

What are the potential barriers for KS3 children accessing outdoor education within the school timetable and curriculum in the UK?

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Introduction

My extended literature review dissertation delves into the examination and analysis of barriers obstructing Key-Stage 3 (KS3) children, aged 11-14 years, from engaging in outdoor education (OE) within the United Kingdom (UK). Through an exploration of existing literature, the study identifies various factors impeding access to OE experiences for this demographic. By synthesising findings from diverse scholarly sources, the dissertation illuminates challenges such as socioeconomic disparities, logistical constraints, and curricular limitations that restrict KS3 children's participation in outdoor learning activities. Furthermore, the research endeavours to propose a range of recommendations aimed at mitigating these barriers and fostering a more inclusive and accessible landscape for OE within educational environments.

The aims of this dissertation are:

- To identify the benefits of OE for KS3 pupils.
- To identify the barriers that exist to participation in KS3.
- To examine the current provision of OE in schools at KS3.
- To make recommendations to improve access to OE for KS3 aged children.

Barriers to OE

Financial

- The financial barrier is the largest barrier faced by schools and their ability to provide OE to KS3 aged children.
- With budget cuts within “core priority subjects” there is an increase In the lack of support OE receives
- OE experiences are very costly for schools and individuals due to the staff competency, equipment, transport and facilities that are required.

Geographic location

- Depending on a school's location, defines what OE activities are immediately available to them. Therefore, extra travel may be required to provide a high-quality OE experience.
- Inner city areas, have less access to natural green spaces, therefore the maintenance of parks is highly important to encourage OE within children.

Disability

- The lack of inclusive facilities and adaptive equipment can create barriers for disabled children's participation in recreational programs and excursions.
- Additionally, social attitudes and misconceptions about disabilities may lead to social exclusion, further limiting opportunities for children with disabilities to engage in OE.

Technology within outdoors

- Technology Is taking over everyday life especially for young children. Which is drawing them away from real world OE experiences.
- Technology can deterate a child's physical and mental health, from excessive use, over stimulation and online bullying and negative communities.
- Behaviour issues often arise in children who have excessive screen time, as their tolerance and attention spans is limited due to the disconnectedness that technology offers.

Recommendations to overcome barriers

Financial

- Further financial support from authorities and sponsors to increase the budget allowed for OE within each school. To allow a higher level of engagement from each student.
- Value given to OE as a core subject due to the mental and physical health benefits it brings to children.
- Potential to develop school staff competencies within the OE sector, to limit the amount of external help and facilities that are required for OE experiences.
- Government funded organisations and OE providers to allow access for more children to OE.

Geographic location

- Allow schools to work with local authorities, to be able to and have access to existing outdoor spaces, such as nature reserves, parks, woodlands etc
- Build weather resistant facilities within the school grounds to encourage OE, outdoor classrooms, low ropes, bushcraft areas etc

Disability

- Accessible facilities build, to allow and accommodate for children who are less able, both physically and mentally. Wheel chair accessible areas such as outdoor classrooms, etc
- Government need to help OE centres to provide specific equipment and training to accommodate for children of physical disabilities, so that they can have the same experiences as their peers.
- Further staff training to be provided and done to allow school staff to understand how to make OE more inclusive for children with mental disabilities. This will make it easier for the children to understand the task, ie picture diagrams, simple instructions etc
- Incorporate buddy systems during OE, to allow the less able children to pair with someone who is more able to allow them to work together to reach a goal or complete a challenge.

Technology within outdoors

- make technology more of an educational tool rather than a barrier. Specific apps can be developed to boost OE. For example, if children were to take tablets into the woods, they could scan plants, tracks or animals to find out more information about them, in which can be tied into classroom learning sessions.
- Balance screen time, both at home and during school time so that children don't feel glued to their devices and know how to have fun and live without their tech.