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## Abstract

### Keywords:

outdoor education; psycho-physical development; efficiency.

Given the importance of outdoor educational practices for the psycho-physical development of young preschoolers, the question arises whether the interdisciplinary formative action would have other benefits, such as social inclusion, if it were carried out predominantly in free, open spaces. The present study investigates the perceptions of teachers on the dimension of outdoor education in an attempt to establish the benefits, the degree of efficiency in optimizing preschooler learning, as well as their holistic psycho-physical development. It is also of interest to identify constraints or disadvantages of this type of education, which has as its specificity the organization of the instructive-educational action outdoors. The interpretation of the data reveals the undeniable contribution that outdoor education has on the development of preschoolers as a whole. At the same time, difficulties in its implementation have been identified due to the unpredictability of the physical-geographical environment, resource management, especially on the child-child interrelational dimension. Thus, effective outdoor learning requires certain types of outdoor space, certain attitudes and practices on the part of adults, high levels of direct involvement of teachers in the work with children. Although effective pedagogy maintains a balance between structured games and unstructured activities, the current orientation is towards capitalizing on a dynamic interaction of children with their own learning experiences, including from the point of view of cognitive acquisitions.

## 1. Introduction

Outdoor education allows the transformation of the natural environment into a living space for learning and exploration, where children can reflect on sustainability and how lifestyle influences the environment. Outdoor education comes as a valuable complement to the traditional educational process. Also known as learning outside the classroom, or learning in the natural environment, this approach emphasizes learning through direct and concrete experiences (Bal & Kaya, 2020). In establishing a conceptual framework for education carried out outside the classroom, we are faced with a diversity of definitions; however, one of the most representative is the one that specifies the place of learning, the content taught and the purpose pursued (Phyllis, 1986). Therefore, outdoor education includes learning processes that take place in open spaces such as forests, meadows or schoolyards. The purpose of outdoor education is to contribute to the complete formation of the individual, both from a personal point of view and in relation to society and nature, overcoming the limits imposed by conventional learning carried out exclusively in closed spaces. One of the key figures who laid the foundations of experiential education applied in nature is Kurt Hahn

(1886–1974), the initiator of the Outward Bound school. His educational vision was focused on the formation of essential skills through direct involvement in practical activities, being particularly concerned with the development of character and personal responsibility. This educational approach has older philosophical roots, also found in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), especially in "Emile, or On Education", where the emphasis is placed on the importance of direct contact with life and nature in the formation of the individual. In a broad perspective, outdoor education can be considered part of non-formal education, which includes extracurricular and extracurricular activities aimed at stimulating the complete development of the child.

## 2. Theoretical basis

There is a growing recognition in contemporary educational discourse that outdoor activities contribute significantly to children's development. In this context, more and more researchers are focusing on the role of early childhood education in cultivating a positive relationship with the environment, encouraging ecological attitudes and values (Cutter-Mackenzie & Edwards, 2013; Herrington &



Studtmann, 1998; Malone & Tranter, 2003; Merewether, 2015; White, 2004;). The value of education carried out in outdoor spaces is constantly highlighted, especially since, being placed in situations that require self-discipline and self-regulation, children learn efficiently and sustainably through meaningful experiences (Burgess & Ernst, 2020; Phyllis, 1986; Kinberg, 2020; Wolff et al., 2020). Studies have highlighted the effects of these practices on motor development and health (Apaychev et al., 2018; Federici, 1993; Fjørtoft, 2001; Valentini & Donatiello, 2020;). In recent years, there has been growing interest in the impact that outdoor education has on cognitive thinking (Zamzow & Ernst, 2020), psychosocial balance (Kumpulainen et al., 2020; Sabet, 2018), and social inclusion (Dunst, 2020). While some studies highlight the effectiveness of technology-supported learning in educational contexts, offering a promising strategy for facilitating students' active involvement in the learning process (Albulescu et al., 2021; Albulescu et al., 2024; Albulescu et al., 2025; Glava, 2022; Opre et.al, 2022), others signal a common perception that learning in outdoor spaces requires less rigorous planning than activities carried out indoors (Renick, 2009). In some cases, time spent outdoors is seen as an opportunity for teachers to make the educational space more flexible (Renick, 2009). In this regard, Merewether (2015) argues that outdoor spaces should not be perceived only as places for relaxation, but as true learning environments, which must be designed to stimulate intellectual and emotional development. Therefore, the quality of children's outdoor experiences is determined by the way the space is arranged, but also by the active involvement of adults who facilitate their exploration (Kiewra & Veselack, 2016; Moore & Wong, 1997). Effective learning outside the classroom therefore requires not only the existence of adequate outdoor spaces, but above all a change in attitude and approach on the part of teachers (Emilsen & Koch, 2010; Moser & Martinsen, 2010), as well as a high level of involvement on their part in activities with children (Chakravarthi, 2009).

### 3. Research methodology

The purpose of the investigation was to identify the influence of outdoor education on preschoolers in the view of teachers.

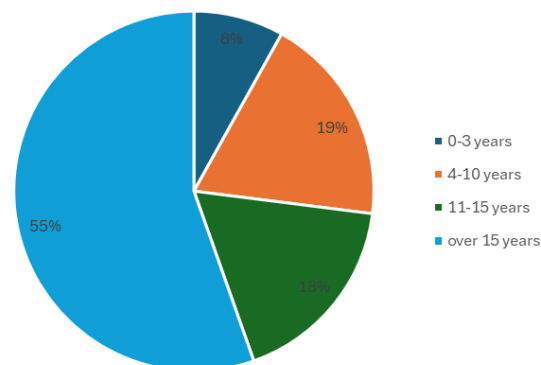
The method used was a questionnaire-based survey. The questionnaire consisting of 15 items was completed in digital format by teachers of early childhood education from Bistrița-Năsăud county

unconditionally and freely expressed, respecting the ethical conditions.

The number of respondents was 74, their teaching experience being reflected in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Distribution of respondents by length of service*

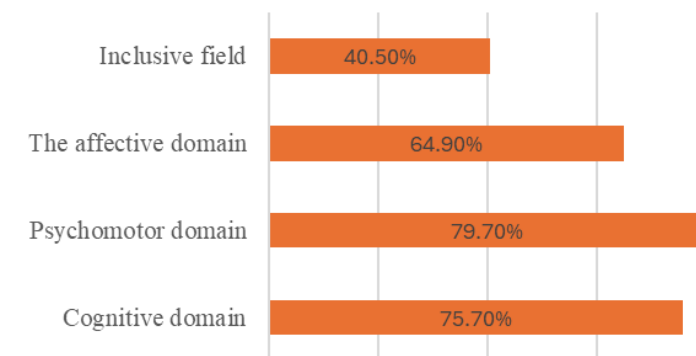


### 4. Results

We present the recorded data and analyze some of the questionnaire items considered to be more relevant in terms of the efficiency and opportunity of implementing outdoor education in preschool. Thus, for the item that aimed to indicate the area in which outdoor education has a greater influence on preschoolers, the responses received place the psychomotor area in first place, followed very closely by the cognitive and affective areas, and in fourth place, the inclusive area, as shown in Figure 2. We interpret these data as illustrative of the direct impact that outdoor education has on the child, in the sense that it supports their harmonious psycho-physical development.

**Figure 2**

*Areas of influence of outdoor education on preschoolers*

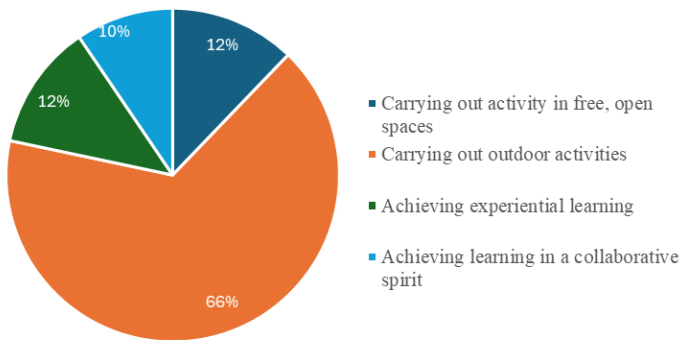


Another item of the questionnaire aimed at indicating the defining characteristics of outdoor education. The results are presented graphically in Figure 3.

From the analysis of data reflecting the perceptions of 74 early childhood education teachers, the main characteristic of outdoor education is by far the achievement of outdoor activities (66.2%). Similar, but significantly lower percentages include the achievement of experiential learning and the achievement of activities in free, open spaces (12.2%). We interpret these responses as eloquent in indicating the specificity of outdoor education, which is indispensably linked to outdoor learning. An even smaller percentage of 9.5% positions the achievement of learning in a collaborative spirit, from which we deduce that collaborative learning is usually achieved in closed formal settings. The next two items analyzed focus on the advantages (Figure 4) versus the disadvantages (Figure 5) of outdoor education.

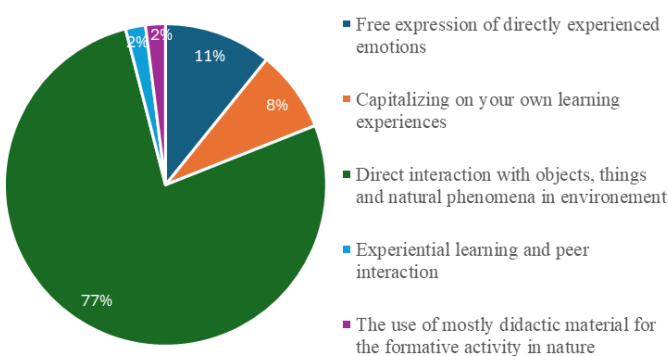
**Figure 3**

*Characteristics of outdoor education*



**Figure 4**

*Advantages of outdoor education*



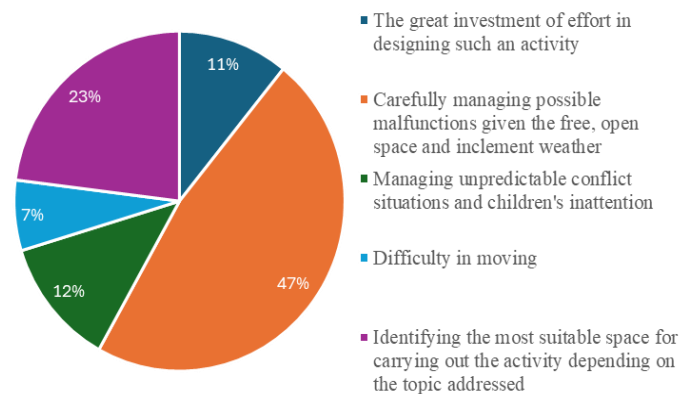
Thus, its major advantage, highlighted by Figure 4, is appreciated by respondents as the direct interaction with objects, things and natural phenomena in the environment (77%). Two other advantages, namely the possibility of freely expressing emotions experienced directly (10.8%) and capitalizing on one's own experiences in learning, are in line with the previously indicated domains (cognitive and affective) as being favored by outdoor education.

From the analysis of the data presented in Figure 5, it emerges as a major disadvantage appreciated by 47.3% of respondents "Managing with great care the possible dysfunctions given the free, open space and the bad weather". Another disadvantage is represented by "Identifying the most suitable spaces for carrying out the activity depending on the topic addressed" (23%). It is observed that the great concerns of teachers in approaching outdoor education are represented by the difficulty of ensuring and managing the educational environment in adequate quality conditions.

From the answers to the item: To what extent do you think outdoor education meets the demands demanded by the alpha child of today, beta of tomorrow? deduces the need to approach this type of education with great responsibility, since, according to the data in Figure 6, it is preferred by current and future children, so it is imposed with priority within the economy of the teaching process. We associate these data with indicating the opportunity for teachers to approach outdoor education regardless of the season or other conditions, such as curricular themes, activity times, etc.

**Figure 5**

*Disadvantages of outdoor education*



**Figure 6**

*The extent to which outdoor education meets the demands of the alpha and beta child*

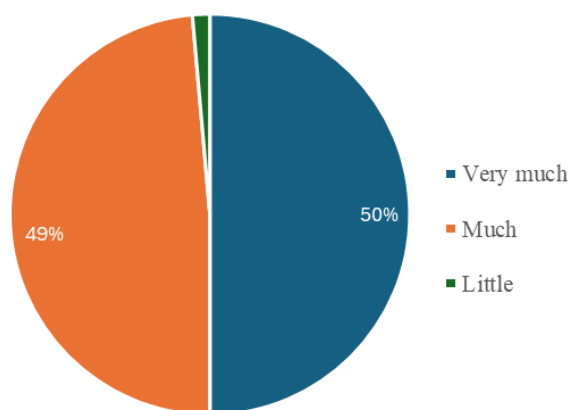
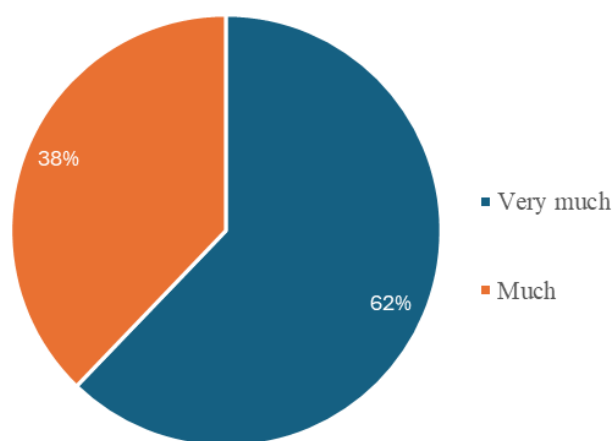


Figure 7 shows the data corresponding to the assessment of the degree of dependence on experiential learning in successfully completing an outdoor activity.

**Figure 7**

*The dependence of the success of an outdoor activity on experiential learning*



The analysis of the above data allows us to highlight the fact that the vast majority of teachers interviewed (62.2%) associate the success of outdoor activities with supporting experiential learning, which is another characteristic of outdoor education.

## 5. Discussions

Outdoor education is associated with quality education, as we expect it to cultivate fundamental traits such as creative curiosity, strong will, perseverance in the face of obstacles, the capacity for sacrifice and, above all, compassion – values that deserve to be protected and developed in any educational system (Catalano, 2014). From this perspective, our study highlighted the fact that it would be plausible from the perspective of learning efficiency to approach outdoor education as the main formative action. White and colleagues (2007) contradict the idea that educators consider free play, child-directed exploration and personal discovery to

be sufficient for early cognitive development. Our findings are consistent with the literature investigating how teacher attitudes and roles influence play and learning in outdoor educational settings. Child-centered learning requires the active involvement of educators in guiding and reinforcing the learning process (Fesseha & Pyle, 2016). A key issue highlighted in the literature is the lack of meaningful dialogue between parents and teachers about the benefits and practices of outdoor play (Jayasuriya et al., 2016). Kindergarten playgrounds are often among the few places where preschool children can freely interact with elements of nature in the presence of their peers. However, there is debate among teachers about the level of preparation required for outdoor educational activities (Davies, 1996; Davis & Waite, 2004; Louv, 2008; Renick, 2009). Although there is substantial attention paid to teachers, research exploring parents' perspectives is less common, generally focusing on concerns about risk and safety (Little, 2013), or on opinions about the value of outdoor activities for their children (Bohling et al., 2013).

The discrepancy between what theory prescribes and what actually happens in practice has been analyzed by Cutter-Mackenzie and Edwards (2013). According to these authors, the rupture arises from the confrontation of two different visions of environmental education in the context of early childhood education: on the one hand, an informal learning, based on free exploration, and on the other, a more organized approach, focused on the transmission of ecological values and environmental knowledge. This polarity generates increased interest in a constructivist perspective on outdoor education, in which children's experiences are guided through structured games, leading to positive and lasting effects on their early development.

## 6. Conclusions

A series of conclusions emerge from the investigative study, as follows:

- The indication of a fundamental characteristic of outdoor education, namely its implementation outdoors, is in accordance with the theoretical foundation and previous research that define and describe the concept of outdoor learning.
- The opportunity for a firm approach to outdoor activities in achieving quality education, since outdoor activity leads to the desirable psychophysical development of the child, to active learning on an experiential and collaborative basis.

As a further research direction, we propose illustrating how the transformation of physical space generates changes in the way of teaching, of approaching learning on an experiential and collaborative basis.

### Authors note:

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