

# Current Status and Optimization Strategies of Recess Activities in Primary Schools: A Field Study of Suburban Schools in Guangzhou, China

Xiaojing Huang, Lelin Wang, Xinyao Huang, Jiao Zeng

South China Business College of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, 510545, China

**Abstract:** This study focus on three primary school in the suburbs of Guangzhou to explore the current situation of recess activities among primary school students and the corresponding optimization strategies. Using a variety of research methods such as questionnaires, teacher interviews and filed observations, this study reveals the problems existing in primary school students' recess activities at present. On the one hand, there are insufficient facilities for games, and students' activity space is limited. On the other hand, the game duration is insufficient to fully meet students' activity needs. Therefore, this study proposes a series of optimization measures, including reducing the impact of online games, providing sufficient time and space for recess activities, aiming to provide useful references for improving the quality level of recess activities for primary school students and promoting their all-round physical and mental health development.

**Keywords:** Primary School Students, Recess Activities, Current Status, Optimization Strategy, Suburbs of Guangzhou.

## 1. Introduction

In today's society, the physical and mental health as well as the all-around development of primary school students have drawn increasing attention from all sectors of society. As a crucial part of primary school students' campus life, recess activities are not only closely related to students' physical and mental well-being but also have a profound influence on aspects such as their emotional regulation, social skills, and teamwork abilities. The "Regulations on School Protection for Minors" states that organizing recess activities helps students regulate emotions, enhance physical fitness, and promote physical and mental health as well as all-round development. While the importance of recess activities is widely acknowledged, the reality of implementation remains concerning. The current state of primary school students' recess activities faces numerous challenges and requires research and optimization. This study employs methods such as questionnaires, on-site observations, and interviews. The aim is to investigate the current situation and causes of recess activities in three primary schools and propose practical optimization strategies for primary school students, thereby promoting physical and mental health and all-round development. The three primary schools in this study are all located in Baiyun District, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province. School E is close to farmlands and factories, the family backgrounds of its students have suburban characteristics. The school offers relatively large spaces. School B is close to the farmland, with a lack of sports equipment and a small playing field. School J has activity venues such as running tracks, basketball hoops, and an agricultural garden. Collect the current situation of the break activities in three schools from multiple aspects such as the content, form, duration, participation, safety, and students' feedback. Analyze the problems existing in the break activities and put forward practical optimization strategies, which provide helpful references and guidance for improving the all-round quality of primary school students.

## 2. The Current Status of Recess Activities in Three Primary Schools

### 2.1. The Type of Recess Activities

The multiple-choice question "What activities do you mainly engage in during the break?" Among these activities, doing homework and going to the restroom account for the largest proportion.. At School B, the percentages of students doing homework and going to the restroom are 57.5% and 55% respectively. At School E, these two proportions are 59.46% and 54.05% respectively. In addition, 48.65% of students at School E read books during breaks, while 5.41% play various recess activities. At School J, the percentages of students doing homework and going to the restroom are 46.34% and 41.46% respectively.

Nevertheless, there are also some other recess activities with relatively high percentages. For instance, at School B, the percentage of students playing various recess activities is 52.5%. The percentages of students reading books at School E and School D are 48.65% and 31.71% respectively. We can see that primary school students play various recess activities during their break time. However, due to the heavy academic burden, most students choose to do homework or take care of their personal physical needs.

Through observation, the author found that the games students play during the break are quite diverse. The author collected and counted the question "What are the recess games you often play?" According to the statistics, the most frequently-played games among students in School B are "Eagle Catches Chicks (37.5%), Shuttlecock Kicking (35%), and Rope Skipping (35%)". The most frequently played games by students in School E are "racing (32.43%), wooden man (27.03%), and playing cards (16.22%)". It can be observed that students in different schools often play can also vary. And the most frequently played games by students in School J are "racing (43.9%), wooden man (27.03%), playing cards (34.15%)".

In various recess activities, primary school students still

retain some traditional game. Besides, we have also seen the emergence of new games.

## 2.2. The Origin of Recess Activities

Regarding the sources of recess activities, 36.4% of students acquire them from classmates. However, through observation, the author found that the recess activities students learn from their classmates are not substantially different from the classic games of the past. In addition, 16.9% of students' recess activities come from books, 19.5% from electronic products, 10.2% from teachers, 3.4% from relatives, and 13.6% are self-created.

Most of the toys used in recess activities are self-made. 38.1% of them are handmade by students, and 21.2% of the games do not require any props. Purchasing at stores (20.3%), getting help from elders to make the props (10.2%), and receiving them as gifts from others (10.2%) are also important sources of game props used by primary school students during break time.

## 2.3. The Space of Recess Activities

The author noticed that most students played games during breaks mainly on the playground or at their own seats. To further understand the situation, the author designed the question "Where do you usually play games during breaks?" According to statistics, the playground and seats were the main places.

26.3% of the students chose to play games "at their own seats", 17.8% of the students chose to play games "in the empty areas of the classroom", 16.1% of the students chose to play games "in the corridors outside the classroom", 9.8% of the students chose to play games "in the stairwells", and 29.7% of the students chose to play games "on the playground". There are some students in other places, but the numbers are relatively small.

Through observation, the spaces available for recess activities in School B, School E, and School J are limited. In response, the author designed a question, "Do you think the spaces for recess activities are restricted?" It was found that the vast majority of students said that the spaces for recess activities were restricted to a certain extent but basically met the game needs (59.3%). It's evident that the shortage of spaces for recess activities restricts the smooth progress of students' recess activities to a certain extent.

## 2.4. The Time of Recess Activities

Through observation, at School E, there are 10-minute breaks in the morning and 5-minute breaks in the afternoon, while at School J and School B, there are 10-minute breaks both in the morning and afternoon. The author posed the question "Do you think the time for recess activities is enough?" to find out about primary school students' recess activities time. The survey results show that: 32.2% of the students said the game time was generally enough and they could always play some games; 29.7% said the game time was very short and they could only play in a rush; 22.9% said the game time was completely inadequate and they couldn't play games at all; 15.3% said the game time was completely sufficient and they could play to their heart's content. It's easy to see that students have a certain need for recess activities duration, and the current 5 to 10 minutes can no longer meet the gaming needs of most students.

Through the author's observation, it was found that in three primary schools, after the class bell rang, there were students

in some classes who didn't go out of the classroom for recess activities. To explore the reason, the author posed a question: "Does your teacher end the class on time?" The survey showed that most students chose the options of "often" and "sometimes", indicating that teachers have the behavior of occupying the recess activities. Through investigation, most teachers use the break time to teach knowledge or assign tasks, or perhaps ask students to correct their homework.

This shows teachers mainly use the break time to complete various educational and teaching activities assigned by the school, which to some extent reflects their serious and responsible work attitude. BUT use the time for students' recess activities to complete the educational and teaching tasks indicates the low efficiency of teachers' classroom teaching.

## 2.5. The Safety Situation of Recess Activities

If we neglect recess safety, it will disrupt the students' daily and academic routines. Therefore, the author further examines how much attention teachers and students pay to recess safety. So, the author poses the question "Does your teacher remind you to be careful and stay safe during breaks?" to find out if teachers value students' recess safety. The results show that 32.2% of students said "remind every time", 31.4% said "often remind", 24.6% said "sometimes remind", 8.5% said "occasionally remind", and 3.4% said "never remind". This indicates that teachers frequently remind students to pay attention to safety during breaks, which has an educational effect.

Do the students themselves have a sense of safety? The author posed a question: "Do you pay attention to safety issues when participating in recess activities?" According to the survey, more students chose the three options of "often pay attention, always pay attention, and sometimes pay attention". This shows that primary school students pay more attention to their own safety and have a certain sense of safety prevention.

The author wondered whether the incidence of students getting injured during recess activities would decrease or be eliminated when students have a certain sense of safety prevention. The question "Did any classmates get injured during recess activities?" It was found that few classmates were injured during the recess activities, and the proportion was 36.4%. This indicates that with teachers' reminders and students' enhanced self-safety awareness, the injury rate of students during breaks will decrease to a certain extent. However, there are still students getting injured while playing recess activities.

In the interviews with school teachers, the author found that there are obvious differences among teachers with different years of teaching experience in dealing with students' injuries during breaks. Therefore, the interview question was set as: "Do any unexpected situations or conflicts occur among students during recess activities? How do you handle them?" Teacher Z from School J has eight years of teaching experience. She said, "It's common to get injured while playing." If there are conflicts, such as squabbling over toys, I'll first get to know the situation and then teach them to be more tolerant of each other. I'll tell them that it's more enjoyable to play together and encourage them to learn to share and respect others." Teacher L from School E has 27 years of teaching experience. She said that there are bound to be unexpected situations or conflicts during breaks. When a student is injured, go to the school doctor first and then inform

the parents. Also, I'll educate them safety during class meetings. Teacher D at School J is a new teacher with only one year of teaching experience. She said, "Students injury is often the case. I first take the students to the school infirmary and then call parents to explain the situation." Teacher D at School B also has one year of teaching experience. He said he would first ask them to apologize to each other and then give them a lesson. If there are subsequent acts of private retaliation or other issues with other classmates, he'll ask them to write self-critiques or even invite their parents to talk to the students. This shows that when teachers face students' injuries or conflicts, they all prioritize the students' safety and solve their problems. When dealing with surface-level problems, veteran teachers pay more attention to cultivating students' worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. They guide students to think independently and prevent the recurrence of the same problems[1]. Therefore, schools should not only strengthen the guarantee of students' break-time safety but also enhance the construction of the teaching staff. New teachers should be encouraged to learn and absorb the educational and teaching concepts as well as the ideas of nurturing students of veteran teachers, so as to better improve students' ideological and moral qualities[2].

### **3. Problems and Influencing Factors of Primary School Students' Recess Activities**

#### **3.1. The Problems Existing in Recess Activities**

(1) The time for recess activities is not guaranteed

The break time between each class is highly valuable for students, they need to use the restroom, drink water, and readjust themselves within just ten minutes to get ready for the next class. However, many teachers have the habit of running over the class time. The main reasons for teachers to do so still revolve around imparting knowledge and assigning tasks. Through observation, it's particularly common for teachers in senior grades to end classes late. The course content in higher grades is more extensive and challenging, and teachers tend to extend their classes more frequently than those in lower grades. Students need enough time to rest and adjust their emotions to get ready for the upcoming classes. Without any buffer or transition time, students will face increased stress, and their enthusiasm for learning will decline accordingly. In terms of time, junior students may have sufficient time resources, while senior students may not.

(2) The space for recess activities is limited

According to the observation, many schools prioritize students' age and safety. In three primary schools, lower-grade students are all placed on the lower floors of the teaching building, while upper-grade students are assigned to the upper floors. Lower-grade students can get to the playground or other open sports areas more quickly, so they have more space for activities. Upper-grade students only have the free space in the classrooms and the corridors outside. Some students even run to the stairwells to play, which poses a significant threat to their safety. During breaks, people are coming and going in the hallway. The potential consequences are unimaginable. The safest place is at the back of the classroom. However, in the three primary schools, there are items such as bookshelves, cleaning tools, and small stools at the back of the classrooms. Therefore, students in classrooms not on the higher floors have limited spaces for recreational activities during breaks, and there are also some potential safety

hazards.

(3) The integration of traditional culture with recess activities is weak

Students from three schools are especially keen on sports games. Besides rope skipping, there are also traditional games such as rubber band skipping, playing house, and throwing sandbags. However, most students don't play other traditional recess activities or culture-integrated games during breaks. Instead, they play online-game-related cards in their spare time.

During an interview with teachers, Teacher J from School E pointed out that in rural areas, due to relatively limited educational resources and funds, the selection of cultural activity content might be somewhat constrained. Teacher T from School B mentioned that the cultural situation didn't significantly affect students' recess activities, and the recess activities in this primary school were rather dull and self-organized by the students. The regions where the three schools are located boast abundant cultural resources, such as historical and cultural relics, lion dance culture, and red revolutionary culture. However, interviews with teachers from these three schools reveal that due to factors like resource allocation and development in rural primary schools, the integration of traditional culture into recess activities is relatively weak[3].

(4) The recess activities lack the guidance and participation of teachers

Through observation, in School J, physical education teachers and the principal participated in and guided students in playing games and supervised students during breaks. In School B, physical education teachers participated in and supervised. In School E, physical education teachers joined recess activities, and many teachers carried out supervision. But teachers' participation was low. It can be seen that, students' recess activities lack professional guidance from teachers. When teachers take part in students' recess activities, can not only bridge the gap between themselves and students but also gain a better understanding of the students' current situation at school and adjust teaching approaches for students promptly.

#### **3.2. The Influencing Factors of Primary School Students' Recess Activities**

(1) The impact of online games on recess activities

In today's campuses, there are always students bringing things related to online games to school. Moreover, they like to discuss online games. Electronic devices are becoming increasingly appealing to students. However, more and more students choose to sit in the corner discussing virtual games on the Internet rather than participating in real recess activities. Also, in the small shops near the school, most of the best-selling toys at present are related to online games, such as cards and merchandise. From this, it's evident that online games have had a huge impact on traditional recess activities.

(2) The lack of school infrastructure

Rural schools have limited campus areas, leaving relatively little space for students to engage in activities during breaks. Facilities like teaching buildings and playgrounds occupy most of the space. Moreover, some schools lack gymnasiums, football fields, and other relevant facilities, making it difficult for students to play games that require ample space during breaks.

In addition, the game props available to students in these schools are old and damaged. With insufficient school

construction funds, these items haven't been updated for a long time, which also dampens students' enthusiasm during breaks.

### (3) The limitations of school management

For safety or curriculum arrangement considerations, schools usually establish a series of management systems for break times. For example, some teachers ban students from running around and horsing around during breaks as they're concerned about children having accidents. Although this reduces the occurrence of safety accidents to some extent, it also curbs students' activities, preventing some traditional and lively recess activities from being carried out normally. Moreover, the school's schedule also affects recess activities[4].

### (4) The student's own personality factors

Students have individual differences[5]. Different students have different interests, and there will also be differences in the recess activities. If almost students in the class are into a certain type of game, it'll be quite difficult to organize other activities. Moreover, some students are introverted and not good at socializing. They can only sit alone in their seats and watch others during the break. The phenomenon of small groups is also quite common among primary school students. If several fixed small groups form in a class, and each group has its favorite games during breaks, other students won't be able to participate in the games they're interested in, which will affect the diversity and overall participation of recess activities.

## 4. Optimization Strategies for Primary School Students' Recess Activities

### 4.1. To Reduce the Negative Impact of Online Games

With the development of science and technology, the utilization rate of electronic products in daily life has increased. After-class online games will have a certain impact on students, but this phenomenon can also be curbed[6]. Nowadays, all ages might play online games. These popular online games can easily affect students' lives. Many parents tell their children not to play games, but they are playing in front of children. Not only parents but also elders serve as role models for children to imitate. Their facial expressions, actions, and words can unconsciously influence children. Therefore, elders should lead by example. Many students initially got into online games just out of curiosity and ended up getting hooked. Therefore, the topics in class are also related to online games. It may seem like a trivial issue, but the environment has a significant impact on children. Once these impacts accumulate, they will have unimaginable consequences.

### 4.2. Ensure the Time and Place for Recess Activities

Without sufficient time and space, it's difficult to carry out extracurricular activities during breaks. Teachers should not occupy students' time. The "Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Educational Evaluation in the New Era" issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council states the necessity of reforming student evaluation to promote students' all-around development in morality, intelligence, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labor[7]. Teachers should encourage them to engage in

appropriate physical activities, give full play to their subjectivity and enthusiasm. The school arranges classrooms for lower-grade students on lower floors and those for higher-grade students on higher floors. It seems like a good idea, but it will cause higher-grade students not to have enough time to go downstairs to play. This requires the school to provide sufficient activity spaces for students of different grades. Safety protection measures should be implemented outside the classrooms, in the corridors, and on the stairways. Inside the classrooms, other empty spaces should be fully utilized and provide more space to play games.

### 4.3. Combination of Traditional Culture and Recess Activities

Schools can select local cultural features and integrate them into recess activities. It can not only help students relax both physically and mentally but also contribute to the inheritance and dissemination of Chinese culture and values. Students can draw inspiration from ancient Cuju and other forms to innovate the current rules of football or introduce new equipment. They can also develop role-playing scenarios based on the fighting spirit of soldiers during the Anti-Japanese War, so as to foster a sense of loyalty to the Party and patriotism. This approach can not only nurture students' creative thinking but also encourage them to cooperate and support one another. More importantly, it can enhance students' cultural confidence. Moreover, teachers can also participate, during the games get to know students better, build closer relationships with them and reduce the likelihood of safety accidents.

## 5. Conclusion

Recess activities undeniably contribute to the physical and mental well-being of the students. This study allows us to understand many current issues related to primary school students' recess activities and the factors influencing these activities.

From the perspective of the problems, there is no guarantee for the time of recess activities; the activity area is limited; the integration of traditional culture into recess activities is weak; and teachers offer less guidance and participate less in recess activities. After an in-depth analysis of the influencing factors, we find that the popularity of online games, the limited school infrastructure, the restrictions of school management, and the individual characteristics of students. In response to these problems and influencing factors, it is necessary to optimize the game activities among primary school students.

In summary, schools, families, and all sectors of society need to make joint efforts to create a rich, colorful, and healthy recess activities environment for primary school students.

Although the research on the recess activities of three primary schools in the suburbs of Guangzhou is relatively comprehensive, the scope and depth of the research can still be expanded. Future research can broaden the sample scope to include schools in different regions with varying infrastructure conditions, conduct in-depth mutual analysis of influencing factors, optimize the long-term impact assessment of implementation strategies, and provide a more general and in-depth theoretical and practical basis for primary school students to carry out high-quality game activities.

## Acknowledgments

This research was funded by the university level innovation project "Research on Intergenerational Changes in Interclass Games in Primary Schools in the Pearl River Delta Region" (Grant No. 2024XJ130). We deeply appreciate the participation and valuable insights provided by the three primary schools and related teachers in the suburbs of Guangzhou.

## References

- [1] Xuelian Liu. Management of Primary School Students' Break-time Life [J]. Teaching and Management, 2015, (02):8-10. (in Chinese)
- [2] Zhengqiang Yu. Solving the Problem of "Ten-minute Break" Through Details [J]. People's Education, 2023, (24):56-58. (in Chinese)
- [3] Yanze Liu. The "Chinese Flavor" and "Sinicization" in Video Game Art [J]. China Book Review, 2023, (12):99-106. (in Chinese)
- [4] Yan Liu. Contemporary Theories and Researches on Children's Games [M]. Chengdu: Sichuan Education Press, 1988:34-35. (in Chinese)
- [5] Yuntian Xie, Xinwei Liao. The Application of Differential Evaluation in Student Evaluation [J]. Teaching and Management, 2013, (18):70-71. (in Chinese)
- [6] Shuaipeng Zhang. Research on the Current Situation and Countermeasures of Primary School Break-time Activities [D]. Henan Normal University, 2016. (in Chinese)
- [7] The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and The State Council Issue the Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Educational Evaluation in the New Era [N]. People's Daily, 2020-10-14(001). (in Chinese)