

Parental Perceptions of Outdoor Activities

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Abstract

The importance of outdoor activities for children should not be overlooked, and teachers and parents as stakeholders have an influential role in providing learning opportunities (Elliott, 2015). Teachers are dependent on parental reciprocity because of potential for harm (Maynard, 2007), and parents can limit activities because of various reasons such as traffic, weather and getting hurt (Cevher-Kalburan, 2014; Yılmaz, 2016). Therefore, identifying parental perceptions of outdoor activities is a significant aspect of supporting children's opportunity to engage in them. In this research, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, as a way to understand participating parents' views in detail (Fife, 2005). Data collection was carried out by the author and NVivo 12 software programme was used to analyse data from 30 participants. Six main themes emerged from the interview questions in the data analysis, which are presented in this paper. While participating parents overall were positive about promoting outdoor activities both at out-of-school and in schools, their preferences for their children were mostly for indoor activities. Thus, there was conflict between what they claimed for outdoor activities and what they most preferred for their own children. This apparent tension suggests the need for further research.

Keywords: Outdoor Activities, Parents, Perception, Early Years

DOI: 10.29329/ijpe.2021.366.22

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INTRODUCTION

“The outdoors is a natural learning and teaching environment for young children and is one in which most children feel settled and capable” (Bilton, 2010, p. 1). This statement prompts a consideration of outdoor activities as a way to widen children’s opportunities. Outdoor activities are an important part of children’s lives as they are instrumental in “promoting children’s wellbeing and development” (Brussoni, Ishikawa, Brunelle, & Herrington, 2017, p. 139) because they offer a wide range of opportunities (Azlina & Zulkiflee, 2012). For example, providing children with opportunities for outdoor activities enables them to increase physical movements and competence (McFarland, Zajicek, & Waliczek, 2014) as well as supporting cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Azlina & Zulkiflee, 2012; Barton, 2006; Davies, 1997; Humberstone & Stan, 2011; Kuo, Barnes, & Jordan, 2019; Waters & Maynard, 2010) and health (Clements, 2004). When these aspects of development are combined, children’s understanding and exploration skills are supported as well (Bento & Costa, 2018). Outdoor activities can provide holistic development opportunities for children through hands-on experiences and being active players. Children are also able to reflect various abilities and notion outdoors, which may not be possible indoors (Bento & Costa, 2018). Coates and Pimlott-Wilson (2019) highlight children’s view that they have contrasting emotions between being in classroom and in outdoors. Therefore, having opportunities to access outdoor areas and providing outdoor activities are essential for children, and such activities are generally chosen by children according to their imagination and interest (Sandseter & Lysklett, 2017). The context of Turkey is quite different than general conditions around the world. In the school context of outdoor activities, play and science activities are the activities most conducted in school gardens by teachers (Mart, Alisinanoğlu, & Kesicioğlu, 2015). In addition to this, field trips are explained as one of the described activities in preschool education programme (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2013) to be performed by teachers in Turkey instead of having nature-based play and activities.

However, as children depend on adults either in schools or at homes, access to outdoor areas are mainly controlled by adults. In school contexts, a support for engagement and joy of children in active play are the main principles of teachers, as well as being intuitive and encouraging for children (Bjørger, 2015). Teachers are considered as providing those activities within formal education. As early childhood teachers, supporting children’s development and learning are main aspects to be considered (Davies, 1997). Thus, “...primary-aged children accompanied by adults, in order to try out ‘hands-on’ learning experiences” (Elliott, 2015, p. 723). Therefore, “risk was also raised as a concern: teachers were afraid that while working outdoors children might come to harm and were worried about the possible responses of parents and others if an accident occurred” (Maynard, 2007, p. 306), so areas should ensure safety as being constructed considering traditional components (Tuuling, Ugaste, & Öun, 2015, p. 26). In this case, the Turkish context accommodates field trips in the basis of outdoor activities (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 2013) and some extent of activities at school garden (Mart et al., 2015). Also, “weather conditions and possible parental reactions may prevent teachers to implement outdoor activities throughout their daily schedule” (Yılmaz, 2016, p. 427). In this case, teachers’ options depend on various aspects such as facilities they have and parental concerns. Yılmaz (2016) furthermore undelines the necessity of informing parents about the importance of some outdoor activities like field trips.

It is important to consider the role of parents having a decisive role on children’s possibilities to engage with a variety of activities both at home and at school contexts. In this case, parents, in particular mothers, adopt approaches that confine children’s activities like risky play by virtue of their concerns for risky circumstances (Brussoni et al., 2018). Children are having less time outdoors than their parents had; limited by parents’ concern for safety aspects (Dealey & Stone, 2017; Yılmaz, 2016). Children and parents can have distinct views on the appropriateness of outdoor space (Waller, Sandseter, Wyver, Årlemalm-Hagsér, & Maynard, 2010) but parental aspects can play a role as limiting factor (O’Brien, 2009; Skar, Gundersen, & O’Brien, 2016). Parents are concerned with following aspects: “... traffic, ill-intentioned strangers, kidnapping and injures” (Cevher-Kalburan, 2014, p. 114). In addition to such issues, inadequate time for parents to accompany their children leads

them to restrict outdoor play as well (Davies, 1996). This is because of some restrictions, which are indicated by Cevher-Kalburan's (2014) study as inadequate playgrounds, lack of green spaces, traffic, fear of stranger danger and so on. Beside this, parents can have negative reactions to children's dirty clothes or being wet because of outdoor activities (Davies, 1997; Yılmaz, 2016), so "listening to an adult may slow a child down" (Smith et al., 2014, p. 569). In other respects, the limitation of spaces leads adults to have only one type of outdoor activity, which is field trip. This is because field trips are based on to visit museums, science centres and so on (Avcı & Gümüş, 2019), so both teachers' and parents' preferences are in favour of field trips to closest places.

Given that parents are likely to go out with their children for predetermined and structured activities (Skar, Gundersen, & O'Brien, 2016). These concerns and the lure of computer games lead many children to stay inside and to have indoor play (Skar et al., 2016). To explore variations in these attitudes, Fjørtoft (2001) conducted research about the socio-economic and educational status of parents, and their occupation to identify any impact on outdoor activities, but found no differences. As there is no specific demographic identification on limiting aspects, the child development and opportunities to have activities outside should be promoted by parents (Yılmaz, 2016).

In light of above literature, it is important to address what parents think about outdoor activities in terms of parents' safety concerns, approaches and understanding of outdoor activities, so the research question is asked: What is the perception of parents with children attending kindergartens towards outdoor activities?

METHODOLOGY

This research was designed as descriptive research methods in order to identify parents' present approach to outdoor activities. This is because descriptive research aims to characterise the circumstances and a feature of case or the association between the case and circumstances (Merriam, 2009). Semi-structured interviews, one of the descriptive research methods, enables the interviewer to prompt the conversation with the participants so maintaining the direction of the process towards the chosen focus of the research (Fife, 2005). As this research is based on parents' approaches to outdoor activities, semi-structured interviews provided an in-depth understanding about the topic. Therefore, semi-structured interview questions were developed by the researcher. Then, five different experts' views were obtained about the interview questions, and the questions were re-structured considering their feedbacks.

Sampling

The sampling group of the research was consisted of parents with a child attending a kindergarten chosen from three main districts of Konya (Karatay, Meram and Selçuklu). Before starting data collection, some schools from each district were contacted to get in touch with parents. After a few parents responded to the invitation with a confirmation they were willing to take part, they were asked to invite other parents to take part in the research. A snowball sampling method was used to identify the participants, which is about finding one person interesting in research, and who refers someone else having similar interests (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Creswell, 2007). Such snowball sampling was used to reach 10 parents from each district, and 30 parents were interviewed in total. Participating parents were "...those who happen to be interested from a particular school, or those attending courses" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 116). As a result of the method of sampling, all participants had a child/children attending a preschool in one of three main districts. Only one of the participants was male, and 29 of the participants were female. The participating parents had different educational and social backgrounds, so they have been holding different degrees: high school, college, bachelor and master's degrees, and nearly half of them was working in a regular job, and others were unemployed (was housewife). In the representation of data, each district labelled with a letter (A, E and H) and participants numbered named like A-1, A-2..., H-1, H-2 and so on.

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview method was used to collect data from parent, who had kindergarten age child. The data collection tool consisted of four personal information questions, seven main questions with sub-questions. In these interviews, personal information was about gender of participant, educational level of participant, employment status, and school type for the child. The main part of interview had two group of questions that one was about outdoor activities in home context, the other was about outdoor activities in the school context.

Via using the developed semi-structured interview questions, the data were collected by face to face interviews with parents in the fall term of 2019-2020 academic year. For the data collection, the following interview questions were asked:

- What do you think about outdoor activities both at home and school contexts?
- Have you considered any problems during outdoor activities?
- What do you think about your child/children's play outside?
- How does outdoor activities affect children?
- What is your opinion for your child/children to play?

As the research is based on semi-structured interview, above questions were the initiating questions and they were followed by various sub-questions considering the responses of the participants.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed for analysis as soon as interviews were completed. Then, the data were transferred into NVivo 12 software programme to analyse. To analyse data, thematic analysis was used, which is about interpreting people and activities (Creswell, 2012) via using themes emerged in connection with research questions. As it can be seen from the interview questions above, some themes were likely to arise from interviews. At the beginning of data analysis, there were around 24 emergent themes, and six of them were more prominent than others as well as being aligned with the research aims. Revealing the overall approaches of parents, the following six themes were considered in the data analysis: children's approaches, parental feelings, parents' safety concerns, parental perspectives to outdoor activities at schools, the impact of outdoor activities and parental preferences.

FINDINGS

The findings of the research covered different aspects of the participants attitudes regarding children's outdoor activities out of school time with their families and parental perspectives to outdoor activities in the school context; so there were six different themes underlined by this research.

Children's Approaches to Outdoor Activities

As a starting theme, parents' thinking of children's approaches to outdoor activities occurred from the collected data. This theme covers responses to whether the participating parents' children like being in outdoors either at home or other places. 25 of the participants directly claimed that their children like being outdoor, but one of them said that his/her child dislikes outdoors, and likes being at home, and four of them responded as partly. One of general context, A-7 claimed that

He likes. He likes very much being outside and engaging with society. He likes enjoying with his friends and sharing something with his friends outside.

Another participant has some similar statements, H-6 stated that

She likes being outside a lot. She likes playing outside and sharing something with her friends. For example, she is keen to playing with ball, painting etc. in outdoor areas. She shares something like exemplified activities as well as toys with her friends.

In addition to sharing, a few participants claimed children were eager to be outdoors, so as an example of this, E-5 asserted that

Yes, he likes outdoors. For examples, he wants to live in a house with garden instead of a flat. In summer times, we have a house with garden in our hometown, we go there to spend summer break. When we get back to here, he repeatedly claims that he wants to live in a house with garden. He likes outdoors a lot.

This example explains how children are keen to have a direct access to outdoor areas. Supporting this, another participant, E-8 stated that

Yes, she likes being outdoor. She likes being having outdoor activities more than being indoors, such as going to parks, riding a bike.

Contrary to other participants, there was only one example, who claimed that her child disliked outdoor activities. She, H-3, stated that

He hates being outside. He doesn't want to go out. He really is. He is my third child. I have two daughters, and they like being outside, and they were outside all day from morning to evening. He is the third child, was born after two girls, and he doesn't like going outside. He never says to go downstairs to play outside, or to go out etc. He hates outside.

She explained the case that his son has negative feeling to outdoor activities. On the other hand, four of participants claimed their children partly like outdoor activities. As an example of this situation, A-6 stated that

Partly, sometimes he like being outside a lot, but sometimes he prefers to be staying at home, and to play with his toys. If we go outside, he takes his toys with him. Thus, he likes spending time at home more.

Another supporting parent claimed that

He likes being indoor more than being outside. He likes outside as well, but it is only when I accompany him. He doesn't request to go out, but he plays once I lead him out. Unless, he stays at home, plays at home.

As can be seen, most children like outdoor activities, only a few of participating parents' children had a negative feeling. This theme exhibited the general approach to outdoor activities were favourable for children, but just a few had unfavourable or neutral approaches. As these statements were gathered from parents, it was important to consider parental feelings to outdoor activities.

Parental Feelings

Another emerging theme, which was also associated with an interview question, from research is about exploring parents' perspectives to outdoor activities. Although there were some negative

aspects for the previous theme, the overall parental thinking was favourable to outdoor activities of children. As an example, E-5 claimed that

This one is the natural part of childhood. I mean children are unable to move freely when they are within walls, and unable to let off steam. Thus, they can't develop independent movement abilities. I think this is inner feeling of them. In short, children should spend most of their time outside.

This exhibits general perspective to outdoor activities. However, there is a distinct concern of parents, which is about safety. In this case, H-4 claims that

There is no problem with me as long as I keep under supervision. I have concerns with buildings around us for outdoor activities. Well, there are lots of buildings around us, I prefer children to have free access soil to let off steam, walking over muds etc. which are joyful for them. As long as we are sure of safety, my children can do whatever they want.

This quotation underlines the importance of engaging with natural features and the necessity of parental supervision to have this engagement. Another parent, A-7, briefly explained that

It is nice for them to have outdoor activities. I support my child. I support my child as long as I am accompanying him. However, I never let him to go out alone.

Supporting these parents, E-6 asserted that

I am thinking that it provides wide range of opportunities, but I am going out with her as I don't prefer her to go out alone. I definitely don't allow her going out alone. I mean I don't trust to safety of environment anymore. The events and news, we heard, push me to think like this. This is not about a trust issue with my child.

In light of these statements, it can be seen that although all parents feel favourably towards outdoor activities, some of them have concerns with safety aspects. However, there is no direct reference to any particular risky situation, so this approach stays as rhetorical but still limits outdoor activities for children. The following theme explores safety and risk in more depth.

Parents' Safety Concerns

While parents were explaining their stance to outdoor activities, risk and safety aspects were questioned in detail. This theme occurred within the context of interviews and this is also mentioned by literature above. Ten participating parents considered their environment as safe but others raised concerns. The responses were equally seen through three districts of Konya. In terms of parents stating the environment as safe, H-4 claimed that

It is safe for me. Our securities work hard to ensure safety. However, I don't leave my child in playground and stay at home. I am always behind my child to check. As I am always there, and as I don't let my child to be alone, I feel it is safe as I am there with my child.

Another participant, A-8, stated briefly that

Outdoor areas are safe. We have no security issue.

However, other participants highlighted different aspects in terms of detrimental factors to safety. E-7 states that

Well. I think it is safe for now. Of course, there is a lack of green areas, and it is limited where we live. There are lots of high-rise buildings surrounding us. There are car parks near children's playground for these buildings. Thus, it is little bit dangerous.

In this example, the safety concern was not about risky play of children, it is about exterior hazards and possessed physical conditions for the participating parent. A-4 highlighted human factors that

I don't think it is safe. I mean we have a fear that people can hurt my child. Therefore, I don't let them to play alone. I supervise them. I am conscious about external threat, so I don't think it is safe enough, so I always accompany him.

This quotation underlines the participant's concern to social environment for them. On the one hand, no participating parents mentioned a particular example for this. They explained their concerns as a probability. Supporting this argument, one of participants, E-3 explained this approach that

Actually, I think it is safe. However, it is completely up to my psychology, I don't consider safe. Well it is more about my fears, for examples; cars pass through, people can be harmful or can snipe etc. Even my daughter is running around the apartment block, I chase her, and I think what if something happens when I don't see her. Even sometimes I worry my children during their play like hide and seek. I think it is totally about me.

This person explains her concerns in-depth to analyse her behaviour. As it can be seen from various responses of the participating parents, there are different variables for the parents, and there is no concrete or authentic examples for risky aspects. To overcome of parental concerns for safety, there is a possible role for educators to reassure them. Thus, the following theme is about parents' concern about outdoor activities at schools.

Parental Perspectives on Outdoor Activities at Schools

It is always necessary to understand parental approaches to outdoor activities at schools because their concerns can determine what is possible. In this study, parents were generally satisfied with what teachers do in schools as outdoor activities. From the examples given, usual outdoor activities are based on trips, and only a few examples contained activities in the school yard. There were also some critical statements from parents in terms of insufficient outdoor activities. A-4 stated that

They go for trips, and when they go for trips, she is happy with being her friends and she enjoys touring. They learn rules of society with such trips. Therefore, I am happy for this. I think the school organised trips and outdoor activities are pretty useful.

Supporting this statement, E-2 claimed that

My child attends this school for three years, and I am aware of they aim to conduct outdoor activities frequently. Especially, our teacher takes children outside when the weather is good and if there is an opportunity to do so. They are having activities and mostly trips, and they enjoy.

As this quotation shows, there is an understanding between teacher and the parent in which sustains the agreed approach to outdoor activities. Correspondingly, H-10 asserted that

I do want my daughter to attend, especially I really want her to attend trips or activities at school yard. Because of this, I always support them to do. Well, when she goes somewhere for a trip,

she learns a lot of things. I think that she expresses herself much better as having freedom during outdoor activities.

While these statements are revealing the usefulness and practices of schools for some participating parents, there are a few critical approaches to lack of outdoor activities. In this case, E-5 stated that

Well, I can say that children can go out at least twice or three times in a week all through the different seasons. This is my expectation from the school, but they don't go out when the weather gets cold. I can explain this situation from other parents' perspectives that they are not willing to let children to go out because of getting ill. This might be the reason for not to let children going out. However, in my view children can do outdoor activities at least twice or three times in a week. As a parent, I don't think there will be problem.

This quotation underlines the importance of outdoor activities and acknowledges what prevents teachers from organising them. From the critical aspect, another participant, H-8 asserted that

I don't think it is enough because there is no park, and security! As you can see, there is really small grass area, which is far away from the building, near exit and for all children. I mean parks are playground for children. There is no green area and sand pit. That grass area is already artificial [not natural] ... there is no higher and lower places, so we do not have anything at our school garden. It is a complete empty yard. I mean it is not an actual school yard. However, trips are well ... I am so happy trips, and I think that those activities are really useful.

As it can be seen from the quotations, the general attitude of participating parents was positive to implementation of outdoor activities at schools, but there were some concerns with lack of opportunities and safety aspects. This theme also shows the understanding of access to the outdoor as being mostly based on trips. In addition to parental positive perspectives on outdoor activities at school context, interview questions prompted parents to explain the impact of outdoor activities for children.

The Impact of Outdoor Activities

Another prominent theme from interviews was about the impact of outdoor activities on child development. The general opinion was that it had a variety of favourable impacts on children. A-5 stated that

... I think my son is kind of examining more and is noticing more. His sense of wonder has been developing ... Certainly there is cognitive development. I suppose so. I mean if he sees leaves, bugs etc., he asks questions to understand. He learns always.

Supporting this participant's statement, another participant, E-1 claimed that

The biggest impact of outdoor is physical development. Of course, social development is also in process in different outdoor environment. Socio-emotional development is influenced as well. Communicative skills are also enhanced during children playing together. As I said, cognitive development is more prominent because of lots of visual stimulus, and different stimulus around him. Also, it is about language development since having various noises. He actually learns more from nature. The colour of leaves and grass are learnt in nature.

This quotation reveals the impact of outdoor activities for children in every aspect such as various developmental impacts and learning opportunities. In addition to this participant's expression, another one explained different opportunities, so H-1 asserted that

Well. I guess her self-confidence gets better because she plays herself when she is out, so she feels like she has adult roles. She walks around and uses slides herself. These make her really happy, and her development gets much better because of having self-control.

In addition to these statements, one of participants, E-8 underlined the engagement with nature that

In terms of developmental aspects, the engagement with nature leads children to think positively. Also, I believe that human is a part of nature because of its entity. Therefore, even parks are not enough for me, so I support children to play with mud and to build something with pinecones. I try to raise my children with this stance as long as I can do. In terms of development, counting on pinecones or sticks are related with her age, and supports both cognitive and psycho-motor development, which is non-negotiable. Also, I think that there are lots of impact of outdoor in terms of social development as well.

Overall, participating parents underlined general developmental aspects of outdoor activities, so this means that parents were aware of the positive impact of outdoor activities for children. Therefore, it is important to follow parents' preferences as another aspect.

Parental Preferences for Activities (Indoor vs. Outdoor)

Although parents affirm outdoor activities at schools, comparison with parents' choice for either indoor or outdoor activities is also important. While only two parents preferred outdoor activities without hesitation, 12 of participating parents have chosen both indoor and outdoor activities, and 16 of participants directly underlined indoor activities as the favoured activities. As an example of a preference for outdoor activities, E-5 stated that

Of course, I choose the activities out of classroom because all indoor activities can be proceeded outside if teacher wants, and being outside, being open-air space, is a huge advantage for children [in terms of their development]. 90% or at least 80% of indoor activities can be carried out outside. Even art-craft activities can be performed outside as carrying two tables for children.

Another supporting parent, H-7 claimed that

Outside is my choice. Indoor activities are nice, but activities out-of-classroom are much better, I think. They can see various things outside. For example, they can see animals and get recognize nature much better. Self-confidence of children gets better as having a close relationship with their friends. They can get socialise more. They can learn more. They do similar activities indoor but!

The common theme from these statements is the developmental impact of outdoor and the possibility to have the same activities as indoors. They believe there are wider opportunities outdoors.

Nearly half of participating parents drew attention to equal importance of indoor and outdoor activities, but during the explanation, they mostly defended indoors. For instance, A-5 stated that

Depending upon situations, both are required but I guess indoor activities should be a bit more. Children have more things to play indoor, more things to learn indoor. There are lots of materials as well, so there will be better learning [outcomes for children].

Correspondingly, H-3 explained that

Both are equal for me, I mean both type of activities should be there for children. However, I find indoor areas safer, and I prefer indoor for my child. When they go out, I feel nervous and anxious whether there is a safety problem like falling down etc. Therefore, I prefer indoor activities.

As this research is based on outdoor activities, parents perhaps wanted to show their concern for outdoor activities, but in the detail it appears that their positions were more favourable towards indoor activities rather than outdoors.

Just over half of participating parents, 16, directly mentioned indoors as their first choice. As an example of the participants advocating indoor activities, A-2 asserted that

Indoor is good. They can do more things inside. They are having fun outside, but it is not like indoor ... Therefore, indoor activities are much better, which are well-designed, and those activities are applicable activities, so her hand muscles get improved.

This participant thinks the impact of indoor is better than outdoor activities. Supporting this, E-4 claimed that

Indoor activities. They can spend a few hours with painting etc in outdoors, but children can hold scissors to learn how to use, then can do painting indoor as well, so manipulative skills get developed during indoor activities, I think.

This participant considers indoor as covering everything can be done outside. Perhaps this is about lack of information provided to parents about what goes on outdoors. Another supporting statements of previously quoted parents, H-5 underlined the similar aspects that

Indoor. Indoor activities have more educational aspects. They can have trips outside, but indoor is much better. Children can learn lots of things during indoor activities but outdoors. Outdoors are likely to be visiting places.

In light of these statements, it is clear that the overall choice is for indoor activities as they believe in indoor activities being favourable for children's learning and development. This is perhaps for more formal learnt skills such as scissors, hand muscles for writing and so on. These are all purposeful in adult terms rather than self-directed, social and creative activities outside.

DISCUSSION

Under this section, it is necessary to present collated aspects of themes to analyse the data in detail. In this case, there are parallel findings on children's approaches to outdoor activities and parental feelings. This is because parents' stance has an effect on children's opportunities for outdoor activities (Obee, Sandseter, Gerlach, & Harper, 2020). This means that parents having a favourable attitude to outdoor activities can generate similar approaches for their children. This aspect is also correlated with McFarland et al.'s (2014) research that there could be a relationship between adult's time spent outdoor when they were young and their approach for their children to play outside.

However, this relation between children's approaches and parental feelings is likely to be influenced by safety issues around them. Parents' attention to risk is a common factor that "children's opportunities for risky play have eroded over time, limited by parents' fears and beliefs about risk, particularly among mothers" (Brussoni et al., 2018, p. 1). The findings on safety exhibit the safety concerns of most of participating parents. Therefore, children's outdoor activities are watched by parents or older parents (Cevher-Kalburan, 2014). Thus, parents aim to ensure safety for their children. This is directly related to parents' sense of their neighbourhood and social area (Boxberger & Reimers, 2019). This can be one of limiting pressure on children's outdoor activities (Skar et al., 2016). As this

is a general sense of safety concerns for parents, their concerns to outdoor activities may be different for the school context because of the variety of safety regulations for schools.

Parental approaches to outdoor activities at schools were mostly about explaining school trips and some of responses were about criticising school yard because of lack of opportunities for children. In this case, teachers' designing, arrangement and practicing activities outside are restricted by lack of opportunities (McClintic & Petty, 2015). As most parents underlined trips at schools, teachers have parental support to organise such opportunities. This is because even trips can be difficult to organise because of a lack of parental support (Gürsoy, 2018). In this case, teachers' and parents' co-operation are required to extend occasions for outdoor activities (Jayasuriya, Williams, Edwards, & Tandon, 2016; McFarland & Laird, 2018) because any conflict between teachers and parents can cause a restriction on outdoor activities (Little, Wyver, & Gibson, 2011). This is contrary to previous research which identified that parents let their children to go school without appropriate clothes for outdoor so as children to stay inside (Olsen & Smith, 2017; Tuuling, Öun, & Ugaste, 2019). Schools of participating parents can achieve the difficult part of outdoor activities as organising trips to outside although they fail to provide regular outdoor activities within school yards. This is parallel to Cevher-Kalburan's (2014) research that the most popular places (for outdoor play) are house gardens and the closest parks, but these places are used rarely.

In this case, this limited outdoor activities for children create disadvantages in terms of children's joy and development. Another aspect was about parental thinking on the impact of outdoor activities. Generally there was an affirmation of the effect of outdoor activities for child development in terms of cognitive, social, language development and self-confidence. These aspects were correlated with previous research (see Barton, 2006; Humberstone & Stan, 2011; Kuo et al., 2019) as well as children having connections with nature (Kos & Jerman, 2013).

As parents had an assertive approach to impact of outdoor activities, parental preferences for activities were expected to be on the side of outdoor activities. However, the case was quite different than what is expected. The findings show that participating parents had preference for indoor activities. This could be the result of lack of information reassuring parents of the safety aspects at schools (Dillon, 2010). Therefore, these safety concerns constrain children's play outside as participating parents mentioned: cars, stranger people etc. (see O'Brien, 2009). Parents' approach to outdoor activities is explained by Little (2010) that parents who take risks are likely to be more easily persuaded that their children should have risky opportunities. The reason for restrictive approaches can also be the result of this situation as parents themselves may prefer not to take risks. However, parents may also be preventing their children's chances to interact with others and equipment around themselves as well as pursuing own interest (Sahrakhiz, Harring, & Witte, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to identify parental perceptions towards outdoor activities in the context of Turkey. Early years children are depended on adults to have access to outdoor areas. As being the safety guardians of children, parents have decisive role on opportunities for activities at out-of-school times and during schools. From this research, six different themes emerged. In light of these themes, most children enjoy the outdoor activities because they are able to have control over their activities (Christiansen, Hannan, Anderson, Coxon, & Fargher, 2018). Most parents also have supportive arguments for children's outdoor activities when considering the developmental impact (McFarland et al., 2014); although they have safety concerns which might limit children's activities (Brussoni et al., 2018).

The participating parents demonstrated supportive attitudes to activities at schools, but lack of outdoor activities at schools has been underlined, which is correlated with Harper's (2017) statement that parents have no concern as long as they are kept informed. This too seems to get in the way of the key statement that participating parents were aware of the developing impact of outdoor activities,

such as cognitive, physical, socio-emotional (Kuo et al., 2019). Although there was overall approach to impact of outdoor activities, their preferences were for their children to play indoors. This might arise because of insufficient information provided for parents on the plans for the activities because they require to be informed about the plans (Barton, 2006), thereby parents can comprehend the importance of outdoor activities at schools. As this research was conducted in one major city, the number of participants, and using only one type of method to collect data, the results are difficult to generalise; however, better information for parents is one of the aspects for educators to consider.

In summary, the general opinion of participating parents for five of the emerging themes were similar to each other, and they had a supportive role to outdoor activities with a few concerns. However, their responses to last theme exhibited a dilemma with their previous responses. In this case, as a researcher, I can remark that although parents have affirmative feeling to role of outdoor activities for their children, they have socially learnt preferences for indoor activities. In light of this research, further research is required to explore some points in more depth, which might be country-wide to generalise findings. However, this research indicates that: the concerns of parents should be addressed by educators; a formal schedule of timed outdoor activity periods for school should be included in the timetable (so that parental awareness to outdoor activities can be ensured); and parents in turn should reflect on the contradictions in their attitudes to outdoor activities so that their values can be reconciled.

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