

Outdoor play and learning practices from a comparative case study perspective

Georgia Gessiou¹, Mehmet Mart²

Abstract: Outdoor play and learning (OPL) is emphasised differently across countries, and cultural aspects influence these practices. There are ongoing debates around outdoor learning in early years, and the communication of the value, effectiveness, and applicability of OPL across schools has encountered obstacles due to various factors. The diversity of implementations within different cultures is obvious, and there are even some variations within the same country in terms of practices and understanding of the philosophy of OPL. The current case study contributes to the gap in mapping OPL practices using a comparative approach in two types of case schools in three countries: England, Greece, and Türkiye. This study offers insights from both teachers' and head teachers' perspectives in addition to considering observation notes. Several themes emerged from the analysis, including 'components of schools' daily life outdoors, forest trips and excursions, from break time to their time, and the question of training'. In conclusion, school culture and the selected educational philosophy appear to have a more significant impact on OPL practices than environmental features alone. However, the findings indicate that schools lack a strategic and systematic approach to the deployment of OPL into the school philosophy. In terms of focusing more on the outdoors, personal values play a significant role, as does the support of stakeholders. The practical similarities and differences highlighted in this study can support the development of OPL practices and inform stakeholders in the early years to reconsider their contexts and potentially introduce transformative changes.

Article History

Received: 21 March 2023

Accepted: 05 August 2023

Keywords

Outdoor play; Practices;

Case study; Early years;

Comparison

Introduction

Outdoor play and learning (OPL) has been a prominent approach in education recently because outdoor environments are key to supporting children's holistic development (Engdahl et al., 2006). OPL is considered essential for providing children with opportunities to manage their learning and development according to their needs. Children can move forward with child-initiated learning opportunities outdoors (Flannigan & Dietze, 2018). This opportunity is important for children's learning because they do not merely learn about their environment from someone else (Dowdell et al., 2011); instead, they directly experience and engage with their environment themselves. Providing a rich learning environment for children is a key role of teachers (Dowdell et al., 2011). This approach ensures that children face no restrictions regarding observing and listening, allowing them to pursue their curiosity while also offering hands-on opportunities such as touching, smelling, and tasting (Jansson & Lerstrup, 2021). When children have opportunities for outdoor play, they find a chance to extend their social interactions within both structured and unstructured learning areas, and they also connect with nature (Gemmel et al., 2022). Such spaces encourage children to initiate interaction with adults about their surroundings, which might interest them, excite them, and prompt them to seek answers to their questions (Waters & Maynard, 2010). In this way, children have a chance to interact with nature, enabling them to understand better themselves and their peers (Ozturk & Ozer, 2022).

In previous research, teachers were aware of the increasing importance of nature in children's lives,

¹ Independent Researcher, Ioannina, Greece, e-mail: georgia.gessiou@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8128-6116>

² Necmettin Erbakan University, Ahmet Kelesoglu Faculty of Education, Konya, Türkiye, e-mail: dr.mehmetmart@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5055-9951>

so they started revising their approach to teaching outdoors as well as improving school gardens (Askerlund et al., 2022). For this, most teachers have some outdoor activities such as free play activities, inspection of nature, storytelling, and math with natural materials (Ozturk & Ozer, 2022). Innovative approaches in the field of OPL pay attention to place and time in the form of place-responsive pedagogy (Mannion et al., 2013) and slow pedagogy (Payne & Wattchow, 2009), which require teachers to be flexible and creative and can recognize differences in ecological and social domains, respond to place and its entities through the facilitation of pupils' first-hand experiences. Teachers are encouraged to foster meaningful learning by encouraging learners to derive significance from embodied, timeless, sensory-perceptual, relational, and place-based experiences. Including such experiences for children raises the possibility of having risky issues to be handled by teachers, although precautions have been taken to ensure a safe environment (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). Thus, the importance of adults becomes distinct during the practice of outdoor activities, although the role of policies assigns the frame of teachers' practices. The importance of adults becomes distinct during the practice of outdoor activities, although the role of policies assigns the frame of teachers' practices.

Furthermore, outdoor learning in early years policy varies considerably (Asfeldt, 2020; Josephidou et al., 2021; Skarstein & Ugelstad, 2020), and the praxis points out the diversity and evolving nature of outdoor learning that seeks to respond to the needs of each society (Potter & Dymont, 2016). Potter and Dymont (2016) refrain from attempting to establish a fixed and universally applicable definition of outdoor learning because of the ever-evolving nature of the field. Communicating the value, effectiveness, and applicability of OPL across all types of schools has faced various obstacles. These include the absence of national associations that can connect outdoor educators and provide curriculum guidance (Asfeldt et al., 2020), limited attention given to specific teaching and learning strategies (Evans, 2021), and insufficient focus on teacher education and training. Some studies (Asfeldt, 2020; Evans, 2021; Lund Fasting & Hoyem, 2022) highlight how diverse spatial contexts, such as location, physical space, and geography of outdoor learning, can impact the communication of its philosophy, values, and goals. It's also worth noting that many mainstream schools encounter challenges when trying to incorporate OPL practices within their settings.

The framing of this research is based on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory because it recognizes that the culture of the society in which an individual lives plays a significant role in shaping their self-regulation, behaviour, and cognitive processes (Kravtsov & Kravtsova, 2010, p. 29). In the context of this research, socio-cultural theory was considered to examine the impact of cultural aspects on the practices of three different countries.

To achieve this, the research focused on three countries and adopted a purposeful approach to study two types of schools in each country: a mainstream-typical school and a school with a nature-based philosophy. In Türkiye, despite the explicit emphasis on the importance of outdoor activities in the preschool education program, teachers are provided with limited examples and materials, leaving the inclusion of OPL in daily activities to teachers' preferences (Aşkar, 2021). The preschool education program encourages teachers to conduct daily activities outside the classroom as much as possible (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2013).

In England, the value of outdoor learning and play in early years education has long been recognized. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework stipulates the need to provide access to outdoor play areas or, if unavailable, to plan daily outdoor activities to meet children's needs (Department for Education [DfE], 2021). The UK Government's Office of the Children's Commissioner (2018) also emphasized the benefits of outdoor play in the report 'The Potential of Children's Outdoor Play' published in 2018, calling for increased outdoor play opportunities and the removal of barriers to outdoor activities.

In Greece, the curriculum framework highlights the importance of systematic opportunities for children to interact with their natural environment outdoors and the significance of outdoor learning environments. However, the Preschool Teacher's Guide (Dafermou et al., 2006) indicates that teacher training primarily focuses on indoor settings where the educational activities of the national curriculum

are developed (Gessiou, 2022). Previous studies (Gessiou & Sakellariou, 2015) have also noted that Greek educational culture has undervalued the importance of outdoor learning and outdoor play in children's cognitive development.

The varied contexts among the participating countries are likely to result in differences in their practices. Notably, the differences between the types of schools are particularly prominent concerning OPL because nature-based schools exclusively focus on outdoor activities within their school premises. The rationale for examining both nature-based and typical schools is to enable a comparative perspective. This approach allows us to understand the diverse practices in early years education.

The research aimed to address the question of how the practices in different types of schools across three countries connect to a long-term, sustainable, and evidence-informed approach to outdoor learning. To achieve this, the research focused on addressing the following research questions:

1. How is outdoor play and learning implemented regularly in different school contexts?
2. What is the role of outdoor play in different school contexts?
3. What are the teaching, learning, and management strategies used in outdoor play and learning practices?
4. What are the approaches of stakeholders (head teachers, teachers) to outdoor play and learning?

Method

This research was designed as a comparative case study to identify three different countries (England, Türkiye and Greece) outdoor play and learning practices by focusing on two distinct examples from each country so that the clear reflection of these countries is criticized within qualitative research methods. As a part of the qualitative research methods, observations, interviews, and photographs were used to analyse the cases in each country.

Sampling

The research participants were selected using a purposeful sampling method, which involves choosing cases that can provide comprehensive information related to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). Within this sampling strategy, researchers select individuals or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help them understand the research problem and questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 333). Therefore, the research aimed to include two different types of schools that regularly engage in forest and outdoor activities. Schools that aligned with the research objectives were identified and approached conveniently. In this regard, one school from each of the three participating countries (England, Türkiye, and Greece) was affiliated as a forest school or nature school (see Table 1 for details), while the other schools were typical early years settings that focused exclusively on meeting national curriculum requirements. To gain access to these schools, head teachers were initially contacted, followed by teachers. Consequently, two schools from each country took part in the research to fulfil its objectives. From the participating schools, one head teacher and one teacher were interviewed, resulting in a total of six head teachers and six early years teachers. To maintain anonymity and logically identify schools, teachers, and head teachers, coding was employed during data representation, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Naming of participating schools, head teachers, teachers, and age groups

	Schools	Head Teachers	Teachers	Types of Schools	Age group of children
England	SE1	HTE1	TE1	Forest School	5 years old
	SE2	HTE2	TE2	Typical School	5 years old
Türkiye	ST1	HTT1	TT1	Forest School	5 years old
	ST2	HTT2	TT2	Typical School	5 years old

Greece	SG1	HTG1	TG1	Nature School	4-6 years old
	SG2	HTG2	TG2	Typical School	4-6 years old

Data Collection

After obtaining consent from the schools to participate in the research, head teachers and teachers collaboratively selected a day for observations and interviews. The research days were structured as follows: morning interviews with head teachers, followed by outdoor area and forest or outdoor activity observations, and concluding with interviews with classroom teachers. This approach aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research context.

To collect data, an observation scale and semi-structured interviews were employed. Additionally, photographs of activities and areas were taken to provide researchers with a clear understanding of the contexts. These photos were uploaded to a cloud platform with accompanying explanations regarding the corresponding activity, area, and observed event, enabling researchers to gain an overview of each context for analysis. Observational data are particularly valuable in case studies where it is challenging to separate social phenomena from context (Yin, 2009).

In this study, an observation scale was developed based on the research questions, divided into four domains: 1) a detailed description of daily activities, 2) the focus of these activities, 3) assessment of early childhood outdoor environments using the Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale [POEMS] (DeBord et al., 2005), 4) teaching strategies based on Dymont et al. (2018). The POEMS scale contains information about curriculum and content, interaction, and play and learning settings while teaching strategies encompass pedagogical strategies and their evidence during activities.

Semi-structured interviews were also designed by the researchers, considering the diverse contexts. A pilot interview was conducted in each country before data collection to ensure that the research aims were achieved. All interviews were recorded with participants' permission, and interviews conducted in Greek and Turkish were subsequently translated into English after transcription. To ensure translation consistency, the interviews were carefully reviewed. To ensure translation consistency, the interviews were back translated to the original language by someone fluent in both languages to verify the accuracy of the meanings.

Data Analysis

The collected data were uploaded into the cloud for both researchers to access for analysis. When the data collection ended, thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, which is "...identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data..." (Guest et al., 2012, p. 27). To provide the reliability and validity of qualitative data, the approach of Miles and Huberman (1994) was used by both researchers. The two researchers read and re-read the data (transcribed interviews and observation notes with related photos) to become familiar with the content and gain an overall understanding of the information collected from the three countries. Then, they started coding manually by systematically identifying and labelling relevant units of information. With two researchers making individual notes on the collected data, they could later compare and contrast each other's perceptions and recollections. Researchers looked for patterns, connections, and similarities between the different codes that formed the initial themes that captured meaningful aspects of the data. They reviewed the themes to ensure that they represented the content and meaning of the data and provided informative and representative names to the themes. This was a systematic process of identifying and interpreting patterns in the load of qualitative data collected.

Ethics

The research obtained ethical approval from Necmettin Erbakan University, adhering to its ethical regulations, in consideration of the three countries involved. Each school approached for participation in the research was provided with detailed information about the research and the entire process. As a result,

all head teachers and teachers were informed, and consent forms were duly collected. Parents of the children were also informed about the research, with a focus on observing activities and teachers. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, both school names and participants' names were kept confidential throughout the research. Furthermore, all photographs featuring children were carefully blurred, even though these photos were provided by the participants for research purposes. In most cases, the photos primarily focused on the activities rather than the children themselves.

To address any potential issues involving the children, teachers introduced the researchers to the children, explaining the purpose of the visit. Children were also informed of their right 'not to be observed,' and they had the freedom to express this right if they ever felt uncomfortable. No such issues were reported during the research, as the researchers maintained participant observations.

Findings

As a result of the data analysis, four main themes emerged, which are consistent with the research questions that address the aim of the research. To explain the different cases for further themes, the components of school daily life outdoors are prominent to represent first.

Components of Schools' Daily Life Outdoors

The results from the observations indicate that outdoor time is organised either in break time that aims at tension relief and includes free play or in organised and subject-oriented outdoor activities. Teachers focused on the importance of outdoor play over organised subject-oriented activities, a statement that aligns with the results of Ozturk and Ozer's research (2022), where the teachers preferred more free play activities outdoors compared to drama, mathematics, music, and field trips. Interviewees described their daily plans and outdoor activities, which combined with the researchers' observations, revealed the 10 themes of outdoor activities during play, as described in Table 2.

Table 2. Outdoor activities during play

Theme	Description
Working with other groups, developing relationships, and building relationships	Build a house, build a bubble store
Gross motor activities	lifting, carrying, running, jumping, rolling, climbing, and swinging
Sensory and messy play	Creating mud, playing in the sand pit, and transferring water
Social interaction	Conflicts between children, adults' instructions, and collective decision-making
Exploration	Changes in the outdoor environment every day, observe the habitat of the schoolyard
Practical skills	Learning nots building tents for sun protection
Nature Interaction	Gardening, taking care of domestic animals, observation of a turtle, nature art, and observing the weather to make decisions
Personal Development	Psychical coordination, physical and emotional risk-taking
Combined cognitive outcomes	Collect leaves, count and categorise them or create a craft. Caring for different logs and understanding the concepts of dimension, weight, height, and comparison (smaller, bigger, equal)
Games	Enjoyment and leisure with traditional games with rules

Three out of the six schools (ST1, ST2, SG2) spend less than an hour outdoors per day, and only in one school in Greece, SG1 (defined as Nature School), there was a free transition between indoor and outdoor spaces throughout the day, where the activities were mostly led by children's choices and observations. In this school, the participating teachers seemed willing to completely change their daily plans in response to the children's needs. In other cases, for instance, in SG2, children's observations or explorations were acknowledged or appraised by teachers without making any further interactive questions or discussions. As Harris (2015) mentions, "others (teachers)... find facilitating child-led learning ... to be a challenge" (p.15). However, ST1 provided some opportunities for children to develop an interest

in forest areas before starting the predetermined activities. We also noticed that only in SG1, the day starts with free play outdoors until all children arrive. In this case, observations and teacher narratives highlight outdoor free play as a valuable space and time for children to feel comfortable and secure to establish authentic interactions with other children and teachers, and engage independently with the environment. This allows stereotypically shallow teacher-student interactions to be replaced with more honest reflections that enhance the quality of student learning (Thomas, 2019). As the teacher from SG1 mentions:

...giving them at the beginning of the day the space and time they need outdoors, children have the opportunity to create warm relationships between themselves and the grown-ups, so the day is structured based on the fact that they feel comfortable bringing their observations and lived experience to discuss in our morning gathering where we all together decide the plan of our day. TG1

The sense of ownership supports active interest, engagement in contribution, influencing what is happening, and taking a leading role in the development of play, allowing children to follow their interests and come to their conclusions (Guilbaud, 2003 cited in Canning, 2022). An affirmation of the above statement is offered in the case of SG1, where outdoor free play in the morning leads to children's council instead of starting their day with the teacher's lead and instructions. Children are equal members in terms of discussion, proposing, and deciding their everyday plans. In contrast, other schools usually set up outdoor time after the morning indoor activities that are mostly teacher-led, followed by breakfast.

So we start when the children come in, they are indoors because they do phonic lessons. And then they have a child minute when the child initiates play, that is usually when the learning is outside as well.... They have a math lesson inside... TE2

The participating teachers recognized the impact of outdoor play on children's well-being and cognitive development. However, they found it challenging to fully integrate this awareness into their practice due to the traditional ideology and the ingrained role of being a teacher, which often emphasizes indoor learning and detachment from first-hand experiences. In line with this, TT2 organized a traditional game outdoors instead of offering children opportunities to engage with nature. Nevertheless, TT2 emphasized the importance of interacting with nature.

When you go outside, learning outside the classroom is always attractive and persistent for children because they acquire permanent knowledge by seeing something instead of listening [to adults].

All interviewees in SG2 agreed that whenever they [adults] organised an activity outdoors, children liked the fact that they, adults and children, would all play together; however, they were always distracted by the stimulus of the surroundings and wished to play freely.

Three out of the six schools (SG1, SE1 & SE2) had the equipment and clothes to support children's play in all weathers (e.g. wellies, raincoats) as well as easy access for children. However, in one school (SG1), the teachers and children considered the weather and conditions before going out to be prepared properly. The routines in all schools mostly occurred indoors with some exceptions where children had the option to eat their lunch outdoors (SG1), and one school from England and Türkiye (SE1 & ST1) had their snacks outdoors during their visits to the forest. In two schools (SG1 & ST2), it was observed that the routines were connected to the outdoor environment where children took care of their garden and domestic animals daily. In the case of Greece, children took care of the garden chores every day, they fed the rabbits carrots from their garden and collectively decided what to cook with the vegetables that they collected. In the other case, children in Türkiye had domestic animals in the schoolyard, and they had a chance to feed and take care of them regularly but not daily. In this respect, one of the head teachers explained the process as follows;

We have planted lettuce and spinach in our garden. In winter, we use them to prepare food, so children can experience growing vegetables and then cooking with them in the kitchen. HTT2

We also noticed that only in one school (SG1), children's creations were made by the affordances of the outdoor environment and were sustained for the needs of children's imaginative play (e.g. a bubble store and a pirate ship that was made by logs, mud, water and fabric that were brought from inside). Even though in most of the schools (SG1, SG2, SE1, SE2, ST1) the outdoor environment offered nature and open-

ended materials, the teachers neglected to actualize the affordances to initiate an activity. It was also recorded through the interviews that outdoor play was an important link to sensory and messy play, but in practice, materials such as sand and water were a controversial issue due to institutional restrictions on how and where to use the materials. For example, combining sand and water or transferring mud to play equipment such as a slide or swing was forbidden. However, the participants mentioned that

It is an outdoor play sensory, isn't it? You feel things, you touch things, and you smell things. HTE1

Let us say that messy play is something that I consider essential in a school. Essentially, messy play is happening out here [schoolyard]. TG2

Following the pandemic, children had difficulties even while walking on the road, and children fell even though there was nothing. The teachers mentioned this, so I said we could support outdoor activities more. As we have experienced teachers, they have been choosing activities that consider their needs. If a problem occurs, we can make arrangements for that, such as fixing the swing and using only one way to avoid risks. HTT2

In terms of outdoor practices in the participating countries, there are similarities and differences. This might occur because of traditional regulations around early years, each participating school's approach to outdoor play and learning, and the teacher's engagement with this.

Forest Trips and Excursions

As at least one school from each country regularly engaged in forest- or nature-related activities outside the school premises, field trips were frequently mentioned by participants during interviews. Therefore, it is important to present the stance of each country regarding forest visits and excursions.

Two out of the six schools (SE1 & ST1) conducted forest trips during the observation period. Forest School Leaders had planned a series of predetermined activities in collaboration with teachers, making use of communal forest areas while allowing for some freedom in nature. The activities included counting, writing, observing, collecting, painting, categorizing, and discussing objects, facilitating children's interaction with nature. These activities were mostly predetermined, and teachers encouraged children to discuss and share their observations of natural elements, such as a dead mouse, a turtle, or footprints. Forest trips in both schools typically lasted half a day, with teachers reminding the children of rules at the beginning and providing prepared snacks in the middle of the visits. It's worth noting that in one school (SG1), instead of establishing rules at the beginning of the year, teachers attempted to set agreements with the children based on their outdoor experiences throughout the school year.

During the forest trips, some activities were related to cognitive development, but typical Forest School activities, such as lighting fires, cooking, building dens, imaginative play, climbing trees, and using tools, as described by Stevens (2013), were not observed. The concept of Forest School activities is influenced by the philosophy of *Friluftsliv* from Scandinavian countries, emphasizing freedom in nature and a spiritual connection with the landscape (Gelter, 2000). However, these elements were not apparent during the observed forest trips. SE1 had more extensive opportunities aligned with the Forest School approach compared to ST1 because SE1 had direct access to the forest, while ST1 required a bus journey to reach the forest area. Schools without direct forest access faced greater challenges in managing time, including children's interest in nature within the planned schedule, as well as arranging snacks and drinks.

Four schools (SG1, SE1, SE2, ST1) mentioned frequent trips beyond the fenced play yard. The main recorded activities included: 1) weekly forest trips organized and led by a Forest School Leader in a specific location, 2) monthly visits to local community facilities (e.g., museums, post offices, libraries), 3) neighbourhood visits based on play or project needs, and 4) visits to environmental centres once or twice a year. Frequent visits to a specific forest location helped children become more familiar and comfortable with navigating and exploring the surroundings, establishing a close relationship with the natural environment.

It's worth noting that in schools where Forest School Leaders conducted forest trips, the experiences from previous trips were integrated into subsequent trips. Classroom teachers played a secondary role, primarily supervising the children and supporting the plan prepared by the Forest School Leader, taking

into consideration the weekly teaching objectives.

In actual forest trips, my role is not so much to supervise and help plan but to support the forest school leader. TE1

In ST1, the head teacher is a qualified forest school leader. She mentioned the process from her perspective that

I have either been a participant in the activities or given examples for them. I observe teachers' practices and then talk to them about their practices afterwards. Sometimes I lead forest activities as an example for teachers. They can see and learn from my practice how to conduct forest activities. HTT1

However, in the participating schools where skilled and experienced teachers are in charge of the forest trip, the experiences of the trips are a stimulus for further investigation and creation immediately when returning to the schools or having a plan in the school garden. Moreover, in this case, the classroom teachers sustained their role and built relationships with the children even after leaving the school premises.

An important thing is that upon returning from our excursion, we carry a very big burden of experiences that could unfold back to school in the next few days and build our activities on them. TG1

We nearly go out every day if the weather is sunny. For example, we walked around the garden on Republic Day while listening to a related song. We also have sports-related activities outside... We have some rule games (traditional games) and imitation games. We also make decorations in the garden to make it attractive to children. TT2

It was observed that when the classroom teachers led the forest visits, the children's self-initiated activities were more valued and supported as the classroom teachers seemed more skilled in following the children's free play and observations. Leather (2018), in his critique of 'Forest School' raises concern about the rapid institutionalization of Forest Schools and teachers' training and how the notion of play is missing. However, all classroom teachers stressed the need for in-service training to support practical forest skills based on environmental and cultural features.

From the Break Time to Their Time

In the previous sections, we described the components of the school's daily lives outdoors. Outdoor play, as many scholars (see Cheng et al., 2022; Ginsburg, 2007) refer to unstructured outdoor play, prevailed in most of our references from the head teachers to teachers as a controversial topic. The teacher in SG2, both Head Teachers in Greece (HTG1 and HTG2) and one in England (HTE1), raised concern about the institutionalisation of children's lives and explained outdoor free play as one of children's last choices, potentially providing physical and mental space before organised and predetermined activities for children, which limit their active engagement and critical thinking.

I think children are very directed even at home and not only at school. The activities after school are directed, that is, everywhere they listen to advice, rules, instructions, and how to do things. I think enough is enough, and free play is necessary for kids. TG2

I mean, I grew up on the Moors, and I just played with my brothers as long as I was back for lunch. I was not in trouble. Whereas now I think when children get in the car, they get taken into an activity. It is usually indoors. They'd go home again, they're on their PlayStation or whatever. And I think if we just give them a little taste of that, the outdoors is fun. HTE1

On the one hand, all adults recognized free outdoor play as beneficial and necessary for children's overall well-being, so HTE1 states that "Outdoors is a site for freedom and child-led play". Outdoor free play in school was even recognized as one of the children's last chances to define their own space and time, where they could be agents of their lives. In this way, as TG1 mentions below, early years settings can be more inclusive and can receive valuable and authentic information about what children need, what they want to learn, and how to engage more effectively in the learning process.

The milestone difference is that organised activities have a certain targeting that strengthens children with certain abilities, and pace so automatically the other children are underestimated. Also, we are not sure whether each organised activity interests each child, and if not, will he/she be able to express it or gain anything from this activity? The activities that children themselves choose, we know for sure that they are interested in them and that they are beneficial for them. In the outdoors, because there is more freedom and opportunities for action and observation. TG1

On the other hand, the findings from the interviews and observations revealed a wide spectrum of how outdoor free play is valued and supported in different settings, which also indicates a wide variation in the philosophies and practices of how outdoor free play is perceived and utilised.

Table 3. Spectrum of outdoor free play based on interviews and observational notes

	<i>from</i> Break Time	<i>to</i> Their Time
<i>Time</i>	Between organised and teacher-led activities. The duration is specific.	At the beginning of the day and during the day according to the children's council plan. The duration may vary
<i>Space</i>	All the groups were collected in one area. Specific orders on how not to get dirty or how to use the equipment	Choice of free transition between indoors and outdoors. The sense of mess
<i>Adults' role</i>	Teachers as Experts in learning	Teachers as Fellow Travelers in learning
<i>Curriculum</i>	No connections to educational design	Outdoor free play leads to an emergent curriculum.
<i>Risk</i>	An opportunity for an outburst.	Exploration of children's boundaries and capacities
<i>Visibility</i>	One-way communication with the parents	Pedagogical documentation, parents' active participation

Table 3 describes the wide spectrum of outdoor free play and its place in the different contexts that were focused on. There have been six themes that have emerged corresponding to the perceptions and practices that place outdoor free play from the point of viewing it as "break time" – recess time from the indoor teacher-led activities – to the point of viewing it as "their time" – where children define their own space and time where they can be agents of their play and learning experiences.

During the interviews, teachers and head teachers mentioned that outdoor free play includes free movement and choice, encountering changing conditions and unpredictability, and learning through first-hand experiences and problem-solving situations. However, during the observations, it was revealed that in some schools, free outdoor play was equivalent to break time. This was a break from the organized teacher-led activities, and the duration was specific (approximately 30 min per day). In some cases, it may also be skipped if the indoor activities lasted longer than expected (SG2). In other cases (SG2, SE1, ST2), children used common outdoor spaces for different groups of children, and sometimes there might be children from different age groups. Thus, outdoor playtime was occasionally interrupted as the area became more crowded. Therefore, it was difficult to sustain children's work and various activities (e.g., buildings with bricks and logs, castles with sand).

...So if you like things like water playing capacity and things like that, sometimes the year one teacher wants to teach comes out and says: Can yours not go out for a bit because I've set up something for that. So that does happen. TE1

As mentioned in the findings of McClintic and Petty's (2015) research, there is a parallel finding from this research that in schools where outdoor free play is mostly linked to break time, teachers' main role is to provide safety and guidance. When there is limited time and space for outdoor free play, the adults feel under pressure, so they start imposing directives during play as well as having directive behaviours. As Legget and Newman (2017) indicate, teachers' perceived roles shift from teacher to supervisor during outdoor activities.

We are observers for their safety. First and foremost, we participate when there are relationship management problems to put a stone in how we can manage a situation that can be a bit difficult for the children. TG2

It will be us observing and watching the children seeing what they know, seeing if there were any misconceptions, anything, they're getting wrong, so that we can pick up on that and help them and address and address it. TE2

I like the pedagogical approach of this school. Every day, I explore new knowledge with my children, which makes me really happy. In the traditional method, the teacher plays a leading role, but we, the children and teachers, learn together. We also learn from children. TT1

In these cases, the children's observations and explorations during free play had had no influence on the pedagogical design, nor were they further studied by the team. The spontaneous and informal

learning opportunities, often encountered outdoors, were consequently lost.

However, in one school that is defined as Nature School (SG1), outdoor free play was prioritised, and it was placed both at the beginning and during the day, but the duration would vary depending on the day. In this case, outdoor free play acted as a decisive factor in how the day proceeded. In any case, outdoor free play was recognized as a valuable space and time for children to feel comfortable and provide natural interactions with peers and adults. The experiences and observations in the early morning outdoor free plays usually were the subject of discussion in the children's councils. As in Norway, kindergartens defined as nature kindergartens purposefully try to give children much freedom when spending time in nature, and the adult's role is to support children's spontaneous motivation, excitement, and questioning (Lysklett, 2017).

For me, free play is very important, it helps me observe each child authentically, what their developmental stages, desires, needs are, how they want to learn, and the meanings that they want to structure around the different conditions that they face. It was really helpful for me as a teacher (the free play). Outdoors, there are endless opportunities for free play and problem-solving observations. There is a continuous flow outdoors, and everything is changing. Children outdoors deal with situations that nature has formed and not artificially a teacher. TG1

In these cases, participating teachers actively engaged in children's play. Sometimes, when invited to join activities, teachers would immerse themselves just like children, getting dirty while building a 'mountain,' climbing alongside children, or making music together. Teachers and children enjoyed intimate and relaxed informal conversations. As Thomas (2019) criticized, this kind of relationship may be as productive as more formal small group debriefs. A facilitative teaching style is less directive, allowing children to make decisions for themselves and experience the consequences of their choices and actions (Sutherland et al., 2016). Such a teaching style must be flexible enough to seize emergent learning opportunities (Blenkinsop et al., 2016).

In the case of SG1, learning experiences from outdoor free play were seamlessly integrated into the objectives of the monthly educational plan. However, even in this school, parents and society have expressed scepticism about the educational and academic value of outdoor free play. Their primary concerns revolve around the belief that outdoor free play lacks direct academic outcomes and that the transition to primary school might be challenging due to the perceived underestimation and scarcity of outdoor free play.

We are concerned that the children will be ready to obey and fulfil the learning tasks. In Greece, there is a narrower perception regarding behaviour. You will usually listen to parents or teachers ask "Is the kid good? Does he/she listen?". We (Greeks) still do not know the benefits of free play and the benefits of their play without the intervention of a grownup. We (Greeks) consider free play a waste of time. Therefore, teachers are indirectly trapped in these perceptions, so they try to correspond with them and plan a program that children will follow and produce the desired outcome. Then they (teachers) feel they did their job well. TG1

How will they make the big step to primary school, which is the biggest anxiety of the parents? How will they stand in primary school? When you are in a school that does not have outdoor environments, does not perform excursions in the forest, does not leave children to see the unknown and process it. Then children cannot even imagine the unknown if they are only inside a closed space. I think it limits their abilities a lot. When a child is ready to do all the above, he can also face something new in his life, let's say the 'big school' or 'the next step'. HTG1

The above findings echoed the importance of outdoor free play and how it can help mitigate social inequity and recognize children as capable agents of their presence. Most interestingly, the findings showed how outdoor free play can lead to an emergent curriculum when it is valued and utilized accordingly.

Question of Training

Another theme that emerged from the analysis influencing the delivery of OPL pertains to staff training and their engagement with this philosophy. All participating teachers held bachelor's degrees, and in some cases, higher degrees in Educational Studies. However, none of them had received specific training in outdoor learning and play practices.

Out of the participants in our study, only three, which were the nature school and forest school

teachers (SG1, SE1, ST1), had relevant training. This training primarily focused on forest school activities rather than broader outdoor learning and play practices. Notably, in the first school (SG1), the training was provided only to the head teacher and one teacher. In the second case (SE1), a forest school leader regularly attended the classroom instead of the teacher participating in forest school activities. In ST1, the head teacher held qualifications as a forest school leader, and the teachers in the school were required to complete some level of forest school leader courses as well.

This covers everything from paediatric first aid to risk management to understanding the weather, and knowing about poisonous plants. So, they have had that full training. And that was quite important for me that we invested in that training. And they share that with other colleagues. HTE1

I attended the forest school leader course, but I have not yet obtained the certificate. I have a music teaching certificate. This week, I will get a drama certificate. TT1

It was also mentioned by the other head teacher from England (from SE2) that the school staff attends the necessary continued professional development (CPD) courses outside the school context. However, it may not be sufficient because research on training demonstrates that it takes about 30 hours of training to make a significant change in pedagogy (Marchant et al., 2019). Therefore, such CPD opportunities can only support ongoing pedagogies instead of changing teachers' pedagogical approaches.

I provide teachers access to the necessary CPD for their professional development, you know, that they have access to hubs outside the school. HTE2

In addition to CPDs, two sub-themes emerged on how teachers try to improve their practices: motivation from an influential colleague and modelling by the Forest School Leaders.

I was really lucky because I had a colleague who had a strong internal motive for their job. She wants to pay attention to the quality of what we offer based on children's needs... I was lucky because I had a colleague with whom I could interact and I could express my concerns about everyday life problems and observations, and it was constructive. TG1

I have nothing to do with the Forest School, no outdoor Forest School. Therefore, that is why I always take a backseat on forest school days. I would like to receive some training in an outdoor learning environment. TE1

The subtheme, where motivation is inspired by an influential colleague, aligns with recent research findings from South Wales, Canada, and Australia (Asfeldt, 2020; Evans, 2021; Marchant, 2019). In this scenario, the influential person is often a passionate teacher whose vision and pedagogical values shape the program. However, without a clear program philosophy, the program may undergo changes over time as new leaders incorporate their own expertise and backgrounds (Asfeldt, 2020).

In the second subtheme, where Forest School Leaders model strategies, there is a high likelihood that teaching and learning strategies may become simplified and routinized. This implies that practitioners might imitate practices without necessarily comprehending why they are conducting certain activities in specific ways. As Harris (2015) notes, some Forest School leaders are willing to completely change plans in response to children, while others find facilitating child-led learning to be a challenge. In such cases, it becomes essential to understand the philosophy behind the approach and then put it into practice. Otherwise, accommodating the needs of children during outdoor activities might be challenging for teachers.

During observations in one Greek school (SG1), participating teachers lacked formal qualifications; however, they demonstrated a remarkable set of skills, competencies, and an understanding of free play, both on school premises and in the forest. Nevertheless, TE1, a teacher from a school who collaborated with the Forest School leader, expressed that a lack of knowledge left them with low confidence. All the head teachers mentioned that there were gaps in teachers' adequacy regarding OPL practices, and three sub-themes emerged regarding their thoughts on staff development: self-education, colleague communication, and outdoor environmental improvement.

They are able to speak to other colleagues. HTE1

I think that here lots of people need to do outdoor activities. And you know how adults can reflect on their practice and share with other experts in their early years. HTE2

They will attend PTSA hubs where they can meet other teachers and other schools. HTE2

We encourage them to read this research. I think it will help us know more about what is happening and the effects and help us improve in this phase, not so much theory, but maybe smaller research articles to help us. HTG1

Communication among teachers in the same setting provides them with experiences that contribute to the personal development of their teaching practices so that they can establish a unified philosophy and engage more with the setting considering both teachers' and children's needs. In that case, as TG1 mentions, the motivation for improvement and development will be internal, and it will better correspond to each school's context. However, it was highlighted that the participating Greek teachers would be more encouraged to be part of this process if the working conditions were better (children-teacher proportion, better salary, safety, meetings/training would be included in working hours).

If we had the right information and training, it would be different. However, we don't have it, maybe due to a lack of time or strength. Self-education is a good solution; however, you need to have time, energy, and willingness to do it, and this presupposes strong motivation and good job conditions (e.g., children-teacher ratio, good salary, safety). TG2

Self-education is a way to commit all the way, engage, and be thrilled by what you are learning. The motivation in this case is internal. However, we live in an era where motivations are mostly external. The government offers many seminars that focus on gaining more knowledge but lose the content and teachers' needs. It is more "up-bottom" training. It will be more beneficial to create authentic communication and strong links with the academic community and departments in each community. TG1

In terms of teacher certification, there are some common approaches to implementing forest school activities, such as having forest leader certificates across all participating countries. Head teachers stress the need for further training regarding OPL practices, mainly proposing staff development through self-education outside working hours, such as CPDs. On the contrary, teachers proposed training on the school premises and better conditions that will foster teachers' communication and interaction to establish a more solid and unified philosophy.

Discussion

This paper has brought together outdoor play and learning practices emerging from three different countries: England, Türkiye, and Greece. The focus is on two distinct examples from each country. One school from each country was affiliated as a forest school or nature school, while the other schools were typical early years settings, concentrating solely on the national curriculum requirements. Comparing these three countries highlights various aspects of OPL. It is likely that there are various practices and different amounts of time spent outdoors across different schools, as mentioned by Lysklett and Berger (2017) in the context of nature preschools and other preschools in Norway.

Observations, combined with interviews of teachers and head teachers, revealed a variety of activities regularly implemented in different school contexts. Outdoor time was organized either as a break or in organized, subject-oriented outdoor activities. These outdoor activities were predetermined and planned by teachers based on curriculum objectives and the weekly program design. During these activities, teachers were observed introducing various materials, either to pique the children's interest or to utilize the materials' affordances for the activities. Thus, providing active learning opportunities can enhance children's curiosity (Jansson & Lerstrup, 2021). However, the use of materials tended to be one-dimensional and based on the teacher's instructions. Predictability in material use and environmental features can create frameworks and boundaries during the activities. In contrast, unpredictability can support children in bringing their experiences, ideas, and perceptions of how things function and attributing meaning in their play and learning (Sandseter et al., 2022).

During the implementation of outdoor activities, teachers often followed a directive teaching approach similar to what occurs in the classroom, resulting in teacher-led learning. Some teachers identified the tension that the directive approach created for children during outdoor activities. They perceived this reaction as children asserting their right to follow their instincts and interests without imposed outcomes, allowing them to explore, create, and discover freely during outdoor activities.

However, we documented a case (nature school) where outdoor organized activities were typically designed based on observations of children's outdoor free play. In this case, the teacher recognized that during outdoor free play, children defined their own space and time, allowing them to take on the role of agents in their play and learning experiences. In practice, during outdoor free play, teachers gained valuable and authentic insights into what children needed, what they wanted to learn, and how to engage in the learning process more effectively. This aligns with Ozturk and Ozer's (2022) emphasis on teachers focusing on various outdoor activities. In this school, teachers demonstrated a more facilitative teaching style and actively participated in children's play and exploration whenever they were invited. This approach supports Waters and Maynard's (2010) findings on adults taking on assistant roles. Teachers in this school were willing to dedicate more time to outdoor free play, question their dominant roles as teachers, and establish deeper connections and communication with children. This enabled them to recognize and support emerging learning opportunities outdoors, aligning with the goal of providing a child-friendly environment (Jansson & Lerstrup, 2021). Outdoor free play played a decisive role in shaping the course of the day.

Furthermore, children had the option of freely transitioning between indoors and outdoors if an adult was present in each space. Outdoors, there were many open-ended materials whose affordances were realized in unpredictable ways by children (e.g., sand and logs in the slide), sometimes resulting in a sense of messiness for adults. The teachers' role, rooted in the relationships and communication they fostered with children, could be described as fellow travellers in learning. They actively engaged with children's questions and curiosity, creating play opportunities outdoors through various activities to support these relationships (Gemmel et al., 2022).

The study identified various challenges in supporting outdoor free play. As Maynard and Waters (2007) also noted, the challenge of facilitating outdoor free play is culturally and politically influenced and context specific. Early years regulations in these three countries provide a flexible framework that allows for the freedom to choose themes and activities. However, they lack comprehensive guidance on how to support outdoor free play in terms of risk management, documentation strategies, and teacher training. Policy regulations offer more objective and direct guidance on teacher-led activities, which primarily take place indoors. This could potentially affect decision-making during outdoor free play and hinder the emergence of learning opportunities. Our findings align with those of Marchant et al. (2019). The narrow methods of assessing and documenting learning outcomes typically applied to teacher-led activities may provide evidence that is challenging to apply within the broader context and goals of OPL. This challenge appears to be even more pronounced in typical schools that have limited freedom and security compared to forest or nature schools, which can approach outdoor activities from a more nature-oriented perspective. This raises concerns about demonstrating the learning benefits of outdoor free play to parents and the community and how to make these benefits more visible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study addresses the gap in understanding OPL practices through a comparative approach involving three countries. It provides insights from both teachers' and head teachers' perspectives, while also considering observation notes. Within this context, it becomes evident that school culture and the selected educational philosophy may exert a greater influence on OPL practices than environmental features.

The findings underscore that schools lack a strategic and systematic approach for integrating OPL into their educational philosophy and for enhancing teachers' professionalism in this domain. Despite varying opportunities, the same types of schools in the three cases show a similar focus on OPL, especially in terms of forest-oriented activities. Typical schools appear to require more guidance on incorporating nature into their daily activities. This study suggests the need for professional development opportunities that empower all teachers to effectively utilize their surroundings.

For forest-affiliated schools, teacher training should emphasize adapting the curriculum to align

with their forest practices. Teachers who embrace this educational philosophy require a diverse skill set to engage with curriculum content across various settings, fostering an individualized, place-based, and emergent curriculum.

Currently, teachers face various external, top-down pressures. In this research, teachers recommend a bottom-up approach to their training, one that fosters communication and collaboration among teachers within the school premises. This approach aims to establish a more solid and unified educational philosophy that considers the needs of both teachers and children, ultimately enabling more effective engagement with the learning environment.

Despite OPL's long-standing recognition for its benefits to children's well-being and development, it remains a somewhat vague practice area and can be a source of stress for teachers. Empirical evidence from this research reveals that, despite cultural differences and varying policies among the three countries, there are shared concerns regarding the effectiveness and practicality of OPL. The current research highlights some practices that can guide necessary actions. Outdoor free play is acknowledged as valuable space and time for children that can lead to an emergent curriculum. To achieve this transformation, we must navigate existing curriculum pressures and redefine the teacher's role. It was observed that by slowing down the pace of everyday school life and planning, teachers and children were encouraged to form stronger connections with their environment, fostering warmer bonds and supporting equity and inclusion.

Teachers, through pedagogical documentation using photos, videos, or transcriptions of children's outdoor free play, gained valuable and authentic insights into what children needed, what they wanted to learn, and how to engage in the learning process more effectively. This, in turn, led to the participatory design of the outdoor emergent curriculum. Such a process can also be highly effective in communicating the practicality and effectiveness of OPL to parents and other stakeholders, countering the limitations of traditional learning assessment methods that are ill-suited for the ever-evolving nature of OPL. This research contributes to OPL practices across different countries and encourages consideration of policy developments and the re-evaluation of current practices.

Declarations

Authors' Declarations

Acknowledgments: Thank you to all participating kindergartens, children, teachers, and head teachers who participated in this case study.

Authors' contributions: All authors contributed equally.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: Not applicable.

Ethics approval: Ethical approval was obtained from the Necmettin Erbakan University Ethics Committee.

Publisher's Declarations

Editorial Acknowledgement: The editorial process of this article was carried out by Dr. Mehmet Toran.

Publisher's Note: Journal of Childhood, Education & Society remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliation.

References

- Asfeldt, M., Purc-Stephenson, R., Rawleigh, M., & Thackeray, S. (2020). Outdoor education in Canada: A qualitative investigation. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 21(4), 297-397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2020.1784767>
- Aşkar, N. (2021). Açık havada eğitim: Okul öncesi eğitim programı materyalleri bağlamında bir değerlendirme [Outdoor education: An evaluation in the context of preschool education program materials]. *Yaşadıkça Eğitim*, 35(1), 132-153. <https://doi.org/10.33308/26674874.2021351236>
- Askerlund, P., Almers, E., Tuvendal, M., & Waite, S. (2022). Growing nature connection through greening schoolyards: Preschool teachers' response to ecosystem services innovations. *Education 3-13*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2022.2148485>

- Blenkinsop, S., Telford, J., & Morse, M. (2016). A surprising discovery: Five pedagogical skills outdoor and experiential educators might offer more mainstream educators in this time of change. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 16(4), 346–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2016.1163272>
- Canning, N. (2022). Implementing an empowerment framework: The significance for children’s play environments and reflective practice. *Education Sciences*, 12(8), 556-573. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12080556>
- Cheng, T., Brussoni, M., Han, C., Munday F., & Zeni, M. (2022). Perceived challenges of early childhood educators in promoting unstructured outdoor play: An ecological systems perspective. *Early Years*, 26, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2022.2034140>
- Children’s Commissioner (2018). *Playing out: A Children’s Commissioner’s report on the importance to children of play and physical activity*. Children’s Commissioner.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications
- Dafermou, H., Koulouri, P., & Basagianni, E. (2006). *Preschool teacher guide*. Pedagogical Institute, Ministry of National Education and Religion.
- DeBord, K., Hestenes, L., Moore, R. C., Cosco, N. G., & McGinnis, J. R. (2005). *Preschool outdoor environment measurement scale*. Kaplan Early Learning.
- Department for Education. (2021). *Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage: Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five*. www.gov.uk/ofsted.
- Dowdell, K., Gray, T., & Malone, K. (2011). Nature and its influence on children’s outdoor play. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 15(2), 24–35. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03400925>
- Dyment, J. E., Chick, H. L., Walker, C. T., & Macqueen, T. P. N. (2018). Pedagogical content knowledge and the teaching of outdoor education. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 18(4), 303–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2018.1451756>
- Engdahl, K., Brodin, J., & Lindstrand, P. (2006). Play and Interaction in two Preschool yards. In J. Brodin & P. Lindstrand (Eds.), *Interaction in Outdoor Play Environments: Gender, culture and learning* (Vol. 47). Stockholm Institute of Education. http://www.buv.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.75636.1328875727!/menu/standard/file/TKH_47.pdf
- Evans, N., & Acton, R. (2021). Narratives of teaching in outdoor and environmental education: What can we learn from a case study of outdoor education pedagogy?. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 22(3), 214– 227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2021.1902828>
- Flannigan, C., & Dietze, B. (2018). Children, outdoor play, and loose parts. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 42(4), 53–60. <https://doi.org/10.18357/jcs.v42i4.18103>
- Gelter, H. (2000). Friluftsliv: The Scandinavian philosophy of outdoor life. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 5(1), 77–92.
- Gemmell, E., Ramsden, R., Brussoni, M., & Brauer, M. (2022). Influence of neighborhood built environments on the outdoor free play of young children: A systematic, mixed-studies review and thematic synthesis. *Journal of Urban Health*, 100, 118-150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-022-00696-6>
- Gessiou, G. (2022). A follow-up review on the impact of a participatory action research regarding outdoor play and learning. *Education Sciences*. 12(10), 679- 692. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12100679>
- Gessiou, G., & Sakellariou, M. (2015). Taking learning outdoors. Outdoor kindergarten places as educational tools for children's play, development and learning. In E. Gourgiotou, & K. Ouggrinis, (Eds.), *Αρχιτεκτονικές και εκπαιδευτικές παρεμβάσεις για τη δημιουργία τόπων μάθησης στο Νηπιαγωγείο [Architectural & educational interventions to create learning places in kindergarten]* (pp. 227–253). Disigma Publications
- Ginsburg, K. R. (2007). The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds. *Pediatrics*, 119(1), 182–191. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2006-2697>
- Guest, G., MacQuenn, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483384436>
- Harris, F. (2015). The nature of learning at forest school: practitioners' perspectives. *Education 3-13*, 52(2), 272–291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2015.1078833>
- Jansson, M., & Lerstrup, I. (2021). Children’s perspectives on green space management in Sweden and Denmark. In M. Khan, S. Bell, & J. Wood (Eds.), *Place, pedagogy and play: Participation, design and research with children* (pp. 194–208). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429023477-16>
- Josephidou, J., Kemp, N., & Durrant, I. (2021). Outdoor provision for babies and toddlers: Exploring the practice/policy/research nexus in English ECEC settings. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 29(6), 925-941. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2021.1985555>
- Kravtsov, G. G., & Kravtsova, E. E. (2010). Play in L.S. Vygotsky’s nonclassical psychology. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 48(4), 25–41. <https://doi.org/10.2753/RPO1061-0405480403>

- Leather, M. (2018). A critique of “Forest School” or something lost in translation. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 21, 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42322-017-0006-1>
- Leggett, N., & Newman, L. (2017). Play: Challenging educators’ beliefs about play in the indoor and outdoor environment. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 42(1), 24–32. <https://doi.org/10.23965/AJEC.42.1.03>
- Lund Fasting, M., & Hoyem, J. (2022). Freedom, joy and wonder as existential categories of childhood—Reflections on experiences and memories of outdoor play. *Journal of Adventure Education Outdoor Learning*, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2022.2066008>
- Lysklett, O. (2017). Nature preschools in Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Norway: Characteristics and differences. In T. Waller, E. Årlemalm-Hagsér, E. Beate Hansen Sandseter, L. Lee-Hammond, K. Lekies, & S. Wyver (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of outdoor play and learning* (pp. 242–250). Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402028.n16>
- Mannion, G., Fenwick, A., & Lynch, J. (2013). Place-responsive pedagogy: Learning from teachers’ experiences of excursions in nature. *Environmental Education Research*, 19(6), 792–809. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2012.749980>
- Marchant, E., Todd, C., Cooksey, R., Dredge, S., Jones, H., Reynolds, D., Stratton, G., Dwyer, R., & Lyons, R., Brophy, S. (2019). Curriculum-based outdoor learning for children aged 9-11: A qualitative analysis of pupils’ and teachers’ views. *Plos One*, 14(5), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0212242>
- Maynard, T., & Waters, J. (2007). Learning in the outdoor environment: A missed opportunity?. *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 27(3), 255–265. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575140701594400>
- McClintic, S., & Petty, K. (2013). Exploring early childhood teachers’ beliefs and practices about preschool outdoor play: A qualitative study. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 36(1), 24-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2014.997844>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *An expanded sourcebook: Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications
- Ministry of National Education. (2013). *Okul öncesi eğitim programı [Preschool education programme]*. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı. <http://tegm.meb.gov.tr/dosya/okuloncesi/ooproram.pdf>
- Ozturk, Y., & Ozer, Z. (2022). Outdoor play activities and outdoor environment of early childhood education in Turkey: A qualitative meta-synthesis. *Early Child Development and Care*, 192(11), 1752–1767. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2021.1932865>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications
- Payne, P., & Wattchow, B. (2009). Phenomenological deconstruction, slow pedagogy, and the corporeal turn in wild environmental/outdoor education. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 14(1), 15–32.
- Potter, T. G., & Dyment, J. E. (2016). Is outdoor education a discipline? Insights, gaps, and future directions. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 16(2), 146–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2015.1121767>
- Sandseter, E. B. H., & Kennair, L. E. O. (2011). Children’s risky play from an evolutionary perspective: The anti-phobic effects of thrilling experiences. *Evolutionary Psychology*, 9(2), 257–284. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147470491100900212>
- Sandseter, E. B. H., Storli R., & Sando, O. J. (2022). The dynamic relationship between outdoor environments and children’s play, *Education 3-13*, 50(1), 97-110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2020.1833063>
- Skarstein, T. H., & Ugelstad, I. B. (2020). Outdoors as an arena for science learning and physical education in kindergarten. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(6), 923–938. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2020.1836590>
- Stevens, C. (2013). *The growing child: Laying the foundations of active learning and physical health*. Routledge.
- Sutherland, S., Stuhr, P. T., & Ayvazo, S. (2016). Learning to teach: Pedagogical content knowledge in adventure-based learning. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 21(3), 233–248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17408989.2014.931365>
- Thomas, G. J. (2019). Effective teaching and learning strategies in outdoor education: Findings from two residential programmes based in Australia. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 19(3), 242-255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2018.1519450>
- Waters, J., & Maynard T. (2010). What’s so interesting outside? A study of children-initiated interaction with teachers in the natural outdoor environment. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 18(4), 473-483. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2010.525939>
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and method* (4th ed.). Sage Publications