

Dissertation Proposal

Introduction and Rationale for proposed study

The proposed study is ‘Do exercising in different environments have any impact upon a university student’s wellbeing?’ with a particular focus on their mood state, self-esteem and stress levels. Research suggests that a university student’s well-being can be negatively affected as a result of ‘university life’ (Abouserie, 1994). There are many stresses faced by university students, such as interpersonal conflicts, financial constraints and academic stress. University students are now being taught in larger groups, making it more difficult to make friends and develop a sense of belonging (Macaskill, 2013). As a result staff and student ratios have increased, meaning students may feel that they aren’t getting the support they require (Robotham and Julian, 2006). Consequently the more students attending university has meant the government has slowly decreased funding for students, thus increasing the already present financial pressures on students (Denovan and Macaskill 2016). In a study investigating student anxiety and depression it can be seen that some students show an overall general low well-being, this is shown to increase after university entry, showing by mid-course 9% of previously symptom-free students became depressed and 20% became anxious at a clinically significant level (Andrews, 2004). There is little research on stress and achievement in undergraduates, but what there is suggests that high stress levels are associated with lower levels of achievement (Denovan and Macaskill, 2016). What is being done to combat this epidemic in undergraduate students in the UK? According to Grinde and Patil it is implied that simply being in the outdoors and connecting with nature has psychological benefits including reducing stress and alleviating feelings of depression (Grinde and Patil, 2009). Studies such as ‘A comparison of four typical green exercise environments and prediction of psychological health outcomes’ (Rogerson et al., 2015), ‘The mental and physical health outcomes of green exercise’ (Pretty et al., 2005) and ‘Acute effects of outdoor physical activity on affect and psychological well-being in depressed patients’ (Fruhauf et al., 2016) investigate whether indoor or outdoor physical activity has a greater impact on a person’s mental health, showing the outdoors has the most benefits and could possibly be the answer to reducing the poor wellbeing in UK university students. The outdoors has links to greater self-control, helping recover from pre-existing stress or problems, having an immunizing effect by protecting us from future stresses and helping us

to concentrate and think more clearly (www.Thehealthwell.info, 2017) and this shows that the outdoors could be used as a way to alleviate the negative symptoms students are enduring. Relatively few studies have been done regarding the outdoors and university students wellbeing, with more focus being on primary to secondary schools. However the majority of studies show that the benefits outweigh any negatives (University, 2017) and thus show why this study is important as I can strengthen the argument that students need time away from studies in order to maintain a healthy well-being. Studies have shown the negative wellbeing students are suffering is affecting their grades, self-esteem, stress levels and overall mood-state (Michie, Glachan and Bray, 2001) meaning this study could be useful for students wanting a better well-being.

Aims of Study

Throughout this study I have multiple aims I wish to investigate. I will be looking at mood state before and after a bout of exercise in 4 different environments, these being Llansteffan beach, Carmarthen Park, Carmarthen campus gym and a general classroom. I aim to find out whether sitting quietly, through my control group in the classroom, has any effect on mood state. My specific aim for this study is to prove that the outdoors has a positive effect on a student's stress levels, self-esteem and mood state as opposed to the time spent indoors. Within this study I also aim to measure which outdoor environment has the most positive effect on a university student; being a green, blue or indoor environment. I also aim to measure whether time in the outdoors has a more positive effect on females or males and conclude which year of study, being first, second or third years, has the most positive outcome compared to others.

Outline of proposed methodology for study with strong rationale for choices made

The participants of the study will be from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (12 male/ 12 female) within the ages of 18-24. A sample size of 24 students has been chosen to take into consideration that students will be busy during term time and have different time-tables. When carrying out the practical side of the study up to 30 students will be allowed to join and their results taken. Therefore if a student pulls out, for instance due to injury, the initial allocated amount of students needed to carry out the study will still be taken.

Students of the 'Outdoor Adventure Education' degree will not be used as participants of the study as the outdoors is a crucial part of their degree and this could mean a biased opinion of the outdoors, affecting the validity of the results.

As for the procedure of my study, locations Llansteffan beach, Carmarthen Park and the campus gym have been chosen, due to the study being of a well-being focus. The study aims to find ways to better well-being in a realistic sense, meaning using places that are easily accessible to current students. Each participant will partake in 20 minutes of walking at a controlled pace at each location.

With regards to the design of the study, it will be a quantitative study through the medium of questionnaires. The 'Brunel Mood Scale' (Brunel Mood Scale, 1992) to measure mood state, the 'Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale' (Rosenberg, 1965) to measure self-esteem levels and the 'Perceived Stress Scale' (Cohen, 1994) to also measure participants stress levels will be the three main questionnaires in this study. Participants will fill in these three questionnaires immediately before and after each activity to get the most accurate results from the participants and for the study. These particular questionnaires are being used as they are recognised mediums of data collection and have been used in many studies regarding mood state, self-esteem and stress levels; therefore they are validated measures of collection. Participants HR (Heart Rate) and RPE (Rate of Perceived Exertion) will be taken before and after each exercise to measure how hard they are exercising (HR) and their perception of how hard they are exercising (RPE). A small sample group of 5 people will be taken to interview them about their thoughts and feelings of the study activities to gain deeper knowledge of their mood state.

Identification of data analysis methods to be used

As my results data will derive from questionnaires and interviews they are therefore qualitative data. No questionnaire will be open ended as the questionnaires are parametric, with answers ranging from a number scale to yes or no. I will be using paired t-tests, before and after, for mood state, self-esteem and stress at each location. I will conduct a one way ANOVA to establish if there is a difference in starting mood state on the four different occasions. I will also measure perceived life hassles before the first activity and after the final activity to see if anything has changed over the four weeks.

I will then put this data into tables and graphs which will show the results more clearly and accurately. Potential problems with participants filling out questionnaires could be confidentiality; to combat this I have completed the required ethics form, created an information participation sheet and consent form. Issues such as confidentiality have been considered and I will assign each participant a number and ask they only put their participant number on the questionnaires. I will have a USB stick where I will keep a document which has the participant number and correct participant name to refer to if needed or if a participant wants their personal results.

1314 Words

Dissertation Work Timetable:

- Dissertation work
- Dissertation lesson
- Other Assignments
- To Do

Work piece name:	Due Date:	Completed? Notes
Proposal Lesson	October	
Ethical Considerations for Research Lesson	October	
Proposal	October	
Ethics Form	October	
Recruit participants for study	October	
Literature Review Lesson	November	
Literature Review	November	
Methodology Lesson	November	
Next Steps Assignment 1	December	
Methodology	December	
Introduction Lesson	December	
Data Analysis Lesson	December	
Introduction	December	
Curriculum Adventure Assignment 1	December	
Next Steps Assignment 2	December	
Curriculum Adventure Assignment 2	January	
Data Analysis	January	
Beach Walk	January	
National Park Walk	January	
Gym Walk	January	
Discussion	February	

Conclusion	February	
Dissertation Final	April	

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