



Final Report on the Evaluation of the School Playground Improvement Pilot by UNACEM

Responsible organization: QUICHAY S.A.C.
Team: Patricia Cabrerizo y Elizabeth Morán¹
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¹ Patricia Cabrerizo is a specialist in socio-emotional development and director of Quichay (www.quichay.com). Elizabeth is a specialist in educational management and an independent consultant. The fieldwork was supported by Diana Menzala, Franco Vásquez, and Katherine Diaz.



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Executive Summary

- Objective** To identify and analyze observable changes in the behavior of primary and secondary school students following the intervention carried out in the school playground, with emphasis on behaviors associated with social skills.
- Methodology** Observations were conducted in the school playground during primary and secondary recess periods and after these, at two points during the year: April and October 2025. Additionally, group interviews were conducted with 75 participants: 60 students -primary and secondary-, 14 teachers y school principal. The analysis of both sources of information made it possible to identify findings regarding changes resulting from the playground improvement.
- Key insights** The study shows that the new playground layout enables a wider variety of activities and fosters greater interaction and dialogue among students. Although improvements in the care of the space are observed and the playground has the potential to support the development of socio-emotional skills, these effects do not occur automatically and require pedagogical support. Challenges persist in the management of the space, its equitable and pedagogical use, as well as gaps between the needs expressed by students—particularly the lack of shade, usage restrictions, and infrastructure issues—and institutional decisions. Furthermore, while teachers and primary school students value the new playground, secondary school students are more critical, citing the lack of shade, accidents, disruptions to important activities, and limited space.
- Recommendations** The recommendations propose that the educational institution and the project team work in a coordinated manner to improve the management, pedagogical use, and sustainability of the school playground.
For the institution, it is suggested to develop a comprehensive plan that strengthens the care and equitable use of the space, promotes active student participation, avoids restrictions that limit key experiences, and addresses urgent infrastructure issues.
For the project, it is recommended to incorporate guidance and training in socio-emotional skills and playground management, consider strategies to address other critical infrastructure challenges, include risk management, and ensure that future interventions include evaluations that collect baseline data prior to the changes.



1. INTRODUCTION

The school environment plays a fundamental role as a support for academic activities, as well as a key setting for coexistence and the holistic development of students. Learning in this environment includes the development of socio-emotional skills—skills acquired in both formal and informal contexts that influence adaptation to the environment, healthy interpersonal relationships, and various academic or professional goals (De Fruyt, Wille, & John, 2015; YouthPower Learning, 2017; UNICEF, 2023). Different intervention approaches include “social skills” or “relational skills,” understood as abilities that enable students to build healthy relationships, communicate effectively, collaborate with others, and resolve conflicts (CASEL, 2017). The development of these skills has gained increasing importance in recent years due to evidence of their contribution to multiple aspects of development (OECD, 2016; CASEL, 2017; Fundación Wiese, 2020; UNICEF, 2023), and has even become a priority in national policies such as the National Education Project to 2036 (National Education Council, 2020).

To foster these skills, it is essential to consider interactions across the different spaces within educational institutions, as learning does not occur solely in classrooms but also in other environments where students, teachers, and other educational actors interact. The school playground is one such space where these skills can be developed (UNICEF, 2023), particularly during recess, a key moment for students’ holistic development in which they play and interact freely without constant adult supervision (Freire, 2011; Marín, 2012).

Considering the above helps to understand the relevance of the school playground improvement project carried out by UNACEM with the support of COPILOTO and AULA. The pilot of this project was implemented in a school in Villa María del Triunfo, in the city of Lima, where changes were made to the playground to promote a diversity of activities, interaction, and the development of social skills, under the name “Playgrounds that Educate.” This pilot included an evaluation conducted by the Quichay team, aimed at contributing to the improvement of the intervention. This document constitutes the final report of that evaluation.

The objective of the evaluation was to identify and analyze observable changes in the behavior of primary and secondary school students following the intervention carried out in the school playground. This study places special emphasis on behaviors associated with social skills, such as communication, collaboration, and conflict resolution. For this purpose, the socio-emotional learning model developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning



(CASEL) was used as a reference framework, particularly focusing on relational skills such as communication, conflict resolution, and group collaboration (CASEL, 2017).

The methodology implemented for this evaluation focused on the collection and analysis of two sources of information—observations and group interviews—and was organized into three phases carried out during the 2025 school year. In the first phase (April 2025), an initial observation of behaviors in the newly inaugurated playground was conducted. The second phase (October 2025) included a second observation and group interviews to gather perceptions from students, teachers, and school administrators. In the third phase (November 2025), a comparative and integrated analysis of the information collected at both points was conducted.

The relevance of this report lies in its ability to answer the question: What changes has the playground improvement generated? In this sense, it not only documents variations in the use of the space and the observed dynamics, but also gives voice to the main actors of the educational community (students, teachers, and the principal), contrasting observed evidence with their everyday experiences.

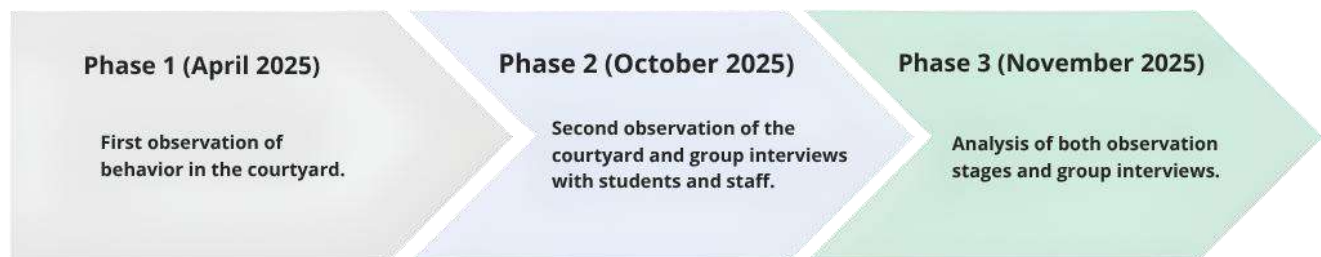
The document is structured into four main sections to facilitate its reading and understanding. First, the Methodology section details the evaluation design, the instruments used, and the data collection procedures. Second, the Results section presents the integrated findings from the comparative observations and dialogues with the educational community. Subsequently, the Conclusions section synthesizes the main learnings of the study, highlighting both achievements in student interaction and remaining challenges. Finally, the Recommendations section provides guidance both for the educational institution—to optimize the pedagogical management of the playground—and for the project team in the design of future interventions.

2. METHODOLOGY

An evaluation design was implemented to assess the changes driven by the improvement of the school playground, with particular consideration given to those changes related to the social skills the project aims to promote. The methodology focused on the collection and analysis of two sources of information: the observation of behaviors in the school playground and group interviews with students, teachers, and school administrators regarding their perceptions of changes resulting from the playground improvement.

This work was organized into three phases. In the first phase, in April 2025, an initial observation of behaviors in the school playground was conducted. In the second phase, in October 2025, a second observation was carried out, along with group interviews with students, teachers, and school leadership. In the third phase, a comparative analysis of both observation stages was conducted, as well as an analysis of the group interviews.

Figure 1: Phases of Data Collection and Analysis



Below is a detailed description of the information collected for each tool, as well as the process of their integrated analysis used across the aforementioned phases

2.1. Observation of Behaviors in the School Playground

The objective of the observation was to identify observable changes in students' behaviors in the school playground, particularly those related to the social skills promoted by UNACEM's playground improvement project, both through the enhancement of the physical space and the implementation of actions aimed at maximizing its use for the development of these skills.

For the definition of social skills, the socio-emotional learning framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2017) was used as a



reference. This framework focuses on interpersonal or relational skills, which reflect the ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups, communicate clearly, listen effectively, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate and resolve conflicts constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

As part of this approach, a set of behaviors associated with social or interpersonal skills—feasible to identify within the school playground—were observed. To this end, a series of observable behaviors was defined based on existing evidence on social skills, information from UNACEM’s playground project—provided by the COPILOTO team—and an initial exploratory visit to the school, which included an interview with the principal and a preliminary observation of the playground.

The behaviors observed during recess are presented below:

Table 1: Behaviors Observed During Recess

Observed Aspects	Definition
Use of the playground for diversity	Refers to the use of the playground for different types of activities, considering the diversity of students. It reflects access to a variety of activity opportunities. This serves as the foundation for enabling diverse activities that support the development of social skills.
Communication behaviors	Use of the playground for activities that allow students to communicate or socialize with one another and with others. Communication includes speaking, listening, and non-verbal communication (facial expressions, movements, etc.).
Collaboration behaviors	Behaviors that reflect the ability to collaborate and help others or show concern for others’ well-being (associated with empathy).
Behaviors associated with respect for rules	Behaviors that reflect adherence to basic rules for maintaining and caring for the space.

**Conflict prevention
and resolution
behaviors**

Behaviors associated with the prevention and resolution of conflicts within the school playground. It involves observing whether conflicts or situations of teasing or aggression arise and, if so, how the group of students responds.

A behavior-focused observation methodology was used, combining quantitative data (recording the presence or absence of each behavior and the approximate percentage of students exhibiting each behavior) and qualitative data (descriptions of activities and observed behaviors). This observation was conducted at two points in time to assess potential changes in behavior: during the first semester of 2025 (April) and again in the second semester (October).

2.1.1. Instrument

The Behavioral Observation Guide for the school playground during primary and secondary recess periods was used. This guide was specifically designed for the study and previously piloted. It allowed for the recording of the presence or absence of specific behaviors, as well as detailed qualitative descriptions for each of the defined aspects.

The observation guide was designed to be applied at two points during the year (April and October 2025) by three previously trained observers, who were positioned at strategic points within the school playground, ensuring that their presence did not alter the students' usual dynamics. Additionally, it enabled the recording of playground use outside of recess hours, during class time, and included a contextual observation record to capture events or situations that might affect student behavior (such as weather conditions, institutional events, or others).

2.1.2. Procedure

- An initial exploratory visit was conducted at the educational institution, during which a conversation was held with the principal and observations of the school playground were carried out during both recess and class hours. This initial visit provided basic contextual information for the design of the observation guide. It also allowed for the development of a layout of the playground areas ([see here](#)), which helped define the observation zones and the positioning of the observation team.

- Once the observation guide had been designed, a pilot test of the instrument was conducted to validate its relevance and operability. During this phase, primary and secondary recess periods in the morning shift were observed.
- On April 28, 2025, the first formal observation was conducted, covering primary and secondary recess periods in both shifts (morning and afternoon). Following the guidelines, the three professionals in charge of the observation positioned themselves in different areas of the playground to observe students without drawing attention.
- The first observation was conducted under natural conditions, without direct intervention in student activities or alterations to the environment. This allowed for the documentation of spontaneous behaviors related to social skills in a real school coexistence context during recess.
- However, some situations were identified, such as: (a) the presence of furniture (tables, desks, etc.) on the stage undergoing repair, which limited full use of the space. This contrasted with the previous exploratory visit, during which the stage was clear and students were observed engaging in activities such as running and playing; and (b) the presence of teachers in the playground during recess. At least five teachers were observed during primary recess and three during secondary recess. However, their presence did not inhibit student behavior. In contrast, during the exploratory visit, only one or two teachers were observed during recess.
- Based on the first observation, an initial report was prepared (see: [Report 1 / Executive Summary of Report 1](#)), accompanied by recommendations for the educational institution (see: [Recommendations to School Leadership](#)).
- The procedure was replicated during the second observation (October 22, 2025) in order to ensure comparability between both observation periods.
- The second observation was also conducted under natural conditions, without direct intervention in student activities or environmental changes. However, some situations were identified, such as: (a) the presence of volleyball nets in the playground due to school sports events; and (b) the presence of teachers with primary students practicing their performances for the school games during secondary recess (in the grass area). Nevertheless, this did not significantly affect student behavior.
- On the same day of the observation, the team met to take notes. Subsequently, they met virtually to complete the observation guide data and jointly analyze the results.

- Once the results of the second observation were systematized, two professionals in charge of the observation analyzed the collected information, comparing it with the report from the first observation. This second stage of analysis was conducted in order to identify observable changes across both points in the school year.

2.2. Group Interviews with Students, Teachers, and School Administrators

Group interviews were conducted in order to directly gather input from playground users regarding their perceptions of the changes resulting from the improvement of this space, as well as their recommendations for enhancing the project. To this end, a preliminary consultation was held with the school principal to identify these users. Based on this consultation and considering the evaluation design, it was determined that the primary users are students and teachers from both educational levels—primary and secondary—across both school shifts (morning and afternoon), as well as the principal.

2.2.1. Instruments

Information was collected through three interview guides specifically designed for this project. These guides aimed to gather participants' perspectives based on three core questions:

(a) What characteristics of the school playground are perceived as changes compared to the previous playground? (b) What changes in behavior or learning have students experienced as a result of these changes? and (c) What recommendations would they give to the project?

In all cases, the interviews were conducted by two facilitators who used the following instruments:

- **Guía Group interview guide with students:** The student group interview was divided into three parts: (a) an initial activity designed to break the ice, introduce participants, and learn about the activities students engage in during recess; (b) a drawing activity in which students were divided into groups and asked to draw the playground before and after the project improvements ([see drawings here](#)). To support recall, students were provided with a reference photo of the previous playground from the COPILOTO team, as well as a photo of the new playground taken by the evaluation team; and (c) a guided discussion led by the facilitators based on the drawings, aimed at understanding students' perspectives on the core questions mentioned above.
- **Group interview guide with teachers:** The teacher interview consisted of two parts: (a) an initial introduction activity in which each teacher was asked to share the level

they teach, as well as their experience within the institution and with the use of the playground; and (b) a guided discussion facilitated by the moderators. To support recall, teachers were provided with a reference photo of the previous playground from the COPILOTO team and a photo of the new playground taken by the evaluation team. Based on these images, participants took turns responding to the core questions.

- **Individual interview guide with the school principal:** Due to time availability and the principal's role, an individual interview guide was designed to gather her perceptions regarding the implementation of the playground, as well as the core questions.

2.2.2. Participants

A total of 75 individuals were consulted through the interviews: 60 students and 15 members of the educational institution's staff (teachers and the principal). The table below provides a detailed description and the number of participants.

Table 2: Participants Consulted in the Interviews

Participants	Description	Number of participants
Primary school students	2 groups of 15 students each. Each group included students from different grades (4th, 5th, and 6th grade of primary school). One interview was conducted with students from the morning shift and another with students from the afternoon shift.	30
Secondary school students	2 groups of 15 students each. As in primary school, each group included students from different grades, from 1st to 5th grade of secondary school. This group included some students who participated in the consultation for the project design. One interview was conducted with students from the morning shift and another with students from the afternoon shift.	30
Teachers and school leadership	1 group of 14 teachers from primary and secondary levels (7 men and 7 women). The group included teachers from different grades and subject areas who had been working at the institution for at least one year (with experience ranging from 2 to 15 years). Additionally, 1 interview was conducted with the school principal.	15

Participant selection was carried out in coordination with the school principal, ensuring representation of both educational levels (primary and secondary), different grade levels within each, and both school shifts (morning and afternoon), as well as that participants had been enrolled at the school prior to the playground improvements. In addition, voluntary participation was ensured.

2.2.3. Procedure

- The dates and times for the interviews were coordinated with the school principal. This coordination included rescheduling visits due to institutional activities and delays in communication with the principal. The interviews were conducted in October 2025.
- Interviews with students and teachers were conducted in different available classrooms within the institution. It is worth noting that in some classrooms, the deteriorated condition of the furniture and cleanliness was noticeable.
- The interview with the principal was conducted in the principal's office.
- During and after the interviews, the facilitators took notes of participants' responses, aiming to preserve their original way of expression. Additionally, the interviews were recorded and transcribed using AI-based applications (Otter). In the case of teacher and principal interviews, transcriptions were accurate. However, for student interviews, the recorder did not capture all the information due to the low volume of many students' voices; in such cases, notes were used as the primary source of information. Additionally, photos were taken of the drawings produced by students ([see drawings here](#)).
- To ensure confidentiality, participants' names were not recorded.
- Each interview was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, organizing the information according to emerging themes from participants and incorporating quotes as references, guided by the core questions.
- Once the final thematic analysis was completed, a cross-analysis was conducted to identify common patterns across student discussions, as well as between the perspectives of teachers and the principal.



2.3. Integrated Analysis of Information Sources

Once the information from observations and group interviews was collected, an integrated analysis of the data sources was conducted. This analysis considered additional guiding questions that allowed for the comparison of perspectives among different stakeholders (e.g., What similarities and differences exist between the perceptions of students and the teaching and school leadership team regarding the playground?), as well as the comparison between group interview findings and observational data (e.g., Can the behaviors mentioned by teachers, students, and the principal be observed in the playground?).

This analysis made it possible to formulate conclusions and recommendations based both on the findings from each tool (observations and group interviews) and on the contrasts between these sources of information.



3. RESULTS

The results of the study are presented below, addressing the following question: What changes has the playground improvement promoted? To answer this question, an analysis of three sources of information is presented:

- (1) observations conducted in the school playground at two points during the year (April and October 2025), focusing on observable changes in student behavior;
- (2) discussions with students, centered on the perceptions of primary and secondary students regarding changes in the playground and related behavioral outcomes; and
- (3) discussions with students and the principal, which, similarly, focus on perceptions of changes in the playground and associated behaviors.

Based on the analysis of these three sources, the main conclusions and recommendations presented in the following section were defined.

3.1. Changes Identified Through Observation

The following section presents the changes observed in student behavior during recess, comparing the two observation periods: one at the beginning of the first semester (April 2025) and one during the second semester (October 2025). For each observed aspect, behaviors that remained consistent across observations, as well as the most notable changes identified during the second observation, are described.

3.1.1. Use of the Playground in Its Diversity

The aim was to identify how primary and secondary students use different areas of the playground during recess, considering the predominant activities that remained consistent across both observations and the changes observed during the second observation.

Table 3: Use of the Playground in Its Diversity

Level	Behaviors that remain consistent between April and October	Key changes observed in October
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most students engage in some type of sport (such as soccer and volleyball) and play spontaneously. ● Games such as tag and hide-and-seek take place in various areas (main yard, corridor, ramps, basketball court, grass area, and stage). The use of slides remains popular, although with less respect for turn-taking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A greater variety of spontaneous games is observed that were not seen in April (such as “water and cement” and “the floor is lava”). ● More students are observed alone (watching recess, eating, or resting), although some later join groups. Approximately 20 children were observed alone in October, compared to 12 in April. ● In peripheral areas of the grass and bleachers, more students are seen talking and resting. In April, approximately 21 children were observed resting and conversing, while in October this number increased to 27.
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most students engage in some type of sport such as soccer, basketball, and volleyball. ● Boys occupy the largest areas of the playground (main yard, basketball court, and grass area). ● Girls play volleyball and socialize in groups in peripheral spaces such as the slides, corridor, bleachers, and grass area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A greater number of student groups practicing sports is observed, especially basketball, soccer, and volleyball. In April, approximately 2 groups were observed (1 basketball and 1 soccer), whereas in October, 4 groups were observed (2 volleyball and 2 basketball). ● In peripheral areas of the playground (slides, corridor, bleachers, and grass area), there is a higher concentration of students talking, resting, and eating. In April, an average of 20 students were observed engaging in these activities, while in October this number increased to approximately 35 students.

- A lower number of secondary school students was observed in the playground, which may be related to the presence of primary school students rehearsing in the grass area.

As shown in the table, the main changes in playground use compared to the beginning of the year are related to a greater diversity of activities across different areas (sports, games, and interaction), as well as an increase in the number of students talking and resting during recess. However, group sports such as soccer and volleyball continue to be predominant at both educational levels, as do group games in primary school. Likewise, in secondary school, the largest areas of the playground continue to be primarily occupied by male students. The following section presents two situations that illustrate these dynamics in playground use.

Figure 2: Observed Situations as Examples of Playground Use in Its Diversity



3.1.2. Communication Behaviors

The aim was to identify how students interact during recess, considering the ways in which they express themselves both verbally and non-verbally, their coordination in carrying out activities, and the presence of gestures of affection.

Table 4: Communication Behaviors

Level	Behaviors that remain consistent between April and October	Key changes observed in October
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Girls mainly socialize in peripheral spaces (bleachers, corridors). ● Boys mainly communicate through interactions that occur as part of games or sports. ● Both boys and girls communicate through laughter, shouting, and calls for attention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communication shifts from being centered on games and sports to including more spontaneous conversations. ● An increase in expressions of affection is observed, such as hugging and holding hands as expressions of friendship, especially among girls. In April, approximately 16 students were observed displaying these gestures, while in October the number increased to around 22.
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students mainly socialize in pairs and mixed groups in areas such as the grass, the dividing wall between playground areas, the bleachers, and the corridor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Greater dialogue is observed to coordinate games and sports activities. ● An increase in expressions of affection among students is observed, such as hugging, linking arms, and joking with peers. In April, approximately 11 interactions of this type were recorded, while in October the number increased to 15. ● Students are observed interacting with teachers during recess. In October, at least 3 students were observed talking with a teacher present in the playground.

The analysis of communication behaviors shows an increase in interactions through dialogue among students, occurring both in spontaneous conversations and during the coordination of games. Likewise, more expressions of affection among peers were observed (such as hugging, holding hands, or laughing). The following situations illustrate examples of behaviors observed in the playground.

Figure 3: Observed Situations as Examples of Communication Behaviors



3.1.3. Collaboration Behaviors

The aim was to identify how students work toward a common goal during recess, considering their willingness to cooperate in games or sports, the formation of teams, and mutual support.

Table 5: Collaboration Behaviors

Level	Behaviors that remain consistent between April and	Key changes observed in October
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaboration among students emerges naturally and spontaneously during games and sports (e.g., several students look for the ball together without being asked). ● Students cooperate to solve difficulties without requesting adult intervention (e.g., retrieving balls stuck in the canopy roof). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An increase in inclusive interactions among students is observed, particularly when they involve peers in games or conversations and share materials. In April, approximately 2 interactions of this type were recorded, while in October the number increased to 4.

- Acts of support are also observed, where students assist a peer in need without being asked (for example, when a student experienced an accidental fall, another student helped spontaneously).

Secondary

- Collaboration among students emerges naturally and spontaneously during games and sports (e.g., two students help carry an object without being asked).
- Different groups of students engage in different games or sports that coexist within the same space (e.g., multiple parallel soccer games are observed in the main playground).
- A slight increase in inclusive interactions among students is observed, particularly when they involve peers in games, sports activities, or conversations. In April, approximately 2 such interactions were identified, while in October 3 situations were recorded.
- When multiple games take place simultaneously, students respect each other's space, avoiding interference such as running through or kicking balls into other groups' areas (e.g., a group of girls plays volleyball while boys playing soccer in the same space avoid crossing into their area or kicking the ball in that direction).

In relation to collaboration behaviors, the main change observed is the increased frequency of situations in which students include others in games or conversations, either by directly inviting them or allowing them to join and participate without resistance. Likewise, in secondary school, a greater respect for shared play spaces between groups was observed, which may indicate increased awareness of others' space.

Figure 4: Observed Situations as Examples of Collaboration Behaviors



3.1.4. Respect for Rules and Coexistence

The aim was to identify how students comply with the established rules for the use of the playground, respect turns and shared spaces, and maintain relationships with their peers.

Table 6: Respect for Rules and Coexistence

Level	Comportamientos que se mantienen entre abril y octubre	Cambios resaltantes observados en octubre
Primaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most students follow instructions to organize games, use spaces, and return to the classroom; however, delays in complying with instructions persist, especially when returning to class at the end of recess. ● Teacher supervision is observed during recess. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A slight increase in the proper use of trash bins for waste disposal is observed, although there are still cases where some students leave wrappers on the ground. In April, 5 instances of students throwing waste on the ground were recorded, whereas in October only 2 similar instances were identified. In contrast, in October, 2 situations were observed in which students disposed of waste correctly in the bins.
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Students generally follow instructions; however, delays in complying persist, especially when returning to the classroom at the end of recess. ● Lower levels of teacher supervision are observed compared to primary school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● As in primary school, a slight increase is observed in the number of students who use trash bins to dispose of waste, although there are still cases where wrappers are left on the ground. In April, 2 instances of students throwing waste on the ground were recorded, while in October only 1 similar instance was identified. In contrast, in October, 1 situation was observed in which students disposed of waste correctly in the bins.

The observation of behaviors related to respect for rules and coexistence shows that the only notable change is that more primary and secondary students disposed of waste in trash bins, contributing to better care of the cleanliness of the space. However, some students continued to throw waste on the playground floor. The following situations illustrate behaviors that reflect respect for rules.

Figure 5: Observed Situations as Examples of Respect for Rules and Coexistence



3.1.4. Conflict Prevention and Resolution

The aim was to identify how students manage situations of disagreement during recess, considering the involvement of an adult, the level of autonomy in negotiation, and the strategies used to prevent or resolve disputes.

Table 7: Conflict Prevention and Resolution

Level	Behaviors that remain consistent between April and October	Key changes observed in October
Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The presence of physical aggressive behaviors, such as pushing, persists, especially during games and sports (slides, main yard, grass area, basketball court). These behaviors are more common among boys and occasionally among girls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In observed conflict situations, more students attempt to resolve conflicts through dialogue. When this occurs, students return to the activity quickly. In April, one situation was observed in which students resolved a conflict through dialogue with the intervention of a teacher.

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- In some cases, students sought adult intervention to resolve conflicts. For example, when an incident occurred, students called their teacher, who encouraged them to engage in dialogue.
 - In October, two situations were observed in which students resolved conflicts through conversation (one of which involved teacher intervention).

Secondary

- Students are observed resolving their differences without seeking adult intervention.
- Instances of teasing and provocation are observed that do not escalate into aggression.
- No verbal (insults) or physical (pushing) aggressive behaviors were observed. In April, such behaviors were observed more frequently among boys and occasionally among girls, with 5 recorded instances of physical and verbal aggression. In contrast, during the October observation, no such situations were recorded.

Finally, the observation of conflict prevention and resolution behaviors shows a higher frequency of situations in which students resolve conflicts through dialogue, avoiding escalation into physical or verbal aggression. However, it is important to note that, in order to draw clear conclusions about conflict resolution—given that it depends on multiple factors—a greater number of conflict situations would need to be observed.

The following section presents situations that illustrate examples of how students resolve conflicts.

Figure 6: Observed Situations as Examples of Conflict Prevention and Resolution



3.1.5. Análisis del uso del patio según género

The activities carried out by primary and secondary students during recess make it possible to identify how girls and boys use the playground and what participation patterns emerge based on gender. While the space promotes a wide diversity of activities, certain practices continue to be predominantly associated with one group (male or female), while others are carried out in a more shared manner.

The following tables present a summary of the observations conducted in primary and secondary levels, highlighting the relationship between activities and gender.

Table 8: Analysis of Playground Use by Gender – Primary

Level	Activity	Gender
Primaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Playing soccer ● Using the slides ● Lying down, eating, and talking in the “rombo” áreas 	● Mainly boys
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Playing volleyball ● Talking ● Playing in the rings ● Hugging, holding hands, linking arms 	● Mainly girls
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Playing “mock fights” ● Games (e.g., “tag,” “the floor is lava”) ● Eating 	● Mixed groups

In primary school, activities mainly associated with boys involve intense physical movement, such as soccer, playing on the slides, and using the “rombo” areas. Girls primarily participate in activities that combine social interaction and play, such as volleyball, conversations, and expressions of affection (e.g., hugging or linking arms with peers). Mixed-participation activities were also observed—such as tag, “the floor is lava,” mock fights, or eating—where interactions occur in a more integrated way between girls and boys.

Table 9: Analysis of Playground Use by Gender – Secondary

Level	Activity	Gender
Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Playing soccer and basketball ● Sitting on the slides ● Using the handrails 	Mainly boys
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Linking arms, holding hands ● Walking 	● Mainly girls
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Playing volleyball ● Talking ● Eating, sharing food ● Observing recess 	● Mixed groups

In secondary school, recess activities also show gender-based differences. Male students tend to concentrate on activities that involve greater physical effort or movement, such as soccer and basketball, as well as the use of playground equipment like the slides and handrails. Female students mainly participate in activities that involve social interaction and gestures such as linking arms, holding hands, or walking together.

There are also activities in which both girls and boys participate, including playing volleyball, engaging in conversations, sharing food, and observing recess.

It is important to note that across the different observation periods (April and October 2025), student behavior remained similar; therefore, no significant changes in playground use by gender can be identified.

3.1.6. Analysis of Playground Use by Space

The analysis of playground use by its different areas makes it possible to understand how students distribute their activities and energy during recess, as well as which zones are most frequently used for play, social interaction, or rest. Observations at both the primary and secondary levels show that while some areas concentrate higher levels of physical activity and social interaction, others are mainly used for resting, talking, and observing the surroundings.

The following table presents detailed information on the activities, level of use, and energy observed in each playground area.

Table 10: Analysis of Playground Use by Space – Primary

Space	Activity	Use	Energy
Main playground	Soccer, volleyball, basketball, and games	Very high	Very high
Slides	Using the slides	High	High

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Grass area	Various games, resting, and talking	Very high	Very high
Adjacent playground	Volleyball and games	Very high	Very high
Basketball court	Volleyball, soccer, and games	Very high	High
“Rombo” area in the grass	Lying down, talking, playing, and eating	High	High
Corridor and benches	Playing, observing, talking, eating	Medium	Medium
Static rings	Talking, eating, observing	Low	Low

Bleachers	Observing, talking, eating	Low	Medium
Ramps	Playing, running, walking	High	High
Stage	Observing, talking, eating	Low	Low

In primary school, the spaces with the highest levels of use and energy are the main playground, the grass area, the adjacent playground, and the basketball court, where sports and various games are concentrated. Areas such as the slides and ramps also show high usage, with intense physical activity. The “rombo” area in the grass is characterized by high use combined with a variety of activities, including resting, talking, and playing. In contrast, areas such as the static rings, the stage, and the bleachers show low usage, mainly focused on observing, talking, or eating.

Table 11: Analysis of Playground Use by Space – Secondary

Space	Activity	Use	Energy
Main playground	Soccer, volleyball, basketball, and games	Very high	Very high
Grass area	Various games	Very high	Very high
Adjacent playground	Volleyball and games	Very high	Very high
Basketball court	Volleyball, soccer, and games	Very high	Very high
“Rombo” area in the grass	Talking, playing, and eating	High	Medium
Corridor and benches	Playing, observing, talking and eating	High	High
Static rings	Talking, eating, observing	Low	Low
Bleachers	Talking, eating, observing	Low	Low
Handrails	Exercises	Low	Low
Dividing wall between the main playground and the grass area	Observing, talking, eating	High	Low
Stage, stairs, and ramps	Observing, talking, eating	Low	Low



In secondary school, the most frequently used spaces are similar to those in primary school. The main playground, the grass area, the adjacent playground, and the basketball court show very high levels of use and energy, with sports and games being the predominant activities. The “rombo” area in the grass and the corridor show high use with medium energy, where mixed activities such as social interaction (e.g., talking and eating) and play take place. Other spaces such as the rings, bleachers, handrails, stage, and ramps show low levels of use, mainly for observation, conversation, or rest. The dividing wall between the main playground and the grass area shows high use but low energy, reflecting quieter activities such as observing, talking, and eating.

The analysis of changes in playground use across different observation stages showed that, in both primary and secondary levels, a greater number of students were observed in areas that were less used in April. In primary school, more students were observed in areas such as the grass and bleachers, where they talk and rest. In secondary school, more students were observed in areas such as the slides, corridor, bleachers, and grass, where they talk, rest, and eat. This may indicate that, over time, students use a wider range of playground areas for different activities.

3.2. Changes Identified from Students’ Perceptions

3.2.1. Characteristics of the New Playground

An initial question posed to students who participated in the discussions focused on the characteristics of the new school playground, identifying the changes they perceived compared to the previous playground.

From these discussions, five main changes in the characteristics of the playground were identified, as mentioned by students from both educational levels.

Table 12: Main Characteristics of the New School Playground Identified by Students

<p>New organization with differentiated areas</p>	<p>The new playground layout is organized into different zones (areas for sports, slides, grass areas, or seating), allowing students to engage in a variety of activities such as soccer, volleyball, and conversation. This new organization is perceived as more orderly, in contrast to the previous playground, which consisted of a single large space.</p>	<p>“Now there are different spaces for different games.” (primary student)</p> <p>“...there used to be one space where a person could play, now it’s divided. For example, down here you can play volleyball, and over there there are courts for basketball... the space is divided...” (secondary student)</p>
<p>New playground colors stand out</p>	<p>Students highlight the change to a light blue color, compared to the gray color that existed before. This, combined with the presence of plants, is positively valued as it makes the playground feel more lively.</p>	<p>“There wasn’t any color before, just cement... now there’s more color, more color.” (primary student)</p> <p>“Now it has more color.” (secondary student)</p>
<p>Perception of reduced space</p>	<p>Students perceive that the new playground space is smaller due to the new organization. They mentioned that, because there is less space, activities such as soccer or school sports events cannot be carried out in the same way as before, when the space was larger.</p>	<p>“It has been reduced... things have been placed along the sides... they don’t allow certain things that were done before. There used to be more volleyball, more soccer, and more activities.” (primary student)</p> <p>“Before it was spacious but less organized, and now it is smaller.” (secondary student)</p>
<p>Dangerous areas or games</p>	<p>Certain areas or activities in the playground—mainly the handrails and slides—are perceived as dangerous due to the occurrence of accidents (such as falls or bumps). Students mentioned that these accidents occur mainly among primary school students and have decreased over time.</p>	<p>“I don’t like the handrails because they are dangerous, sometimes people fall... about the slides: ‘They are very dangerous.’” (primary students)</p> <p>“They added that light blue structure, and because of that there were many accidents, especially in primary school.” (secondary student)</p>

<p>Areas are used differently according to students' grade level and gender</p>	<p>Students mentioned that the playground is used differently depending on gender and grade level. It was noted that upper primary students and boys tend to occupy more space, while others remain on the sidelines; the slides are used more by lower primary students (younger children), and soccer continues to be the activity that occupies the most space.</p>	<p><i>"In the larger area, boys play, while girls stay on the side. 5th and 6th graders take up the space." (primary student)</i></p> <p><i>"Boys play more soccer, girls walk around... some girls also join the games... those who play basketball also want to. It wouldn't be fair for others to be told to go to a small space while soccer players use everything." (secondary student)</i></p>
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Additionally, students from different educational levels emphasized different characteristics. On the one hand, primary school students mentioned that some areas are deteriorated due to the lack of roofing and the effects of rain ("When it rains, it fills with water; it should have a roof"), as well as a lack of care among students, who "pull out the grass."

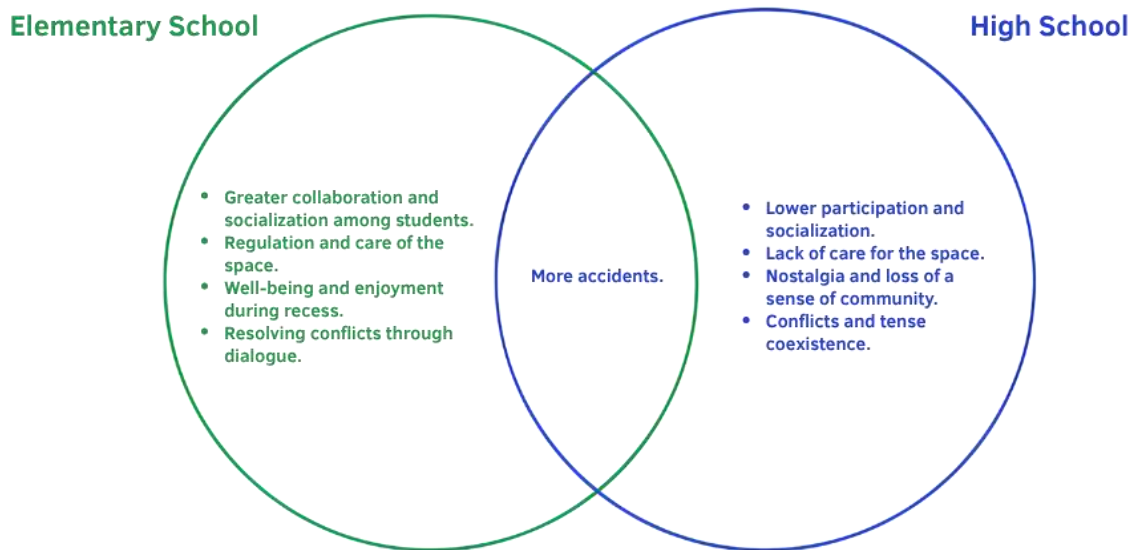
On the other hand, secondary school students pointed out that playground use is sometimes restricted due to increased rules and greater control by teachers and school leadership (e.g., "confiscating balls"), which reduces freedom during recess and decreases students' motivation to go outside ("Before we did more things; now we hardly go out

3.2.2. Students' Perceptions of Behavioral Changes Resulting from the New Playground

Based on the identified characteristics, students were asked about the changes in behavior and learning they have observed with the use of the new playground. As shown in Figure 7, there are differences in perceptions between primary and secondary students.

The only point of agreement between students at both levels is that the new playground has led to an increase in accidents. It is perceived that, due to changes in the playground and the addition of new areas—such as the handrails and slides—there are more accidents, especially among primary school students. Students mentioned that several accidents involving children have occurred this year. Likewise, they noted that, as with the previous playground, there are still cases of students being hit by balls.

Figure 7: Main Behavioral Changes Associated with the New Playground, as Identified by Students



Primary school students mentioned the following changes:

- **Mayor colaboración y socialización entre estudiantes:** They report that in the new playground they help each other, share responsibilities, and lend materials such as balls. They also highlight that they take care of the playground together.
“We help each other as classmates.” (primary student)
- **Regulation and care of the space:** They also mentioned that they have learned to avoid accidents in the new playground, as well as to take care of the environment and the plants.
“We learn to avoid dangers like getting hurt.” “We take care of the plants and the playground together.” (primary student)
- **Well-being and enjoyment during recess:** Students view recess as a moment when they feel free and enjoy themselves, preferring to be in the playground rather than in the classroom.
“We feel happy when the bell rings.” “(Talking about going out to recess): free... our chains break... like getting out of jail.” (primary students)

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- **Resolving conflicts through dialogue, although fights still occur:** Students mentioned that they have learned to resolve conflicts by talking instead of responding with violence. According to them, some students may get upset, but do not escalate to physical fights. However, conflicts still occur occasionally, especially among boys.

“Sometimes someone responds with a hit, but other times they talk to solve the problem.”
(primary student)

Secondary school students expressed a more critical perspective, highlighting the following behavioral changes resulting from the new playground:

- **Reduced participation and socialization:** Secondary students mentioned that they enjoy socializing (talking or sharing), but now perceive that, due to limited space and increased restrictions, they socialize less and go out to the playground less frequently.

“Basically, most secondary students stay in the classroom.” “Before, we talked more; now there’s no space.” (secondary students)

- **Lack of care for the space:** Some students acknowledged that students themselves have not taken proper care of the playground—littering and painting walls—which has contributed to its deterioration.

“Kids play, and since they don’t take care of it, they damage the playground.” (secondary student)
(estudiante de secundaria)

- **Nostalgia and loss of collective experience:** Due to reduced space and increased restrictions, students expressed nostalgia for collective activities that used to take place in the playground, such as sports events or parades, which are no longer held. Some also mentioned that they now engage in fewer sports.

((Referring to a drawing of the previous playground): “This is where we used to be happy with the different playground.” “We used to have sports events; it was more fun.” (secondary students)

- **Conflicts and tense coexistence:** Unlike primary students, who mentioned resolving conflicts through dialogue, secondary students highlighted the occurrence of fights or disputes among peers—especially among boys—reflecting tensions over the use of space. They also mentioned that some conflicts occur outside of school.

“Sometimes there are fights, and they tell you during recess: ‘I’ll wait for you after school.’” (secondary student)

3.2.3. Recommendations from Students' Perspectives

As a closing of the discussions with students, they were asked to provide recommendations for the institution or for similar projects. The following recommendations were mentioned by students from both educational levels:

- **Include more roofing and shaded areas:** Students suggested adding roofs or more shaded areas throughout the playground to protect them from the sun during hot seasons and from rain—preventing puddles—during colder periods. This would make the space more functional year-round. Secondary students also noted that this had been an expectation during the design consultation phase.
- **Greater freedom and more recreational activities in the playground:** Students highlighted the need to reduce restrictions on playground use (e.g., avoiding punishments such as not being allowed to go outside, confiscation of balls, and limitations on activities). In contrast, they recommended incorporating more recreational, artistic, and educational activities.
- **Expand the space:** Students expressed the need to expand the playground, as it is insufficient for the number of students. They mentioned the existence of an additional plot of land owned by the institution that could be used. This expansion would allow for more sports and recreational activities.

Primary school students proposed two additional recommendations that were not mentioned by secondary students:

- **Promote care of the playground:** Students noted that some peers litter or damage the space, and that this could be prevented.
- **Increase recess time and playground use:** Students highlighted that they learn and engage in enjoyable activities during recess, and therefore suggested extending recess time and increasing the use of the playground.

Meanwhile, secondary school students specifically recommended:

- **Improve management and organization of playground use for more equitable access:** For example, by organizing activities in shifts so that all students can use the playground, or by encouraging the use of spaces according to their intended purpose (e.g., ensuring that rest areas are not used for sports activities).

- **Improvement of other infrastructure areas perceived as more critical:** Students highlighted the need to address facilities such as restrooms, which are in poor condition, and plumbing issues that cause unpleasant odors and flooding. They emphasized the importance of prioritizing these repairs, as they significantly affect students’ well-being.

3.3. Changes Identified from Teachers’ and the Principal’s Perceptions

3.3.1. Characteristics of the New Playground

Primary and secondary school teachers, as well as the school principal who participated in the discussions, were asked about the characteristics of the new school playground that they perceived as changes compared to the previous one. Based on these discussions, the main changes in the playground’s characteristics were identified, as highlighted by teachers from both educational levels and the principal.

Table 13: Main Characteristics of the New School Playground Identified by Teachers and the Principal

<p>New organization with differentiated areas</p>	<p>The new playground structure is organized into four functional zones (grass area with shade, bleachers, sports area, and play area), which allows for the natural development of activities. This new organization is valued by teachers and the principal for providing visual and practical order, in contrast to the previous playground, which was perceived as large and gray.</p>	<p><i>“...it is well organized and now there are enough spaces for students to move around. In my class, many boys usually play soccer—they go to the soccer area—and the girls go to the shaded area to play volleyball.” (teacher)</i></p> <p><i>“...the way the spaces have been distributed is appropriate because four very important areas for students have been considered...” (principal)</i></p>
<p>Shaded areas allow the playground to be used</p>	<p>Teachers and the principal value the shaded areas, which allow the playground to be used under adverse weather conditions such as intense sunlight or rain. They highlight the grass area, where students—from the youngest to secondary students—can sit, lie down, or talk while being protected from the weather.</p>	<p><i>“...the shade really helps with the strong sun that used to affect students a lot; now, with this, there is at least some shaded area where we can find relief. It’s also aesthetically very nice because it feels like we are in an open field.” (teacher)</i></p>

Additionally, shaded areas are valued as spaces that allow teachers themselves to observe students or carry out activities.

"...we teachers appreciate it because we look for shade to be able to observe from there. We usually stay in the shade so we can watch them from that area..." (teacher)

Multiple spaces allow for diverse activities (play, sports, interaction, and rest)

The diversity of spaces allows students to freely choose between sports, recreational, or social interaction activities. According to teachers and the principal, the new layout promotes options such as basketball, recreational games, and spaces for sharing, diversifying the use of free time beyond traditional sports.

"...what I like most about the playground is that it's good; at least my students enjoy it a lot, they use it frequently, they play on the grass..." (teacher)

"...everything used to be soccer and volleyball... you couldn't do other activities. Now that the playground is divided, there's a basketball area... even the handrails..." (principal)

The change in color is valued and associated with calmness

Teachers and the principal highlight the light blue color of the playground (in contrast to the previous gray), as it is more visually appealing and adds vitality. The principal also mentioned that the playground's color influences students' mood, contributing to a sense of calm.

"...the school used to be very dull, to put it one way. It was dull. Now this playground has brought it to life..." (teacher)

"...the playground looked gray. It was gray because it was empty, a space that didn't attract attention..." (teacher)

"...students like it, and I have noticed it because I talk with them about the color that has been used..." (principal)

More accidents or risk areas require increased supervision, especially around the handrails

There are structures in the playground—particularly the handrails—that are identified as risk areas, as they have caused accidents, especially at the beginning of their use. Teachers mentioned that this situation requires constant supervision, particularly at the primary level, in order to prevent falls or injuries.

"...we cannot stop letting students go out to the playground, but there are dangerous areas. There is a lot of cement, and falls can be dangerous, especially since children sometimes do not measure risks and get hurt. So, during the first month, it was very difficult.

We were constantly in the playground with them—playing, running, jumping, even lifting them—to help them learn how to use it properly. But over time, they have learned, although we still have to be there...” (teacher)

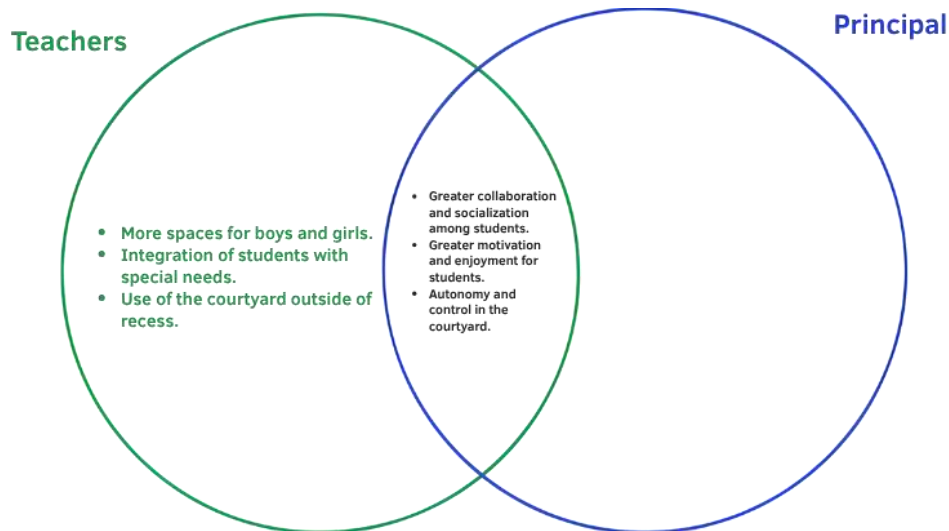
“...it became dangerous again because primary students wanted to grab onto it, but that has been gradually corrected...” (principal)

Additionally, teachers from different educational levels emphasized distinct characteristics. On the one hand, teachers pointed out that certain areas present limitations for continuous use, either due to material deterioration (such as wear of the synthetic grass, dust accumulation, or the oxidation of metal structures like the rings) or due to climatic factors, as rainfall causes flooding in exposed areas, rendering them unusable (“...in winter, when it rains, the grass gets wet—literally—it is not usable, at least during that season... we need to see how to maintain it...”).

3.3.2. Teachers’ and the Principal’s Perceptions of Behavioral Changes Resulting from the New Playground

Based on the identified characteristics, teachers and the principal were asked about the changes in students’ behavior and learning they have observed with the use of the new playground. As shown in the following figure, there are differences in perceptions between teachers and the principal.

Figure 8: Main Changes in Student Behavior Associated with the New Playground, as Identified by Teachers and the Principal



Teachers and the principal agree on three main changes in student behavior, which are described below:

- **Greater collaboration and socialization among students:** They mention that the new playground has fostered interactions among students (both within the same class and across different classes), as well as dialogue and cooperation. They highlight that students now talk, share games and food, establish rules, and strengthen empathy and respect.

“Now there are spaces to talk, something that was being lost.” (teacher)

“They are experiencing changes in the sense that the space can be used better; they gather in groups, sit down, and talk.” (principal))

- **Increased motivation and enjoyment among students:** They note that the new playground generates enthusiasm and happiness among students. They observe that students look forward to recess, smile, laugh, and enjoy it so much that they even find it difficult to return to class.

“They are excited to have more time during recess, because that’s when they enjoy themselves the most. But getting them back when it ends is very difficult because they hide.” (teacher)

- **Autonomy and self-regulation in the playground:** teachers noted that the new playground allows students to move freely while respecting rules and shared spaces. They report that students have learned to establish their own rules of play and regulate their behavior, avoiding conflicts and channeling their energy in a positive way.

“Now they know how to respect the different areas (of the playground); they no longer run into each other...” (teacher)

All the changes mentioned by the principal are consistent with teachers’ perceptions. However, teachers identified additional changes that were not mentioned by the principal:

- **More spaces for girls and boys:** Teachers stated that the new playground allows both girls and boys to share the space while also having areas of their own. They indicated that previously boys occupied almost the entire playground, whereas now girls also participate in activities such as volleyball and feel included.

“Before, boys would take over the playground; now girls also have their own space.” (teacher)

- **Inclusion of students with special needs:** Teachers also mentioned that the new playground promotes the inclusion of students with special educational needs (such as autism spectrum disorder or Turner syndrome, among others). They noted that the open space allows these students to self-regulate, interact, and engage in activities they previously avoided.

“I have a student with autism; the playground calms him and makes him more sociable.”

“...I have a student with Turner syndrome; she is very special... she never used to go out to the playground during recess, but now she does... she sits, watches others play, claps, and looks happy...” (teachers)

- **Use of the playground beyond recess:** Teachers observed that the new playground has become an attractive space even outside of recess time. They noted that when students go to the restroom or take breaks, they often pass through the playground, sit for a while, play briefly, or walk around.

“When they go to the restroom, they don’t go straight there anymore—it becomes more of a route through the playground, and if something catches their attention, they sit for a moment where they can...” (teacher)

3.3.3. Recommendations from Teachers' and the Principal's Perspectives

As a closing of the discussions with teachers and the principal, they were asked to provide recommendations for the institution or for similar projects.

Both teachers and the principal recommended strengthening the pedagogical use of the playground, emphasizing the need to take advantage of this space for educational activities such as reading, art, dance, geometry, and spiritual reflection. They suggested incorporating complementary materials that facilitate learning across all educational levels, as they consider that integrating the playground into curricular areas remains an ongoing challenge.

From their perspective, teachers made two additional recommendations that were not mentioned by the principal:

- **Strengthen organization and teacher support:** Teachers expressed the need to plan and organize the use of the playground as an educational resource. They suggested allocating specific spaces for activities such as dance, art, and physical education, as well as promoting teacher training and strategies to better utilize the playground to enhance learning outcomes.

Expand roofing and shaded areas: Teachers also suggested extending canopies and roofing structures to cover more areas of the playground. They highlighted concerns about exposure to sunlight and rain, noting that having more protected areas would allow all students to sit and use the space in a safe and comfortable manner.

Additionally, the principal specifically recommended expanding the space, emphasizing that despite the improvements, the playground remains insufficient for the number of students. She suggested considering an expansion of the area, including the creation of a specific space for early childhood education, in order to ensure greater comfort and safety during school activities.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This section presents the main conclusions derived from the study findings, based on the integrated analysis of observations and discussions with playground users.

- **The organization of the space allows for a variety of activities to take place in the school playground, even simultaneously.**

Observations of the playground show that its organization into different areas enables students to engage in a variety of sports, recreational, conversational, and resting activities. This organization is also valued by teachers, the principal, and some students, who note that it creates a greater sense of order and allows different groups of students to occupy different spaces (for example, some may play in the central area while others talk or rest in the grass area). Additionally, the analysis of playground use by gender and by space shows that this organization not only enables a diversity of activities but also a differentiated distribution: some areas concentrate high-energy physical activities (mainly carried out by boys), while others promote conversation, rest, or social interaction, with a greater presence of girls or mixed groups..

- **The playground appears to promote greater opportunities for interaction among students.**

Both observations and the perspectives of teachers and the principal indicate that the modifications to the playground have enabled students to interact more with one another. These interactions occur through sports (such as soccer, volleyball, and basketball), group games, conversations, and sharing food. Additionally, more situations were observed in which students are included in groups that are playing or conversing. In this sense, the playground functions primarily as a meeting space, allowing students to play, connect, and engage in dialogue during recess and free time.

- **There are various areas in the playground that facilitate greater dialogue among students.**

Observations highlighted an increase in the number of students engaging in dialogue (talking, sharing food, chatting, joking, etc.) during recess, especially in shaded areas such as the grass and the bleachers. This increase in dialogue is also noted by teachers and the principal, who value it as a way for students to connect in a context where they have limited opportunities to interact and communicate face-to-face without the use of mobile phones.

- **There are signs of improved care for the space, although behaviors that contribute to its deterioration still persist.**

Observations of the playground revealed that more students are engaging in a concrete action related to caring for the space: disposing of waste in trash bins. This change was also highlighted by primary school students, as well as by teachers and school leadership, and may be the result of awareness-raising or educational efforts. However, observations still showed instances of students throwing trash on the ground. Additionally, students from both levels mentioned that some peers continue to damage different areas of the playground by littering, painting on surfaces, or pulling out the grass.

- **The playground is an important resource, but it does not educate on its own: it has the potential to promote the development of socio-emotional skills, but not automatically.**

The increase in interaction and dialogue among students, as well as the availability of different activity areas, suggests that the playground is a resource that can contribute to skill development. It appears to particularly support the development of relational skills, which, according to the CASEL model, are defined as “the abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups” (CASEL, 2017). The playground provides an important space for relationships to develop, enabling students to communicate more and build connections with others.

However, it cannot be concluded that the playground alone leads to the development of these skills automatically. For example, while it may create opportunities for interaction and communication, it does not necessarily ensure effective communication, healthy relationships, or teamwork. Developing skills such as assertive communication—defined as the ability to express oneself clearly and directly, engage in dialogue, and set boundaries without resorting to violence (Ayrton Senna Institute, 2020)—or teamwork—defined as the ability to build relationships and work collaboratively toward a shared goal (Fundación Wiese, 2020)—requires a more comprehensive and integrated intervention beyond the physical implementation of the playground. This involves sustained and concrete actions that allow students to learn and practice these skills.

- **There are several challenges in the management of the space and in promoting its pedagogical use.**

Observations of the playground and the discussions reveal various management challenges, such as the care of the space (considering that some students still litter or damage it), the organization needed to ensure that all students can use the playground (given the perception that the space

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is limited for the number of students), and the restrictions mentioned by students that contradict the promotion of playground use (such as the confiscation of balls or the use of punishment by preventing students from going out during recess). These findings suggest a need to support the institutional management of the school to ensure the proper use and administration of the playground.

Additionally, teachers indicated that greater organization and support are needed to help them use the playground as a space for learning and skill development. This suggests that the training or follow-up actions implemented by the project are not yet sufficient to achieve effective management and use of the playground for skill development.

- **There is enthusiasm for and appreciation of the playground among teachers, the principal, and primary school students, particularly regarding the organization by areas, shaded spaces, grass areas, and color.**

Observations during recess, as well as discussions with teachers, the principal, and primary school students, show that the new playground is more highly valued than the previous one. In particular, the organization into different areas—with some shaded spaces—has enabled a variety of activities and allows students to choose whether to play, talk, or seek protection from the sun and rain. The grass area is also valued by both teachers and students as a space for different activities and interaction. Likewise, the color is perceived as more vibrant and appealing compared to the previous gray tone.

- **Secondary school students value the new playground less, and the least valued aspects include areas without shade that have caused more accidents, the interruption of important activities due to the new layout, and the insufficient space for the number of students.**

There are aspects of the playground that are generally less valued, especially by secondary school students, who expressed a more critical perspective compared to primary students and teachers. In the discussions, they highlighted concerns such as the limited availability of shaded areas, which makes parts of the playground unusable during strong sunlight or light rain—common weather conditions in the area of the school. Additionally, they pointed out that certain structures, such as the handrails, have led to a higher number of accidents, particularly among primary school students, requiring greater supervision and concern from teachers. Secondary students also expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that the new playground has disrupted activities they value and associate with their sense of belonging to the institution, such as sports events and parades. Finally, all stakeholders consulted indicated that the playground space remains insufficient for the number of students in the school, limiting both recreational and pedagogical activities.

- **Students' voices reflect needs and observations that are not being fully addressed.**

One notable finding is that, during the discussions, students expressed important needs that were not mentioned by the principal or teachers. This suggests that there may be limited opportunities for student participation within the institution, where they can communicate, be heard, and propose improvements. Although such spaces could be promoted through the student council, they do not appear to be consistently implemented. Moreover, even when consultation processes have taken place—such as during the design phase of the project—students feel that their requests, such as the need for more shaded areas throughout the playground, have not been fully considered. This indicates a clear need for students to be heard and included in institutional decision-making processes.

In addition, the needs expressed by students are relevant for the effective management of the school environment. First, they emphasized the need for shade throughout the playground, as this would provide protection from the sun and prevent the formation of puddles that damage the space and limit its use. Second, they highlighted the need for greater freedom in the use of the playground—avoiding restrictions such as limiting the use of balls, restricting access to recess, or eliminating activities that are important to them, such as sports events.

Finally, students identified broader infrastructure needs within the school that they perceive as more urgent than the playground itself, such as poorly maintained and unclean restrooms, as well as plumbing issues that cause unpleasant odors and potential health risks. Addressing these infrastructure needs is essential, and this concern was also evident during the observation of several classrooms in poor condition throughout the study.

- **It is important to consider that a key limitation of this study was the inability to conduct observations of the playground prior to its modification.**

The evaluation process began after the playground had already been improved, which limited the ability to directly compare student behaviors before and after the intervention. As a result, it was not possible to clearly observe the full extent of changes generated by the new playground. However, the study was still able to approximate an understanding of the intervention's outcomes through two observation points (one at the beginning of the year, shortly after the playground was introduced, and another after one semester of use), as well as through the analysis of perceptions from students, teachers, and the principal.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions presented and considering the experience of the evaluation team, as well as the evidence on socio-emotional skill development, the following recommendations are proposed. These recommendations can be used both to improve actions with the educational institution where the pilot was implemented and to inform the design of future interventions aimed at strengthening the proposal. The recommendations are divided into two subsections: recommendations for the educational institution—focused on actions that can be carried out by the school team—and recommendations for the project—which can be used by the UNACEM team and partner organizations to enhance the intervention.

5.1. Recommendations for the Educational Institution

➤ **Collaboratively develop an action plan to improve the management and pedagogical use of the playground.**

Design and implement a plan aimed at maximizing the use of the school playground, considering both actions to improve space management—including more equitable use across genders and educational levels, maintenance and care, and diverse recreational activities—as well as its pedagogical use for the development of socio-emotional skills. This improvement plan may include internal coordination and peer-learning actions within the team, such as training in socio-emotional skills and management, requests for support from UGEL or partner organizations, and coordination with students and parents.

➤ **Promote active student participation.**

It is important for the school leadership and teaching staff to create spaces for listening and to actively promote student participation (for example, by strengthening the student council), allowing students to take part in decision-making and in the implementation of improvements within the institution, including the use of the playground. As identified in the findings, students have needs and ideas that can contribute to maximizing the playground’s potential for skill development. Additionally, existing initiatives commonly implemented in schools—such as activating and supporting the student council—can be leveraged to involve students. Through their participation, initiatives can be developed to promote the care of the playground and the equitable use of the space. Encouraging active student participation not only helps generate appropriate solutions to identified challenges, but also motivates students and supports the development of skills such as teamwork in the implementation of proposed solutions.

- **Avoid restricting access to recess and sports activities.**
Design and implement alternative solutions to practices such as restricting access to recess, canceling activities like sports events, or limiting the use of balls. It is important to work collaboratively with students and teachers to address existing challenges—such as accidents or limited space for activities—without resorting to these types of restrictions. This is crucial, as recess, ball games, and activities such as sports events are key moments in school life that can enhance student motivation.
- **Address other infrastructure issues, such as poorly maintained restrooms, plumbing systems, and classroom conditions.** It is important to complement playground improvements by addressing priority infrastructure issues (such as the condition of classrooms and restrooms). These needs directly affect students’ perception of well-being and should be part of a comprehensive institutional improvement plan. It is understood that resolving these issues does not depend solely on the school; therefore, solutions may require coordination with local authorities (UGEL/regional government) and partner institutions.

5.2. Recommendations for the Project

- **Include support and training for educational institutions in the management and pedagogical use of the playground to ensure that they truly become “playgrounds that educate.”**

To achieve the goal of using playground improvements to support the development of socio-emotional skills, it is necessary to go beyond physical enhancements and include ongoing support and training for school leadership and teaching staff. This should focus on the development of socio-emotional skills and on strategies to promote these skills using the playground as an educational resource. Additionally, support should be provided to school leadership to ensure effective management of the space.

For this process, it is important to recognize that socio-emotional skills are developed through learning across multiple contexts, including school, family, and community (see, for example, Cabrerizo, D’Sa, Smith, & Velásquez, 2020). Research shows that schools play a key role in this development; however, this requires structured training for teachers and school leadership. Furthermore, these skills require sustained practice over time, which implies that interventions may need to be longer-term and supported through partnerships with other institutions, such as UGEL, local government entities, or specialized organizations in pedagogical management and socio-emotional learning.

➤ **Consider how to proceed in educational institutions facing more critical infrastructure challenges.**

A key question emerged from the visits to the school: What should be done when an educational institution faces more complex infrastructure issues that students perceive as more urgent? For example, should playground improvements be implemented when there are problems such as faulty drainage systems or poorly maintained restrooms? If so, how can institutions be supported in addressing these challenges? These are complex but necessary questions that can guide an important reflection for the project. This reflection could help define basic criteria for selecting participating schools, identify preparatory actions to ensure minimum conditions, develop differentiated support strategies based on the type of institution, or establish partnerships with governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Education or the Local Educational Management Unit (UGEL).

➤ **Incorporate risk management into the project.**

There are risks associated both with the use of the playground—such as accidents—and with its deterioration, which should be considered both in the design phase and in the support provided for institutional management. For example, the design should take into account that certain areas, such as handrails, may pose risks for younger children, or that materials—such as metal structures or synthetic grass—may deteriorate if not protected from weather conditions like light rain. Additionally, institutional support should include guidance, assistance, and follow-up to ensure proper maintenance of the playground and the implementation of risk management strategies.

➤ **Integrate evaluation into future projects to collect baseline data prior to intervention.**

If similar interventions are planned in other institutions, it is recommended to design an evaluation that includes data collection before any modifications are made, as well as ongoing monitoring throughout the project. This would allow for a more accurate assessment of the impact of the intervention over time.



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ANNEXOS:

- Playground layout with identified zones: [See playground here](#)
- layground drawings created during group interviews with students: See drawings here