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Children's Views on Playtime in Schools: A Systematic Literature Review

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Introduction

Playtime in educational settings

The school day typically involves structured opportunities for learning, interspersed with breaks for recreational purposes. These breaks within educational settings, often referred to as playtime, breaktime or recess, have wide-ranging benefits for children and young people. Playtime can be beneficial to children's social, emotional and mental health, promoting positive emotion, as well supporting the development of resilience and emotional regulation (Lester & Russell, 2008, 2010; Ramstetter et al., 2010) with further evidence suggesting that it benefits academic engagement (e.g. Erwin et al., 2019) and children's ability to attend in lessons (Brez & Sheets, 2017; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). Playtimes are also considered important as they offer opportunities for physical activity (Baines & Blatchford, 2019; Beresin, 2012; Ramstetter et al., 2010) and to expend energy, particularly for children and young people who may not receive such opportunities outside of school due to fewer

opportunities being available to them (Mulryan-Kyne, 2014). Further to this are more general health and wellbeing benefits of playtime such as stress reduction and increased vitamin D levels (McCurdy et al., 2010).

These well-documented benefits of playtime indicate that play is an important part of children's lives and that it is fundamental to their development. This is reflected in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) which states the 'right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities' (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Despite this, at present there remain challenges to children accessing playtime in schools (Hobbs et al., 2019; Lester & Russell, 2010).

One example of this is that opportunities for playtime in schools have decreased over time. An extensive longitudinal study in the United Kingdom (UK) found that the amount of playtime in UK schools has declined since 1995, with children in Key Stage 1 (ages 5-7) receiving 45 minutes less playtime a week compared to 25 years prior, Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) children receiving 40 minutes less, and older children in Key stage 3 and 4 (11-16) having 65 minutes less playtime each week comparatively (Baines & Blatchford, 2019). Similarly, research from the United States of America (USA) has also documented a decrease in playtime opportunities over time (Bohn-Gettler & Pellegrini, 2014; Ramstetter et al., 2010). This gradual decline in time afforded for playtime is one of many contributors to the erosion of playtime in schools, as well as notable decreases in the space available for play in schools (Lewis, 2017).

This decrease in opportunities for playtime has likely been impacted on by an increased focus on academic concerns (Center on Education Policy, 2007; Ramstetter et al., 2010), with arguments suggesting that playtime is not being taken seriously by adults (Bohn-Gettler & Pellegrini, 2014) and is often traded out for more instructional time (McNamara et al., 2015). Further decreases in time available for playtime due to curriculum demands include the use of the withdrawal of playtime as a sanction (Ramstetter et al., 2010), where a frequent reason for children being kept in at playtime is to complete their work, as well as for misbehaviour during lesson time and playtime (Baines & Blatchford, 2019).

There remain concerns about playtime from adult perspectives, with issues such as frequent misbehaviour from individuals and bullying (Baines & Blatchford, 2019; Lester & Russell, 2010), with teachers being concerned that issues such as these on the playground can spill

over into lesson time (Mulryan-Kyne, 2014). Furthermore, adults' views on safety during playtime has led to a further need to control various aspects of it (Thomson, 2007), such as rough and tumble play which is often stopped in playground contexts due to being perceived as violent (Lewis, 2017). These factors have contributed to negative adult perceptions of playtime that have resulted in restrictions and limitations for children in the playground context, such as increased supervision, use of sanctions, and the shortening of playtimes (Lewis, 2017; Mulryan-Kyne, 2014).

Children's views in research

The importance of eliciting and engaging with children's views within research is supported by Article 12(1) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that children should have 'the right to express … views freely in all matters affecting [them]' (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Within educational research, exploring children's views can be helpful in identifying factors that may be progressing or hindering aspects of school culture, practice and the environment, such as inclusion (Adderley et al., 2015). However, in relation to playtime, children have a limited voice in the shaping of this area of school life, and playtime is often driven by adult policy (Lee et al., 2015; Thomson, 2007). There is a need to include children's voices in the shaping of policy and practice for playtime.

However, the child's voice in research can often be 'tokenistic' in nature (Lundy, 2018) leading to the possibility that children do not feel that their voice contributes to meaningful change (Cairns et al., 2018), and adults not following up on children's wishes (Thomson, 2007). Lundy (2007) argues the need for various considerations when engaging with child voice in research, such as: opportunities for children to express their views; facilitation in expressing their views; their views must be listened to; and their views must be acted upon. Considering this, researchers are beginning to move beyond simply collecting children's views by increasing the participation of children within the research. This participation includes having children as co-researchers whereby they can be involved in the planning of the study, data collection, and analysis of data (e.g. Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Smit, 2013), as well as dissemination of findings. This can be an effective way of promoting children's voices, as children are more likely to contribute to change (e.g. Smit, 2013) and it can increase the relevance and efficacy of this change (Massey et al., 2020).

Playtime and children's views

Playtime is considered an important part of children's development and has benefits to wellbeing and other aspects of their lives, yet there is evidence to suggest that there are increasing barriers to playtime (Lewis, 2017). Therefore, it would be helpful to understand children's views and experiences of playtime, and what they think impacts on their access to it in order to improve their experiences of it.

There is a recent review that examines the current literature pertaining to children's views on playtimes (Massey et al., 2020). However, the majority of studies included focussed solely on children's views on physical activity. This review concluded that there is a 'chasm between how children and adults view the underlying structures that govern [playtime]' (Massey et al., 2020, p.758), highlighting that physical activity is often the focus of research on playtime, despite data suggesting that social interaction is of similar importance to children at playtime. Therefore, this present systematic literature review aims to consolidate what is known about children's views on playtime more generally, as opposed to a specific aspect of it, such as physical activity, which is often the focus of adult-led research. This review aims to better understand the value of playtime from children's perspectives, as well as the perceived difficulties and barriers children have when accessing their playtime, to further promote their voice on the topic. Therefore, the research questions are:

- What are children's views on playtime?
- What do children perceive to be the barriers to accessing and enjoying their playtime?

The findings will have implications for policy and practice, as well as avenues for further research.

Methodology

Search strategy

This systematic literature review utilised the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2009). Figure 1 below illustrates the stages of the systematic process of identifying papers.
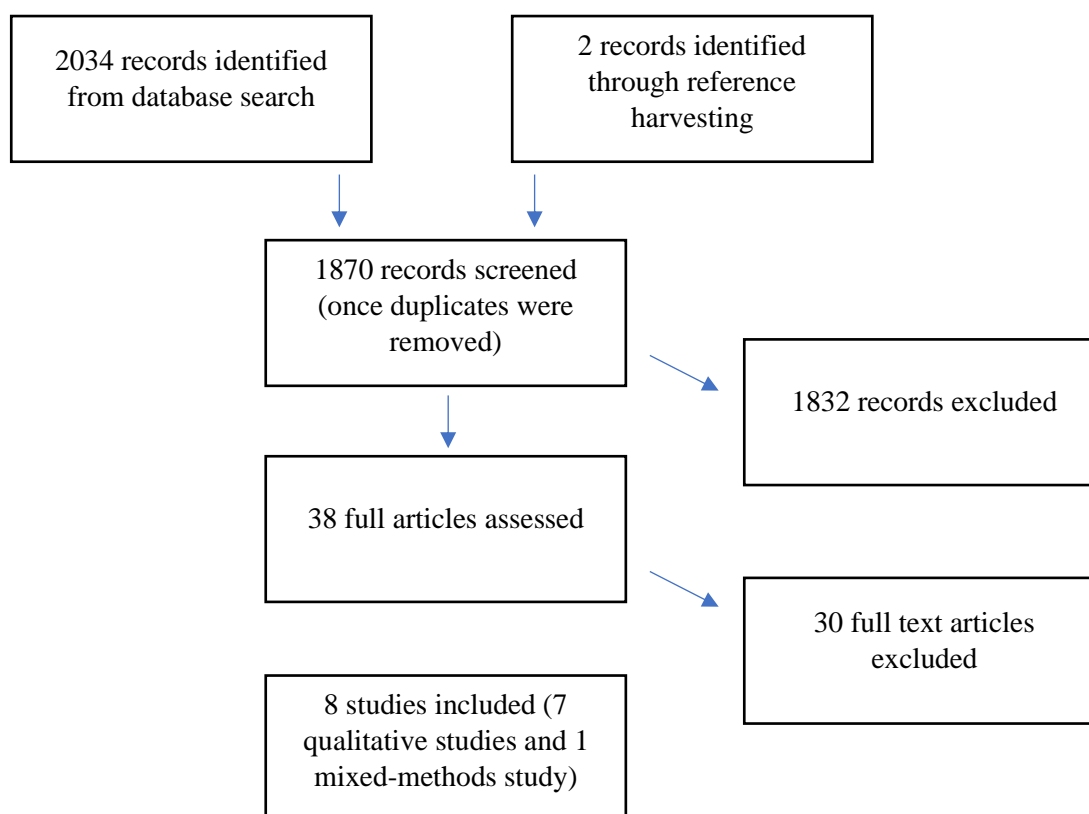
Figure 1 PRISMA flowchart

Searches of databases were carried out between June 2021 and November 2021. The databases included within this search were ASSIA (ProQuest), ERIC (ProQuest), PsychInfo and Social Sciences (EBSCO). The first 10 pages of Google Scholar were also checked for any relevant, additional studies. The key search terms used were: playtime *or* recess *or* breaktime; view* *or* perception* *or* belief* *or* perspective*; children* *or* child* *or* pupil* *or* student* or young person or young people*.

Several papers that were screened for eligibility for this review specifically explored children's views on physical activity at playtime, instead of their views on playtimes more generally. As the aim of this paper is to synthesise children's views on playtime as a broader concept, papers that looked exclusively at children's views on physical activity were purposefully not included. However, several of the studies included within this review do feature children's views on physical activity amongst other aspects of their playtime. Furthermore, this study included papers from 2010 onwards on the basis that it was agreed between the researchers that children's views represented should be as contemporary as possible.

The inclusion criteria were developed and all the studies included met these criteria: 1) children's views were qualitatively represented within the study; 2) the study was based in an educational setting(s); 3) the focus of the study was on playtime/recess/breaktime and did not solely focus on physical activity at playtime; 4) the study was peer-reviewed; 5) the study was written in English, and 6) it was published between 2010 and 2021.

Data classification

Eight studies met the inclusion criteria for this review and were therefore analysed. These studies were rated as high, medium or low by using a weight of evidence (WoE-A) checklist to determine methodological quality (Woods, 2020a, 2020b). Five studies were rated as high (16-20), three were rated as medium (10-16), and none were rated as low (0-10). Seven of the papers used a qualitative design (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Fink & Ramstetter, 2018; Knowles et al., 2013; McNamara, 2013; Pearce & Bailey, 2011; Prompona et al., 2020; Ren & Langhout, 2010) and one study employed a mixed method design (Mcnamara et al., 2018). Three of the papers (two qualitative studies and one mixed methods study), were also scored by the co-researcher to ensure validity of scoring. The studies included are shown below in Table 1:

Table 1. *Summary of Studies Included within Review*

Author(s), year, country	Participants (n=)	Age and setting	Study design	Children's views data gathering methods	Children's views on playtime (findings)	WoE A *(banding)*
Bristow, S. & Atkinson, C. (2021) **UK**	16	5- to 10-year-olds Primary school	Action research	• Children as co-researchers • Focus groups	• Children discussed: the availability and nature of games; having someone to play with; how people treat each other; the importance of playtime, and views of playtime rules. • These themes overlapped and interacted, and these crossovers were deemed important for children's social, emotional and mental health at playtime.	16 (high)
Fink, D. & Ramstetter, C. (2018) **USA**	16	Grade 3 and Grade 5 pupils Two Elementary schools	Qualitative research	• Focus groups	• Children preferred recess and other elements of school that allowed for physical activity and social interaction. • Perceived the withdrawal of playtime as helpful up to a point, but with some children suggesting it was counterproductive as a punishment. • Children felt anxiety, regret and sometimes resentment when having their playtime withdrawn and wished for alternatives to the withdrawal of playtime.	16.5 *(high)*
Knowles, Z. et al (2013) **UK**	299	7- to 11-year-olds Three Primary schools	Qualitative research	• Questionnaire including writing and drawing from children, exploring	• Children likes focussed on playing, positive social interaction and games at playtime. • Children disliked negative social interactions (e.g. bullying, membership and conflict). Football contributed to conflict but was	14.5 *(medium)*

				likes and dislikes of playtime.	highlighted as both a like and dislike at playtime.	
McNamara, L. et al (2018) **USA**	784	Grades 4 - 8 14 Elementary schools	Mixed methods survey	• Online survey	• Belonging, positive affect and enjoyment scores were positively correlated for all groups included within the study. • Children enjoyed being able to socialise and have autonomy over their activities. • Some children reported boredom, bad weather and experiences of victimisation as reasons for not enjoying playtime.	17 *(high)*
McNamara, L. (2013) **USA**	103	Grade 3 – Grade 8 Two Elementary schools	Action research	• Open-ended questionaries • Questions asked to students	• Children identified barriers to playtime such as social conflict, lack of activities, lack of equipment and minimal staff support.	18 *(high)*
Pearce G & Bailey, R. (2011) **UK**	124	4- to 9-year-olds Primary school	Mosaic approach	• Presentation • Tour of site • Drawing Task • Short conversations • Focus group conversations	• Children discussed social play, including aspects such as friendship, loneliness; physical activity play; risk, such as injuries and bullying; and gender, such as different gendered roles.	17 *(high)*
Prompana, S., Papoudi, D. & Papadopoulou, K. **Greece**	82	6- to 12-year olds Primary school	Interpretive methodological approach	• Focus groups	• Four themes emerged from children's views. These were: social interaction; freedom in choosing and making decisions; personal satisfaction and development; and intense feelings and struggle.	15.5 *(medium)*

Ren, J. & Langhout, R. (2010) **USA**	30	Grade 2 – 5 Elementary school	Participatory action research	• Observation, • Followed by focus groups with children	• Children identified problems such as resource unavailability, including lack of equipment, space and too few adults being on the playground for support. They also reported fighting as being an issue. The children also talked about indoor playtime being boring due to have to watch the same films repeatedly with little opportunity for other activities.	12 *(medium)*

Analysis

The purpose of this review was to synthesise children's views of playtime from several sources and identify patterns within this overarching dataset. In order to do this, thematic synthesis was conducted using three stages: coding the text, generating descriptive themes and developing further overarching analytical themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Using thematic synthesis allows for findings from primary studies to be represented within descriptive themes, whilst also generating new, interpretive constructs through aggregating these primary findings into wider analytical themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

Findings

The papers were analysed, and initial codes were generated. These codes were then grouped according to overarching themes. Further analysis was conducted in order to refine these emergent themes, which resulted in two global themes being generated and subthemes within them. These two global themes are: 1) enjoyable and beneficial aspects of playtime; 2) perceived barriers to accessing and enjoying playtime. Themes and subthemes are shown in figures below.

Enjoyable and beneficial aspects of playtime

All eight papers found aspects of playtime that children enjoy, and within this theme, four subthemes were identified as: social interaction and friendships; being outdoors; freedom and autonomy and physical activity, games and equipment.
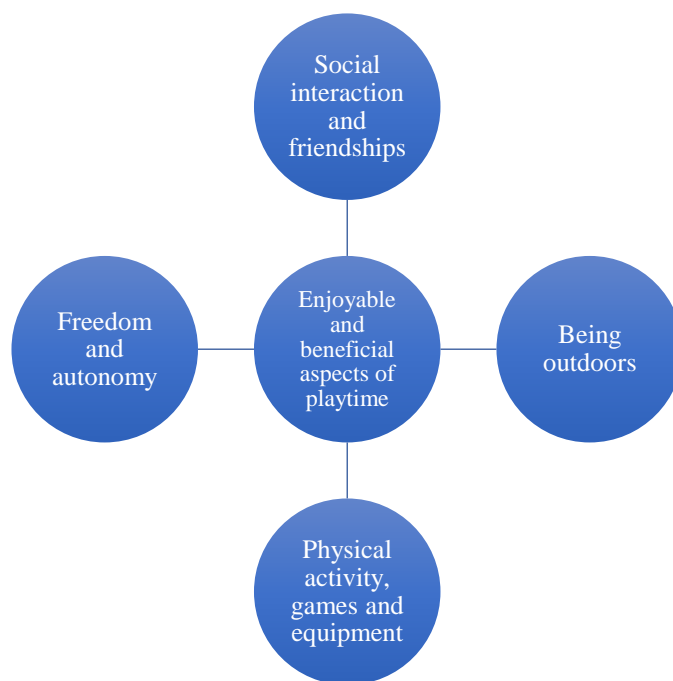
Figure 2. Enjoyable and beneficial aspects of playtime and subthemes

Social interaction and friendships

In several papers, children perceived social interaction and friendships as an important aspect of, and in most cases, an enjoyable part of playtime (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Fink & Ramstetter, 2018; Knowles et al., 2013; McNamara, 2013; Mcnamara et al., 2018; Pearce & Bailey, 2011; Prompona et al., 2020). Specifically, children identified that being with friends was 'fun' and that they enjoyed playing with them (Mcnamara et al., 2018; Pearce & Bailey, 2011; Prompona et al., 2020). Playtime was also perceived an opportunity to make new friendships (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021) as well as an opportunity to strengthen existing friendships and to develop skills such as negotiating conflict and interacting with the opposite sex (Prompona et al., 2020). In one study, the children perceived having someone to play with as important to social and emotional wellbeing (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021).

Being outdoors

In six of the studies, children perceived being outdoors to be an enjoyable aspect of playtime (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Fink & Ramstetter, 2018; Knowles et al., 2013; McNamara, 2013; Mcnamara et al., 2018; Prompona et al., 2020). In general, children liked being

outdoors, and in some of the studies, the children perceived benefits to this aspect of playtime. One example is that some children stated that they liked getting 'fresh air' (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; McNamara, 2013; Mcnamara et al., 2018). Similarly, children talked about being outdoors as being important because they were away from school work (Fink & Ramstetter, 2018; McNamara, 2013; Mcnamara et al., 2018; Prompona et al., 2020), and were able to rest and release stress if needed (Prompona et al., 2020).

Physical activity, games and equipment

In many of the studies, the children viewed physical activity and playing games as important to them (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Fink & Ramstetter, 2018; Mcnamara et al., 2018; Pearce & Bailey, 2011; Prompona et al., 2020). Furthermore, children talked about the importance of having equipment in order to engage with physical activity and games (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Mcnamara et al., 2018). The children identified sport as a broad concept of activity that they enjoyed at playtime (Fink & Ramstetter, 2018), and in some studies, the children specified which sports they preferred most, with football being commonly cited (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Knowles et al., 2013; Pearce & Bailey, 2011). Further to this, the children discussed benefits in relation to this physical activity. For example, children highlighted that physical activity helped them to remain healthy (Pearce & Bailey, 2011), and also that playtime helped them expend energy, which subsequently helped them to feel calmer during lesson time (Fink & Ramstetter, 2018). In another study, the children talked about developing kinetic skills, satisfying personal needs, as well as a sense of belonging when part of a team as benefits of playtime (Prompona et al., 2020).

Freedom and autonomy

Freedom and autonomy at playtime was also perceived to be of importance to children (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Fink & Ramstetter, 2018; Knowles et al., 2013; Mcnamara et al., 2018; Prompona et al., 2020). Children talked about having the freedom to choose what they wanted to play and do, as opposed to adult-directed tasks (Mcnamara et al., 2018; Prompona et al., 2020), whilst other children spoke about freedom in more general terms by describing how freedom at playtime makes them feel (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021), and what they do with their freedom (e.g. being able to run around; being able to play) (Fink & Ramstetter,

2018; Knowles et al., 2013). Children spoke about not wanting strict rules being imposed on their play, as they felt this limited their choices (Mcnamara et al., 2018) with another study identifying that children perceived playtime as an opportunity to act freely and even dispute adult authority (Prompona et al., 2020).

Perceived barriers to accessing and enjoying playtime

Seven papers included children's perceptions on barriers to accessing and enjoying playtime, and within this theme, five subthemes were identified as: social conflict and loneliness; loss of playtime; lack of resource and support; weather and risk.
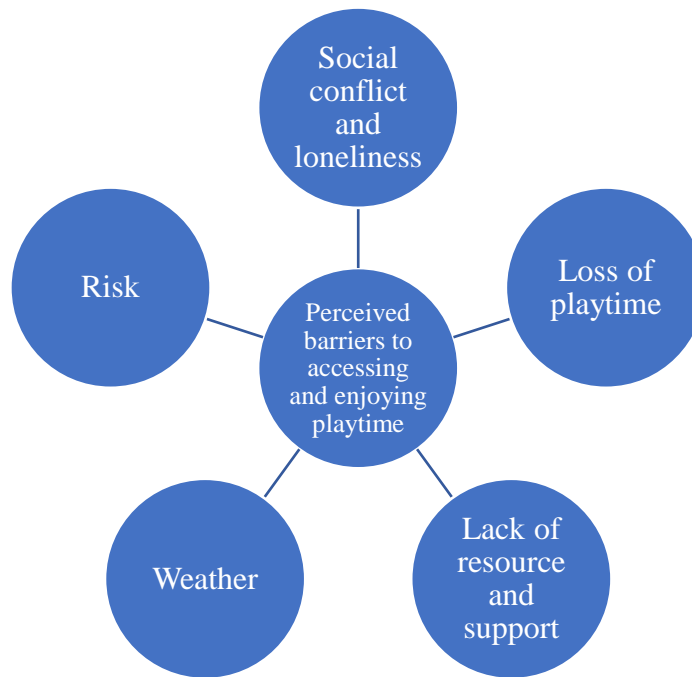

Figure 3. Perceived barriers to accessing and enjoying playtime and subthemes

Social conflict and loneliness

Despite many children identifying social interaction and friendships as an important and enjoyable aspect of playtime, some children did not agree. In some studies, children identified loneliness as a reason as to why they did not enjoy their playtime (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Knowles et al., 2013; McNamara, 2013; Pearce & Bailey, 2011). Children also spoke about social conflict being a barrier to enjoying playtime, with issues such as bullying, fighting and arguing discussed (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Knowles et al., 2013; McNamara, 2013; Mcnamara et al., 2018; Pearce & Bailey, 2011; Ren & Langhout, 2010). Similarly, children identified a climate of conflict in the playground (McNamara, 2013; Mcnamara et al., 2018), with children in one study describing conflict between boys and girls choice of activities, on the playground (Pearce & Bailey, 2011).

Loss of playtime

In one of the studies, the children discussed losing their playtime as a punishment (Fink & Ramstetter, 2018). Within this, the children identified several experiences of personal as well as examples of their peers who had lost their playtime as a consequence for misbehaviour or not completing work. Children felt this strategy as somewhat helpful but others argued that losing playtime was an ineffective strategy for managing behaviour as it did not change the behaviour of the children frequently kept in. This led to some children suggesting that teachers should find other means of disciplining children for behaviours that would typically result in a child losing their play. The children also discussed experiences of their whole class losing their playtime due to specific children's behaviour and claimed that this was unfair (Fink & Ramstetter, 2018). In relation to loss of playtime, a child in another study identified that they wished they had longer at playtime (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021).

Lack of resources and support

Children discussed a lack of resource and support on the playground as examples of barriers to enjoying playtime. They identified a lack of provision in terms of activities and games on the playground (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; McNamara, 2013), and children talked about a lack of equipment as being problematic for playtimes (Knowles et al., 2013; McNamara, 2013; Mcnamara et al., 2018; Ren & Langhout, 2010). This lack of equipment had resulted in feelings of boredom (Mcnamara et al., 2018) and heightened social tensions, with children arguing over limited resources (McNamara, 2013). Children also identified the playground environment itself as something that affected their experiences of play, with comments about a lack of space to play (Knowles et al., 2013; Ren & Langhout, 2010), as well as the issue of litter (Knowles et al., 2013). Furthermore, children highlighted a lack of adult support on the playground as an issue (McNamara, 2013; Ren & Langhout, 2010), whilst in another study, children reported that they felt reprimanded by the adults on the playground with little chance for discussion or problem-solving regarding issues on the playground (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021).

Weather

Two of the studies identified weather as an issue to accessing playtime, as this resulted in more uncomfortable experiences for children being outside (Mcnamara et al., 2018), as well as children in one study talking about indoor playtime being less enjoyable due to having to watch a limited selection of movies (Ren & Langhout, 2010). Children identified that providing them with games to play would improve their experiences of indoor playtime (Ren & Langhout, 2010).

Risk

In some studies, children identified potential risks on the playground as something that worried them (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Pearce & Bailey, 2011; Ren & Langhout, 2010). Children talked about fear of injuries and potential dangers in the physical environment as something that concerned them (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021; Pearce & Bailey, 2011). In one study, children reported being banned from certain equipment due to level of risk (Ren & Langhout, 2010), whilst children in another study perceived the climbing frame on their playground as dangerous (Pearce & Bailey, 2011).

Discussion

This systematic review aimed to synthesise what is known about children's views on playtime and the barriers they perceived to accessing and enjoying it. It was found that children perceived there to be several enjoyable aspects to, as well as benefits associated with, playtime. One aspect was that children enjoyed and valued opportunities for social interaction and friendship, which adds further weight to the importance of allowing these unstructured opportunities to occur on the playground (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). These views on the importance of social interaction also support Massey et al's (2020) conclusions that this is a primary area of importance for children at playtime.

Opportunities for fresh air and physical exercise were also valued by children, highlighting the importance of these regular breaks throughout the day, particularly given the wider impact that physical exercise and being outdoors can have on engagement with academic learning (Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005) and its benefits to health and wellbeing (Beresin, 2012;

McCurdy et al., 2010). This finding is a challenge to the notable decline in time available for playtime over the last 25 years (Baines & Blatchford, 2019).

Children also perceived playtime to be beneficial due to the freedom and autonomy it gave them. Children appreciated the freedom to choose activities, which contrasts with suggestions that more adult-directed activities should be implemented (e.g. Mroz & Woolner, 2020). However, when talking about weather being an issue for accessing playtime, the children identified the need for more activities to be available to them indoors (Ren & Langhout, 2010), with children largely being expected to stay in their classes during 'wet play' (Baines & Blatchford, 2019). Children also identified a lack of resource, space and equipment during playtime, which echoes Massey et al's (2020) findings that children perceived this to be a barrier to physical activity. This finding also resonates with evidence suggesting that the physical space available for playtime has decreased over the last two decades (Lewis, 2017).

Children perceived there to be other barriers to accessing and enjoying playtime. Children did not like strict rules being put on them, and in some cases enjoyed disputing adult authority as part of playtime, which contrasts with the increase in limitations often imposed by adults on playtime, such as rules and sanctions, as well as heightened supervision in the playground (Lewis, 2017). However, the findings from this review suggest that children have mixed views on how adults should supervise in the playground, with some feeling that there was not enough support available on the playground, and others feeling that playground supervisors imposed too many rigid rules and sanctions and did not constructively deal with issues on the playground.

Social conflict and loneliness were raised by the children in the studies reviewed, again resonating with adults perceptions of the challenges of playtime (Baines & Blatchford, 2019). Issues such as bullying and fighting were discussed by some children as reasons for not enjoying their playtime, which supports the idea that whole-school interventions to address social issues on the playground should be sought in order to ensure the benefits of playtime are available to all (Mulryan-Kyne, 2014). Linking to this, some children spoke about concerns for physical safety, such as fear of being injured at playtime and viewing certain equipment as 'dangerous' (Pearce & Bailey, 2011), which links to adults concerns regarding safety at playtime (Thomson, 2007). However, children highlighted adult limitations placed on them, such as the children being banned from using equipment (Ren & Langhout, 2010), further evidencing adult-imposed restrictions on free play at playtime (Thomson, 2007).

Another perceived barrier to accessing playtime was the loss of playtime, both in terms of length of playtime, as well as the use of withdrawing playtime as a sanction. The idea that children perceived the length of playtime to be 'too short' adds weight to the argument that schools should carefully consider the length available for playtime in schools (Baines & Blatchford, 2019). Furthermore, children discussed the loss of playtime as a sanction, exemplifying its current use in schools, as evidenced in the wider literature (Baines & Blatchford, 2019; Payne, 2015; Ramstetter et al., 2010). The children perceived this sanction be to be ineffective at changing the behaviours that it addressed, as argued in other literature (e.g. Ramstetter et al., 2010).

In relation to gathering children's views, all the studies included within this review sought children's qualitative views. However, this was done to differing degrees of participation from the children. For example, many of the studies gathered the views of children using methods that ensured the child was heard, such as the use of focus groups (e.g. Fink & Ramstetter, 2018), whereas only one study included the children throughout the research process (Bristow & Atkinson, 2021). More research is needed overall to ascertain children's views on playtime, and it would be more effective if children were able to participate at a greater level within this research (Massey et al., 2020).

As far as these authors are aware, this is the first paper that has attempted to consolidate children's views on playtime as a broader concept than just an opportunity for physical exercise. This paper also evidences the dearth of research that explores children's views on playtime in this broader sense.

Limitations

It should be acknowledged that only eight papers met the criteria regarding exploration of playtime as a broad concept, as opposed to focussing on physical activity, and these papers were predominantly from the UK and USA, with one paper being from Greece. The inclusion criterion of papers being written in English will have impacted on the possible inclusion of papers that were otherwise relevant but were written in other languages. This is likely to impact on the validity of these findings to a wider audience than the countries included.

Another limitation to this study were the ages of children included, as the majority of papers included for review focussed on younger children. Only two studies (McNamara, 2013;

Mcnamara et al., 2018) included children up to the age of 13-14 (grade 8), with the rest including children who were aged 12 or below. Furthermore, none of the papers included in this review explicitly explored the views of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and it is likely this population face additional barriers to accessing and enjoying their playtime (Woods & Bond, 2020).

Implications for policy and practice

Playtime is important to children and has been shown to have a positive impact in various domains of children's lives. There should be considerations for playtime in school policy to ensure that playtime is protected. Firstly, schools should ensure that adequate time is available for playtime throughout the day. This is to ensure that children have ample opportunities throughout the school day for social interaction with peers, physical activity, fresh air and self-directed time, all of which they deemed important. Schools should consider children's views on the length of playtime in their settings and what might be done to increase opportunities for these breaks throughout the day.

Secondly, children should be provided with adequate resources to ensure playtimes can be as effective as possible. This includes equipment such as sports gear, games, and activities for outdoor as well as indoor play during bad weather. School should also consider the adequacy of facilities that are available to children for playtime, such as playground space. Another important aspect for schools to consider is the staffing available at playtime. Playground supervisors should be adequately trained to ensure that they are able to support with and deal with everyday issues on the playground in a constructive and effective way, whilst also facilitating positive experiences for children and allowing them the freedom and autonomy to enjoy their playtime. This training for supervisors should also involve increasing their understanding of the benefits that playtime provides, as well as possible whole school interventions that enable all children to safely access playtime and the benefits associated with it.

Furthermore, barriers to playtime should be challenged by school leaders, policymakers and school psychologists, particularly tangible barriers such as the withdrawal of playtime as a sanction (Hobbs et al., 2019). This particular barrier should be challenged due it directly impacting on the child's right to play, as well as it being counterproductive in terms of

reducing behaviours that it seeks to address such as misbehaviour and non-completion of work (Baines & Blatchford, 2019; Fink & Ramstetter, 2018; Ramstetter et al., 2010) whilst also negatively affecting children's wellbeing (Baines & Blatchford, 2019) and child-teacher relationships (Payne, 2015). Alternatives to this sanction, that do not affect access to playtime, should be explored.

Directions for future research

This review demonstrates that there is currently a dearth of research that explores children's views of playtime in a general sense, with most of the research on playtime being about physical activity (Massey et al., 2020). The studies included were mixed in terms of the levels of participation of children in the research. Further research is needed to explore the views of children on playtime as a general concept to further our understanding of important aspects of, as well as barriers to, playtime for them. Where possible, this research should use participatory methods that ensure children's voices are facilitated, listened to, and acted upon. Following this, research could then explore ways to remove barriers to playtime using participatory methods with whole school communities, such as action research. Future research could include the exploration of children's views from other countries, besides the UK and USA, as well as the views of populations that are likely to face more barriers to playtime, such as children with SEND.

Conclusion

This review sought to better understand children's views on playtime in a more holistic sense. The studies included within this review highlight that children enjoy their playtime for multiple reasons, including for social interaction and friendships, freedom and autonomy, being outdoors, and a chance to be physically active and play with games and equipment. These studies also demonstrate multiple barriers to children's access and enjoyment of playtime in schools, including concerns about social conflict and loneliness, risk, weather, a lack of resource and support during playtimes, as well the barrier of playtime being withdrawn from children as a sanction. Understanding both the enjoyable aspects of playtime and barriers to accessing and enjoying playtime from children's perspectives can and should inform policy and practice to improve children's experiences of playtime.

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