue after intense physical activities during recess (Blatchford & Sumper, 1998).

In regards to the *sub-theme of negative social effects of recess*, participants mentioned students' modeling negative communication modes such as use of slang, pushing each other, etc.. Literature includes views about modeling such negative behaviors from peers (Erin Vaantaja, 2016). Recess allows student interaction without teacher authority. During these interactions, students can model negative examples as well as positive communication examples. Under the "*negative emotions*" sub-theme, the participants in this study stated students experienced exclusion and loneliness because of not being included in the games during recess and that caused students to be unhappy. They also conveyed that students experienced a sense of loss and frustration when they did not get the desired results during play. Literature supports this view. It has been reported that when children have difficulties in initiating or maintaining friendships in recess, it may have negative effects on affective development (Erin Vaantaja, 2016). According to participants, although these feelings seemed to affect students negatively at the moment, they developed them socially in terms of experiencing real life and knowing themselves. Recess provides an opportunity for students to recognize the causes of negative emotions and not to repeat their mistakes.

The negative physical effects of recess were noted by the participants in this study as physical injuries that may occur during recess. Accidents and injuries at schools mostly occur during recess and lunch breaks because children are free and play games during these periods. There are some risks in the games children play during recess (Eraslan & Aycan, 2008; Kırıl & Kepenekçi, 2018). Due to these risks, teachers in some countries want to restrict recess periods and ban playing some games (Blatchford & Sumper, 1998; Thomson, 2003). Even though they are monitored by teachers during recess, students run, play games, go up and down stairs to meet their needs, move freely. Therefore, there is no absolute control of student movements, as is the case in the classroom. Studies demonstrated that lack of control during recess can allow more opportunities for aggressive actions and create opportunities for bullying behaviors and victimization (Erin Vaantaja, 2016). At recess, students can physically harm their friends or bully them by socially excluding their friends. In addition to the negative impact caused by lack of supervision, the inadequacy of recess areas is one of the reasons why various behavioral problems and especially physical injuries occur. In Özkal's (2019) study, the students stated that their injuries during recess were related to the insufficiency of the school gardens and the fact that the floor was paved with cobblestones. Genç (2003) determined that both the areas at schools and the opportunities in these areas were insufficient for recess. For these reasons, students who are unable to undertake the desired activities during recess may display various negative behaviors. The participants in this study expressed that these disadvantages experienced by students during recess will contribute to their social development in terms of learning life and coping with difficulties.

Schools aim to ensure physical and spiritual development of students while developing them academically through educational programs. The educational program covers all the activities that an educational institution provides for children, youth and adults to achieve the goals of the national education and institution. Services and functions such as instruction, extracurricular activities, celebration of special days, excursions, short courses, guidance, health, etc. are included within this framework. As stated in the definition, recess periods, one of the free time activities, are included in the programs implemented at schools. The results of the research revealed that the participants thought that recess had positive effects on the cognitive, social, affective and physical development of students, consistent with literature on recess. Albeit a small number, negative effects of recess are also included in research results. This also shows that recess is an important curricular element through the implicit program. The research results provide important data on the necessity of not revoking children's rights to have recess which is limited to 15 minutes at the moment by providing justifications to extend the duration of lessons in order keep up with the curriculum or to solve one more question. Therefore, providing information about the positive effects of recess in in-service and pre-service teacher education programs will be beneficial for children to exercise their right to have recess.

Teachers' and administrators' views on the effects of recess in this study are positive in terms of students' right to have recess. These results point to the importance of investigating how recess, which is considered to have significant developmental effects on children, is implemented at schools. It will be beneficial to obtain student views on recess implementations or to make observational studies in order to determine the actual practices in school settings. Research results indicated that recess provides important findings to teachers in terms of getting to know their students. School and classroom counselor teachers can identify preventive and reformative intervention programs by observing students during recess. Students can be encouraged to play together since recess has positive contributions to the inclusion of new students and students who need special education. School and classroom counselor teachers may provide information to parents during parent-teacher meetings about the importance of playing together for children. It is advisable to take the necessary precautions to minimize physical harm to students during recess, especially to prevent life-threatening situations. Considering the positive relationships of recess with students' cognitive, social, affective and physical development, it may also be suggested to researchers to conduct studies on the adequacy of the duration of recess as well as the adequacy of school gardens which are used during recess.

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