

Moving away from traditional education: Outdoor education and learning. ECIE6001

Portfolio

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Element 1: Essay – Compare and contrast the scope and approach to outdoor provision in two types of setting e.g. early years, primary, secondary, PRU, ALN units, etc.

Introduction

When children learn outside instead of in a classroom, it is called outdoor learning. Playing, experiencing the outdoors, solving problems, and working with others are a few examples of these kinds of activities. It can improve children's schoolwork social, emotional, and physical development. (UNICEF, 2025b).

This essay will compare the scope and approach of outdoor learning in two settings: Early Years and Primary schools While the approach examines how it is taught and delivered, the scope examines what outdoor learning involves and what aims to achieve. By comparing the two, it will show how outdoor learning differs based on the children's age and needs.

Outdoor learning is an important part of children's development in early years settings. It promotes the development of the child, including their language, social, emotional, and physical growth. According to the Foundation Phase Framework, outdoor learning should be a part of daily routine rather than being limited to breaks. (Welsh Government, 2015).

Children should have daily opportunities to fully engage themselves in outdoor areas, which can be provided by frequent trips to local locations if the setting lacks outdoor space. The outdoors offers new possibilities. Children can engage and spend time in free play that provide them with real choice, freedom, and time. They can connect with other children, adults, and the natural world while enjoying. (Early Education, 2012). Froebel (1826) states

that children are naturally creative and learn best when given freedom to explore. (Froebel trust, 2022).

Most children enjoy learning through playing. For example, they might explore with mud, sand, water, or natural items like sticks and leaves. Children learn through their senses thanks to these experiences, which is important when they are young. (The Muddy Puddle Teacher, 2024). Some children, especially those with autism, may have sensitivity issues that prevent them from enjoying outdoor play because of differences in sensory processing that make situations overwhelming (BERA, 2023). However, it has been mentioned that Children and young people with autism benefit much from playing, especially outside, even though their play may be different. (BERA, 2023).

Children's gross motor skills, like running, climbing, and balancing, are also learned through outdoor learning. These are important for coordination and physical development. By making their own decisions and taking chances, like climbing or exploring new places, kids also gain confidence and independence. (Giesen, 2025). Join Children's mental well-being is also improved by being outside. Open spaces and fresh air might make kids feel happier and calmer. Also, it allows people to express themselves freely. (UNICEF, 2025).

Social engagement is an important part of outdoor learning in the early years. Children overcome issues, play together, and share ideas. This promotes teamwork and communication skills. (UNICEF, 2025).

Early Years children's growth focuses on communication, which shapes their way of thinking, learning, and interacting with the outside world. Its importance goes well beyond speaking; it includes listening, learning, and the communication of ideas and feelings. Communication is the foundation of all development in early childhood settings, not only a skill. Children must be supported through play, conversation, storytelling, and

responsive interactions to develop, In the Early Years Foundation phase in Wales.

communication is essential to learning. The most important and difficult skill a child learns during their first five years of life is language development. It is one of the most important indicators of children's success in school and afterwards in life. (KELSI, no date).

In Early Years settings the development of basic skills and learning through play are the main goals of outdoor learning. Early Years outside provision helps important topics like Language and communication, Physical growth, Emotional, social, and personal growth. Children have free access to outdoor areas, allowing them to move between indoor and outdoor environments which helps them explore all the time. (Solly, 2022).

Learning through play is an important part of the curriculum. Activities are open, like Enjoying fun with mud, water, sand, Climbing and racing Exploring natural items such as sticks and leaves. Children gain confidence, communication, and gross motor skills as part of these experiences. Climbing, for example, improves strength and risk awareness. (Solly, 2022b). Outdoor learning in Early Years helps children with their Independence using their own decisions, trying new things with confidence Spending time outside lowers stress levels and helps with their wellbeing and playing and sharing with others helps learners' social skills. Sensory exploring is difficult to do indoors. Children pick up learning through touch, sight, hearing, and movement. The Early Years curriculum focuses more on play, discovery, and the development of basic life skills than on academic learning. (Kiviranta et al., 2024). Theorists like Froebel, who thought that children learn best through play and engagement with the environment, supports this. (Ryan, 2025) In the same way, Piaget thought that infants learn by exploring what they are seeing. (McArdle, 2023).

The approach to outdoor learning in primary settings is more curriculum-focused and structured. To ensure that learning goals are clear, teachers create lessons that are directly related to their subjects. Outdoor education is not just for rare events; it is used on a regular basis. To enhance learning, educators can use parks, school property, or other settings. (Alfresco learning, 2025). The main goal of outdoor learning in the early years is to promote overall development which is the balanced development of all elements of a child's growth (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008). Outdoor education is still important in primary schools, although priority is a little different. It becomes more closely linked to topic learning and the curriculum. To be able to promote all Areas of Learning and Experience outdoor learning is encouraged by the Curriculum for Wales. (Welsh Government, 2023b).

By making learning more fun and energetic, outdoor learning in schools for children looks to increase kids' motivation and involvement. Because kids are encouraged to move, explore, and be active in outside settings, it also promotes physical well-being. Additionally, since children often work together and exchange ideas during activities, outdoor learning promotes better communication and cooperation skills. Additionally, it can improve mental health by lowering stress and fostering a feeling of wellbeing. Furthermore, outdoor settings offer chances for research and problem-solving, enabling kids to develop their critical thinking abilities through practical experiences (The Muddy Puddle Teacher, 2024b). In junior schools outdoor learning promotes critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving skills in children. Learning outside of the classroom improves engagement, mental health, and achievement in school. Schools can create engaging lessons that support different curriculum areas by including outdoor teaching into the KS2 curriculum. (The Muddy puddle Teacher, 2025).

Primary outdoor education supports Critical thinking and problem-solving, Independence and strength Kids can engage in more structured activities like Group tasks, outside research, forest schools, Using equipment and tools. (Welsh Government, 2023).

children who struggle inside a classroom can take advantage of a different approach to education which is outdoor learning, which may improve children focusing and improve behaviour. In general, the focus of the curriculum is larger in key stage 2 settings, but it is more focused on the topic understanding and learning goals. (Marchant, 2019). Overall, the scope in Primary settings is broader in terms of academic learning, while still supporting wellbeing and personal development (Welsh Government, 2023b).

As shown by the Foundation Phase, which prioritizes learning through play and outdoor experiences, Early Years places a higher priority on play-based learning and development ((Welsh Government, 2015b). Primary settings, on the other hand, use outdoor learning to improve teaching, involvement, and performance while concentrating more on curriculum-based learning and academic outcomes (Tussaud, 2014).

The approach to outdoor learning in early years is based on play, discovery, and child-led learning. These are the most important keys to the Early Years outdoor learning plan. Instead of limiting access to outdoor areas for certain periods of time, teachers should offer constant access to outdoors. children explore in many ways and use their imaginations. Children gain confidence and learn how to assess challenges as a result. (Learning through Landscapes, 2023).

Teachers encourage outdoor learning by closely seeing kids and using what they see to inform their instructions. By posing intelligent questions that push kids to think more deeply and consider things from several angles, they help expand their understanding. To keep activities interesting and meaningful, educators also consider the children's interests while

preparing the following steps. Also, outdoor activities are often connected to what kids are learning indoors, supporting and reinforcing classroom learning in a more useful and practical manner (Morgan, 2023). The approach to outdoor learning in primary settings is more curriculum-focused and structured. To ensure that learning goals are clear, teachers create lessons that are directly related to their subjects. Outdoor education is not just an extra-curricular activity it is used on a regular basis for learning. To enhance learning, educators can use parks, school property, or other settings. (Burt, 2016). Lesson plans include Activities that are planned with learning goals, using certain outdoor spaces (such as gardens or work zones). Promoting teamwork and problem-solving Changing tasks to accommodate different levels of skill Also, educators do a risk assessments that enable kids to engage in activities in a safe way. (Teach Kloud, 2024). Theorists such as Vygotsky, who believed that learning happens through social interaction and support from others, The idea is supported by group work outside. (Cherry, 2024).

conclusion

Outdoor learning is important in both Early Years and Primary settings, although the scope and approach vary based on the children's needs. Early Years promotes overall growth, supporting children's physical, social, and emotional development through play and discovery. Primary settings, on the other hand, place more importance on curriculum learning and use outdoor settings to support classes and encourage the development of skills like problem-solving and teamwork. Despite these differences, both settings have similar goals, such as improving well-being, promoting learning through doing, and helping children to develop essential life skills. Learning outside is useful and good., outdoor learning is

an important part of education since it allows kids to learn in ways that are not always possible in the classroom.

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- Tea/coffee/squash provided.
- Wear outdoor clothing.
- Children must be with a adult

maria rigby

£10.00 per family

FAMILY FUN DAY AT FOREST SCHOOL

HUNDLETON SA72 6BL

Sat 13th July 2026 10am till 3pm

Your paragraph text



(ForestSchoolsEducation, 2026)



(www.pember.app, 2023)



(School, 2019)

Get ready for a day of bonding, making memories, and enjoying a wide range of fun-filled activities. Here's what you can expect:

Suitable for ages 3 to 11 years old



(Thomson, 2017)

Mashmallow
roasting



(Weinstein, 2019)

Making dens



(Schools, 2019)

Exploring



07983130350

BOOK ASAP!



www.forestschoo.com

Reference for flyer

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Element 3: Risk-Benefit Analysis

Location / Activity:	Forest School/ woodland walk.	Date:	05/07/2026
Assessor:	Maria Rigby	Review date:	10/07/2026

ACTIVITY	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk RATING: L/M/H
Woodland walk, exploring the natural woodland environment.	Encourages physical activity and exercise. Supports mental wellbeing and reduces stress. Develops awareness and appreciation of nature. Builds confidence and independence.	Slips, trips, and falls on uneven or muddy ground Low-hanging branches. Getting lost or separated from the group. Contact with plants that may cause irritation. Insect bites or stings.	Pupils and adults	Route planned and risk-checked in advance. Clear boundaries and meeting points. Adult-to-child ratios. And regular head counts. Suitable clothing and footwear needed. Avoid walking in severe weather conditions. Awareness given about not touching unknown plants or wildlife.	Low

	Promotes teamwork and communication skills.	Weather-related risks.		First aid kit carried; staff trained in first aid. Fully charged Mobile phone available for emergencies.	
Den building, exploring. Climbing.	Builds problem-solving and creativity through den building. Develops physical strength, balance, and coordination. Encourages teamwork and communication. Increases confidence and resilience.	Falls from low-level climbing. Trips/slips on uneven, muddy, ground. Cuts/scratches from sticks, branches, or tools. Branches falling. Misuse of materials (e.g. sticks used unsafely). Getting lost or separated from a group. Contact with irritant plants or insects.	Pupils and adults.	Clear rules set climbing limited to low height (e.g. no higher than shoulder/head height of supervising adult). Adult supervision closely kept, especially during climbing. Area checked beforehand for hazards (loose branches, unsafe trees). Demonstration of safe den building. No use of sharp tools unless specifically supervised and trained. Boundaries clearly defined; regular head counts. Suitable clothing and suitable footwear are needed.	Medium.

		Weather-related risks (wind, rain, cold/heat)		Gloves available if handling materials . First aid kit available; staff trained in first aid. Activity stopped or adapted in poor weather (especially high winds) Clear behaviour expectations (no throwing sticks, safe spacing between participants)	
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Element 4: Literature Review ‘The role of Outdoor Education’

Outdoor learning means learning outside instead of inside a classroom. This can take place in forests, parks, beaches or even on school grounds. Children can explore, face challenges, and discover their surroundings by taking part in different activities. Outdoor education also has clear goals, such as using these experiences to develop knowledge, skills, and confidence. (Welsh Assembly Government/Learning Through Landscapes Cymru, 2008a). Learning through outdoor adventures, community and school-based projects, curriculum lessons delivered outside, and play-based activities in outdoor settings are just a few examples of the many experiences that can be included in outdoor activities. (The Muddy Puddle Teacher, 2025).

Outdoor learning can lower stress levels, improve mental health, and develop social skills like cooperation and communication. Research from Learning Through Landscapes (2022). states that being outside improves mental health and social abilities, including communication. Outdoor settings can improve understanding of curriculum ideas providing an effective method that raises academic achievement. Outdoor classes can be supporting learners that might find it difficult in a classroom environment and motivating them to be more confident to join in with their education (Learning Through Landscapes, 2022).

Studies have shown that young people's happiness and wellbeing can be greatly affected by spending time outside. According to a 2021 Natural England study, eighty five percent of young people feel that being outdoors makes them very happy. (Harman, 2024b). Being outside can help children relax, reduce stress, and improve concentration. After completing challenges, pupils often feel a sense of achievement, which

builds confidence, resilience, and self-esteem (Molyneux, Zeni and Oberle, 2022; Harvey, 2022).

The positive effects of outdoor learning on physical fitness and health are among its advantages. In addition, outdoor education can improve emotional wellbeing. Students often feel more confident after completing outdoor challenges. For example, activities like team tasks or problem-solving exercises can help build resilience and self-esteem. When students overcome challenges, they feel a sense of achievement, which boosts their confidence. (Harman,2024). Regular outdoor learning builds a closer relationship with the environment, which is important in developing understanding the environment. (Learning Through

Landscapes,2022). Research shows that introducing outdoor learning into the curriculum is more effective than treating it as a random activity (Learning Through Landscapes, 2022).

Schools can promote a broader approach to child development by including regular outdoor learning into the curriculum. research shows that children who spend time in nature are better able to develop some of the skills, views, and behaviours that are most important in the twenty-first century." (Kuo et al, 2019). However, schools do not always use outdoor environments for learning every day. This may be due to a lack of time, poor weather, limited funding, or low teacher confidence. In some cases, schools are prioritising classroom-based learning and tests over outdoor activities. Despite this, outdoor education supports skill development, hands-on learning, and mental well-being (UC Davis Health, 2023).

Outdoor education also helps develop motor skills, confidence, teamwork, and a positive attitude towards nature (UNICEF, 2025). Children are encouraged to move freely, explore open spaces, and fully engage with their surroundings. Despite these benefits, there are challenges. Some schools have limited outdoor space or lack funding for equipment such as

waterproof clothing. These experiences help to build confidence in speaking and support the development of social interaction skills. This can be linked to the work of Lev Vygotsky (1934), who emphasised the importance of social interaction in learning through his concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. Through guided participation and interaction with peers and adults, children can extend their communication skills beyond their current level. Additionally, outdoor environments often provide open-ended and less structured opportunities, which encourage children to negotiate, problem-solve and use language in meaningful contexts. (Englishoutdoorcouncil.org, 2016).

Weather conditions in the UK can also make regular outdoor learning difficult. In addition, some teachers and parents worry about safety and the risk of injury (Welsh Government, 2023). To address these issues, the government has provided funding to support outdoor education. For example, £15 million has been invested to improve access to outdoor learning, particularly in disadvantaged communities (Department for Education, 2023a). In England. This funding can be used to develop outdoor spaces, provide equipment, and improve access for all pupils (Department for Education, 2023b). Schools may also involve parents in supporting outdoor areas through volunteering. Consider ending this section by looking into funding for outdoor learning by the Welsh Government. Local authorities have access to Two million in funds to support schools by giving students extra opportunities. This funding helps schools provide a range of age-appropriate activities and opportunities for students in each school; support the provision of activities with a priority on promoting attendance and tackling dislike and (or) disengagement; support activities that promote physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing through boosted access to creative, sporting, and cultural experiences in English and Welsh, including opportunities to play; support equality of access for students; this may include altering or widening certain services to address disadvantages (Welsh government, 2026). Learning Through Landscapes describes outdoor learning as an active

approach that takes place outside the classroom. This means children take part in activities such as exploring, playing, and making their own decisions, rather than just watching and listening. (Heathfield Knoll School, 2024). The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom describes it as learning that takes place outside of the classroom and include activities like outdoor adventures, outdoor play, and environmental projects that support the development of pupils in confidence, teamwork, and a feeling of belonging to the environment. (ACE schools, 2024).

Outdoor learning is described in similar ways by different groups and ideas. Theorists such as Skinner, suggests that behaviour, rewards, and punishments are how individuals learn. He believed that people are more willing to repeat actions when they receive rewards for completing them right. (Main, 2023b) Outdoor learning often includes real, tangible feedback that acts as natural reinforcement. Vygotsky recognized the advantages of relationships in learning. He believed that people learn best when they interact with others and get support, especially in the "zone of proximal development," where learners get help in achieving targets that would not be able achieve on their own. (Cherry, 2023). Piaget believed that children learn by exploring and interacting with their environment. This supports outdoor learning, as it allows children to build knowledge through real experiences rather than passive listening. Students learn more effectively by completing tasks and gaining practical experience instead of just sitting in a classroom. (Gowrie NSW, 2024).

Froebel emphasised the importance of play, saying that children learn best by actively experiencing the world. (Early Education, 2021). This links closely to outdoor education, where play and exploration are key parts of learning. As another theorist, Dewey, (1938) said, students learn by finishing tasks and getting practical experience rather than sitting and listening in a classroom. Primary school educators believe that pupils

learn by working and engaging with others and are also connected to outdoor education. (Learning Through Landscapes, 2008b).

Many primary educators believe pupils learn best when they are actively involved and working with others (Welsh Assembly Government/Learning Through Landscapes Cymru, 2008b). This is important because outdoor activities often involve discussion, teamwork, and problem-solving. Research by Molyneux, Zeni, and Oberle (2022) suggests that outdoor education supports development in many areas beyond academics. It can improve social skills, physical health, mental well-being, and environmental awareness. Pupils are often more motivated and engaged when learning outdoors, and time spent outside can improve focus, skills, and concentration. Vygotsky also supports this idea, as learning improves through interaction and real-life experiences, making outdoor group work highly effective. (MRedford, 2013b). The key themes of outdoor education include physical and mental health, social and communication skills, gross and fine motor skills, looking after the environment, experiential learning, personal skills and growth, and enjoyment in learning (O'Brien, 2018). One important theme is physical activity. Outdoor education encourages children to stay active through activities such as walking, climbing, and playing games. (UNICEF, 2025). According to UNICEF (2025) this supports a healthier lifestyle, which is especially important as many young people spend a lot of time indoors using screens. Outdoor learning also has positive effects on mental health. (UNICEF, 2025).

The amount and success of outdoor learning in educational settings might be restricted by several obstacles. Unpredictable weather and environmental conditions are a major obstacle that can make it challenging for teachers to organize and conduct regular outdoor lessons, which often results in not wanting to take instruction outside. Additionally, teachers may prioritize fulfilling academic goals and finishing evaluated work over outdoor activities, which may appear as time-consuming or less structured, due to curriculum pressure and time

limits, which severely limit chances (Nicol, 2003). Lack of teacher confidence and training is another important obstacle; some teachers are uncertain about how to control behaviour outside, connect activities to curriculum goals, or carry out efficient risk assessments. (Barrable, Touloumakos and Lapere, 2020). Health and safety issues are closely related to this since schools may take risk-averse measures out of worry for liability or accidents, which may restrict kids' access to outdoor activities. Additionally, provision may be limited by a lack of resources and access to right outdoor locations, especially in urban schools where green spaces or equipment may be hard to come by (Barrable, Touloumakos and Lapere, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Research in this area has proved that outdoor learning improves mental health, as other factors such as physical activity and social interaction also play a role. Overall, outdoor education offers many benefits for both physical and mental development. It supports active learning, builds confidence, and improves social skills. Although there are some challenges, better funding and access can help ensure more children receive help from these valuable experiences. Outdoor education is an important part of children's learning and development. It is not just about being outside, but about learning through real experiences that help children build knowledge, skills, and confidence. This essay's literature review has shown that outdoor learning supports many areas, including physical health, mental well-being, social skills, and learning in school.

Outdoor learning helps children learn by doing it instead of just listening in a classroom. The ideas of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky support this, as they both believe children learn best through experience and working with others. When children take part in outdoor group

activities, they learn how to communicate, solve problems, and work as a team. These are important skills for both school and everyday life.

Outdoor education also has many benefits for physical and mental health. Being outside encourages children to be active, which helps keep them healthy. It can also help reduce stress, improve focus, and make children feel happier. This is very important, as many children spend a lot of time indoors using phones, tablets, and computers. Outdoor learning gives them a chance to relax, explore, and enjoy nature.

However, outdoor learning is not always used regularly in schools. There are some challenges, such as bad weather, lack of money, limited space, and concerns about safety. Some schools may also focus more on classroom learning and tests instead of outdoor activities. Even though funding has been provided to help improve outdoor education, these problems can still make it difficult for schools to use it often. (Outdoor Play Canada, 2023)

Overall, outdoor education has many benefits and should be an important part of learning. It helps children become more confident, active, and better at working with others. Although there are some challenges, more support and better planning could help more children take part in outdoor learning. This shows that the role of outdoor education is valuable and should be part of the regular curriculum in schools to support children's development.

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