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I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment.

Does outdoor play provide more enriched learning experiences for children in early years?

Outdoor Play

Why is it important?

Beattie (2025) states that children from an early age should be exposed to outdoor play to develop a positive relationship with their environment. The study found that children developed their physical and cognitive skills all while playing and exploring the outdoors and its natural resources. According to Simoncini (2024), free play is allowing them to choose from the environment around them and to create their style of play based on what they can find. However, the article also states that play isn't always freely chosen as adults will always have an input in children's play and adults will choose the resources for the children. Bjorgen (2015) agrees that children exploring the outdoors and nature provides children with more experiences to develop physically and their motor skills.

Role of practitioners

Whalley (no date) states that the practitioner's role is to enable play. Friedman (2024) suggests that Forrest Schools are schools based on giving children learning experiences through their natural environment. Practitioners follow a child-centred approach to allow children to holistically develop. Forest schools make sure that their practitioners are fully qualified so that children are supported in activities, so they have enriched positive experiences. The Scottish Government (2021) agrees that practitioners should provide an engaging environment but also provide resources and tailored surroundings to the children's interests, so they have a fulfilling experience.

Signet play (no date) suggests practitioners are also scaffolders, in which they provide support throughout sessions for children to model and assist children in completing activities and over time provide less support as children learn from previous experiences.

Theoretical frameworks

Boulton (2022) discusses Piaget's study of child development and how he suggested that children learn and develop from experiences and interactions. Piaget's theory suggests that practitioners allowing children to be exposed to the outdoors will give them real life experiences, studies found that children and practitioners' emotions

become more regulated while exploring the outdoors providing benefits to children and adults.

Hoskins (2018) suggests Froebel's theory on learning through and from play helps children emotionally develop but also so a child can holistically develop (Froebel Trust, No date). States that Froebel's theory is that children should be given the time and space to naturally express themselves, and practitioners should play their part by providing that space and resources for children. Practitioners should allow children to engage in child-led or child-initiated activities to gain full attainment and not be interfered with by adults around them.

Play Wales (2024) discusses children's freedom of movement. This policy suggests that children do not need the outdoors entirely for their movement however, being outdoors allows children to experience being in and part of the community. Children being able to access the outdoors with minimal adult interference allows children to freely open their mind and curiosity to explore the environment around them, this freedom encourages children to see the outdoors with endless opportunities and leaves children with a positive attitude of outdoor play.

The benefits of outdoor play

Friedman (2024) states children being exposed to outdoor play have been found to have lower stress levels. Allowing children to be in nature and freely play helps to improve their emotional and cognitive well-being as they are exposed to nature which helps them overcome fears and allows them to take risks in their play. Welsh Government (2022) agrees that children with additional needs are found to thrive more in the outdoors as being outdoors and freely in nature takes away the anxiety of a classroom or set tasks.

Welsh Government (2022) also states that outdoor learning benefited children as they become more aware of their surroundings and start to begin to care for the environment around them.

Amin (2024) states children begin to develop holistically as the outdoors challenges children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Children begin to emotionally grow as they begin to care about the world around them which helps them develop empathy as they learn to cooperate with their peers, improving their social skills.

The limitations of outdoor based play

Safety, lack of access, screen time, covid

Semple-McBean (2025) suggests a major limitation to outdoor play in early years is parents. Parents have a huge impact on children's lives when in their care or when they send their child to a care setting, parents will not always approve of outdoor play as the risk of an injury while being outdoors could occur. Also, there is a worry of children encountering insect bites causing the children harm, thus leaving practitioners not having the opportunity to expose children to outdoor play due to parents not allowing their children access.

Vasilaki (2025) Due to covid, children's access and availability to the outdoors was limited due to the restrictions. Those restrictions left practitioners with limited resources to provide children due to minimizing the spread of the virus or because of lockdowns. This prevented children from being exposed to the full experiences of outdoor play and learning.

Policies

Education Wales (2023) states outdoor learning provides a significant impact on children's well-being. Play Wales (No date) states in Wales the current play policy states that children have the right to play. The Welsh Government have made the policy a priority for children to have access to play and have funded local authorities to support sufficient play opportunities for children. Welsh Government (2025) also suggests that the right to play will enable all children to freely access play no matter their background.

In conclusion, outdoor play offers an enriched learning experience for children in the early years. Children being exposed to the natural world around them and the environments children can develop holistically to improve their social, physical, emotional and cognitive skills, all this can be supported by the practitioners or adults around them providing them with the right resources and scaffolding their experiences however, allowing a child-led approach. Practitioners, even though faced with limitations of outdoor play due to concerns of safety and the long-lasting effects of Covid, are supported by various policies to continue children's right to play.

Methodology

Introduction

From this project the research information collected will be from primary data. The Open University (no date) states primary data is information collected by a researcher based on their specified study, this data will be collected first-hand by the researcher so that comes from the original source.

This research project will gather information through a mixed methods approach, this is the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods allow data to be reviewed in more depth, allowing researchers to analyse the data so that it can be explained and explored in detail to have a better understanding of research (Hammond, 2021). Quantitative data is an evidence-based data, collected by researchers using statistics and numerical figures from a chosen sample (Grigorios, 2023).

Sample

This research project will focus on children with ages from 3–6-year-olds. This sample type will be out of convenience. Edgar (2017) states that convenience is when the research group will be readily available for the researcher making it easier to attain evidence and data. The sample will be the early years of the local primary school from Nursery to year 2. A total of 30 children from ages 3-6 will be observed by 5 practitioners. A total of 100 parents will be sent questionnaires all with children attending from the early years classes to complete and the educators and practitioners within the school so that the information will all be from people who observe the children to outdoor play. Written and verbal consent will be obtained by all adults, parents and guardians of all participating.

Hawthorne effect

The Hawthorne Effect is the theory that children, when being observed, will begin to change the way they play or normally behave as they are aware they are being observed by practitioners or others around them (Scurich, 2025). James (2010) also states, The Hawthorne Effect is when individuals change their behaviour as they understand they are being watched so they simply act differently until they feel they are not being watched anymore. First Discoveries (no date) states observing a child is one of the first assessment tools practitioners will use when a child is in their care, to navigate how they learn and progress. In this research project the use of observation will be used, however the adult's part-taking in the observation will be known to the children, making it a normal everyday environment to the children and already having a great rapport to achieve the most accurate results. Some suggest that observation can be an intimidating experience if picked up on by children or practitioners so they may change the way they act or play to satisfy those watching.

Halo effect

The halo effect is a theory based on when an individual's impression of another is influenced by how others discuss or feel about them (Cherry, 2024). The Halo effect theory emphasises the cognitive bias is linked to how listening and being around others may change how an individual will feel now that they have other opinion of than their own (Keeley, 2013). The Halo effect may affect the attitude to outdoor play and learning as partitioners may find that children will behave more sociably or show more skills outside in their preferred environment rather than in the classroom (Behrman, 2019; Lee, 2021).

Methods

Questionnaires

One method that will be used in this research project is questionnaires designed for practitioners and parents to gather as much insight into the understanding and attitude towards outdoor play. McFarland (2017) states children given the opportunity to have access to outdoor play, enjoy the challenges that are set as they can have exciting and thrilling experiences. However, parents have become a barrier to outdoor play due to adults wanting to shield children from any potential harm and limiting their outdoor play opportunities, severely reducing them. This will be a quantitative research method as from the figures this will help give the percentages of what parents and practitioners will think anonymously.

Some strengths of using questionnaires and a research method are that individuals are more likely to choose an online questionnaire due to know having to physically fill out forms when it can be done online however, a weakness is that the likelihood of participants to attempt or complete the form are low (Prasad, 2019). Woerkm (2019) states that another strength of a questionnaire is that the individual's part-taking will feel more willing to give an honest opinion if the questionnaire is anonymous, this will give more accurate opinions on what practitioners and adults believe about outdoor play. Another weakness on questionnaires may be that due to different perspectives, the questions may be interpreted differently to how the researcher may intend for them to come across, this then leaves the researcher potentially having answers that will not be relevant to their study (WJEC, 2017).

Observations

The second method that will be used in this research will be observations. In early years observations are used to understand how children play and interact with one another but also how they handle interactions based on activities (Birth to 5 matters, no date). West Sussex Council (2015) states that observation is a process where children are watched in the care of practitioners, where they will take a step back and make notes of what can be heard and seen directly. Louis (2018) states that observation is important for the use of outdoor play because play is a small insight to how children process the environment around them. This will then in turn help practitioners learn their children's likes and dislikes and gain understanding that the children's needs and interests are being met.

Some benefits of using observation to support research will be that the information collected from the observation will be collected in the moment so that the data will be collected straight from the source. Another strength is that during an observation the researcher or observer will not be involved and will not directly affect how the children will play in the moment as they will be at a distance but not interfering (BBC, date).

Seneca Notes (no date) states the disadvantages of observation is that a researcher will only observe behaviours or displays of play but will not understand why they choose to play a certain way. Children could understand that the researcher is someone different and become aware that they are being watched, this displays that the Hawthorne effect which will then affect the results of the observation as this will not be a true reflection of a children's play in the outdoors.

Ellis (2024) states the data collected from the observations will be qualitative data as this will be received by first hand interactions. It allows an observer to understand the deeper qualities children present, as it uses the researcher to be descriptive to gain all aspect of children play being observed creating rich qualitative research data.

The Leuven scale is a 5-point system, 1 being very low self-esteem and well-being and 5 extremely high confidence in their environment. The scale helps practitioners understand and assess the progress a child is making. Children who need help developing their well-being often present as anxious or afraid of the unknown or the independence of exploring on their own, children can only develop and being to learn when they feel safe, positive and happy in their environment and with those around them (Eyworks, 2024). Leuven scale is used as part of the early years to assess children's well-being. This will be used in this research project to assess where the

children are on the scale as Learning Journals (date) states how they develop while being exposed to play and if this will contribute to helping them climb the scale.

Triangulation

Triangulation is the use of more than one method when researching. This gives a researcher an opportunity to use multiple ways of research to strengthen their information to back-up the data they have already collected by also to collect new additional information you may only get from one research method or one target audience. Triangulation will help researchers find enriched data (The Open University, no date).

In conclusion, this research project will use various methods of collecting data from children, practitioners and parents to get the best understanding of attitudes on outdoor play by using qualitative and quantitative data collection, through questionnaires and observation.

Ethics

When conducting a research project involving adults and especially children. It is essential to follow and adhere to ethical guidelines. Ethics are not just requirements; they are the principles that make sure research is conducted with respect of the participants and all parties involved. According to UWTSD (2022), it is important to have the highest of standards and respect in all areas of the research. A key element to follow throughout the whole process is that the research must do no harm to participants and is essential to predict and avoid as best possible any risks.

This project will strictly follow the ethical guidelines by British Educational Research Association (BERA) and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) to

make sure that all the research that will be obtained will be safe and fair to all involved in the project.

Voluntary Informed Consent

BERA (2024) states, Voluntary informed consent should be the first data obtained. Voluntary informed consent is when the nature of the research has been explained and understood by the participants, and they choose they would like to go ahead with being part of the project. This will mean that the researcher will provide the participants with clear information and what they will do with the information they are provided with. Participants should also be made aware that at any stage of the project is completely voluntary and is based off what they want to share or not to share. Participants should also be made aware that if they choose to decline involvement at any stage of the process that it will not have any consequence upon them.

All adults taking part will be given an information sheet explaining the process and the reasoning for the study, this will also include how information will be collected and what that information will be collected for. A consent form will also be given if participants are happy and are willing to go ahead with the project so that they can provide written consent to show they are willing but still informed that they can withdraw at any point.

Right to Withdraw

The right to withdraw for participants is their right at any point of the research project, this includes not having to give a reason or explanation for their choice either. In this project if at any point a parent or child wish for themselves or individuals to no longer take part there will be no judgement or questions asked if they wish to do so.

Children are not legally able to consent so assent will be needed. Assent will be established throughout the research as the child will need to be observed often to see of, they are willing to participate. If at any time the children will become visually upset or verbalise they are uncomfortable with the process, the observation will stop immediately. This coincides with the UNICEF which helps emphasize children's rights and the importance of respecting children and what might affect their well-

being. This is why the UNICEF (2019) article 42 advocates that all children and practitioners should be aware of their rights so they can be cared for respectively. Parents will be given an information sheet from the beginning so they will have all the information from the beginning. However, the respect for the child's comfort and well-being is priority.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality is a vital part of a research project, this will be monitored extremely close throughout the process to make sure that all confidentiality rules are being adhered to. Participants personal information such as names or anything that will be recognisable, will not be used in any written data. The data that is collected purpose will solely be for the research and all information will be securely stored and kept anonymous. All researchers that have access to the data collected will all be approved and DBS checked, to be trusted to handle the data (UWTSD, 2022).

Identifying and Reducing risks

During any research study involving participants, it is vital to understand and avoid the risks that come with data collecting. The identified risks fall into three categories participants, researchers and the institution.

Risks to Participants

The potential risk to participants is the emotional upset that may be caused, especially amongst young children placed in a situation where they are being watched and recorded. BERA (2024) states, to overcome this, children will be continuously monitored and watched for any signs of behaviour that display discomfort or upset in accordance with BERA and UWTSD guidelines to protect children's rights.

According to UWTSD (2022) Another risk will be that all involved in the research project will need to be hold a DBS. To work with children and adults in such proximity and vulnerable individuals a DBS is a requirement, without this allows individuals that have not been authorized or background checked. To avoid this all practitioners will need to have a DBS and have this verified to be able to be part of the research task. Another risk to the participant is that an inappropriate disclosure may occur. If

this happens the observation and project stop, and the designated safeguarding officer is to be informed immediately.

Risk to Researchers

A risk to the researcher could be that observations can take a lot of time and patience, which can put a lot of pressure onto the researcher. This will be addressed by having a schedule to follow so that timings are known to all involved but also so that shorter sessions can be approved, shorter sessions may also benefit the children as they will not be needed for such long periods of time. Also having a mounted camera instead of handheld to help support the observer rather than carrying for long periods of time.

Risk to Institution

BERA (2024) states the risk to the institution could be a potential breach of ethical standards which then reflect negatively on the university. This can be avoided if the researcher maintains a strict following and use of the BERA and UWTSD Research and Ethics and integrity code of practise to ensure that the university will be protected from ethical breaches. Another risk could be litigation through data loss. This can be prevented by following the GDPR, by gaining consent from the participants from the very beginning so that from the data it will show access has been given (BERA, 2024).

Data Storage

The data that will be collected from the observations such as videos or photographs, the questionnaires, consent forms and any notes that may be taken will need to be securely stored in accordance with UWTSD's data management policies. BERA (2024) privacy and data storage suggests, the data will be securely stored online with anonymity being taken into consideration, making sure no names, personal or identifiable information is being stored.

To conclude, ethical guidelines are the fundamentals of all research, especially when involving vulnerable groups such as children. If researchers are to conduct their projects it is a vital part of research to adhere to ethical guidelines, ensuring that voluntary informed consent and advocating the right to withdraw and confidentiality to not effect well-being of others negatively then this outdoor play research project can go ahead allowing professionalism and respect to be maintained.

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