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Challenges of teaching outdoors in the Romanian core procurement cycle

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Abstract. In the formal and non-formal educational systems in Romania, outdoor education has been a subject of great interest in the last few years. However, its use, was highly debated, because of the lack of knowledge on the topic, lack of information on the benefits, and mostly the fear of confronting the challenges that come with its implementation. This last challenge, comes into account because of the lack of a specific frame regarding this topic in the scholar national curriculum. The present article, presents the main challenges that can come with the implementation of outdoor education and its activities in the frame of the formal educational system, at the level of core procurement cycle. In the study, there is an analysis on the main elements of outdoor education that are present in the scholar curriculum at this level. Also, it presents the results of a brief research on the beliefs of primary school teachers from Arad County, on the most important challenges that they face when implementing outdoor learning activities in schools. The research was made using the survey method, with the use of the instrument: questionnaire, in the school year 2020-2021, on a number of 77 teachers.

Keywords. outdoor education, challenges, curriculum, formal education, implementation

1. Introduction

Outdoor education is frequently undervalued, if not ignored, in educational systems. As a result, we believe it is worthwhile to criticize the field while emphasizing its value and significance. The crucial question is whether outdoor education can be considered a school subject and how it can be approached as such in formal education systems. Outdoor education is viewed and treated as a strategy rather than a completely independent discipline, and it is used in education by transforming and adapting curricular content so that they can meet the same procurement and have the same goals, but how to be different: to be more interactive, easier to assimilate, more fun, more efficient, faster, and to contain more learning experiences. Outdoor education contributes to formal education and is compatible with school practice and objectives. (Gough, 2007)

2. Theoretical foundation

The findings and ideas that emerged during the research are related to the recent literature on educational reform, which encourages teachers to collaborate in curriculum revision, improving the work environment, professionalizing teaching and developing local

education policy. It is expected that the idea of using nature as a context for learning and developing environmental awareness will be increasingly essential in the future challenges of education and that outdoor education can be included in the public-school curriculum as a holistic and pedagogical method of holistic support, which maintains motivation and well-being in the educational environment. It has already been shown that especially for students with special needs, it can be implemented as a teaching-learning method without massive costs or resources. (Ohrimenco, 2016)

In 1941, when it took shape as a form of education, according to the philosophy stated by its founder and initiator Kurt Hahn, it was established that the main task of outdoor education is to ensure the survival of innovative curiosity, invincible will, tenacity in choosing individual goals, and student compassion. Hahn's school offered educators the opportunity to develop their full potential, and encouraged them to help others to do the same. Outdoor education is the sum of the actions taken by teachers in an environment outside the classroom, using experiential methods in order to produce changes in physical, intra- and inter-personal, but also in the behaviour of participants. Regardless of the subject to be learned, it can be considered an educational strategy, and compared to traditional learning strategies it leads to faster and more effective results in terms of learning content, developing skills and forming students' attitudes. It is a type of education that complements formal education in a pleasant and effective way, supporting the education received in the family and school, by using modern training methods, which are subordinate to it: team games, free discussions, role-playing games, activities practical, action learning, case study, experiments, adventure, camps, therapies using nature and group method. (Neagu, 2020)

Outdoor education can be done in nature, but not exclusively in the natural space, because being connected to school content it becomes an environment for exploring, applying and experimenting with existing knowledge in the school curriculum. It can also be done in the city or village environment, because through the rich environment they have, they become a "mecca" of research and testing the curiosity of each participant. Planning, action, observation and reflection are the essential steps that guide every activity related to outdoor education. It involves not only changing the framework and carrying out the same content in an external environment, but also exploring the possibilities of using the natural environment as a learning space, and especially the training of skills to work thematically and approach learning content interdisciplinary. (Catalano, 2014)

Teachers can replace textbooks and worksheets with resources from the outside world, resulting in learning situations that build educators' self-confidence as well as the confidence of those around them. Outdoor activities for pre-schoolers include creative workshops, games, practical activities, field trips, and sports. Each organized activity allows the learner to experiment by putting him in situations where he must look for solutions, find answers, and collaborate with teammates to achieve specific results. Outdoor experiential education activities foster group interactions, critical thinking, leadership, cooperation, decision-making, and problem solving. (Roman & Coşarbă, 2020)

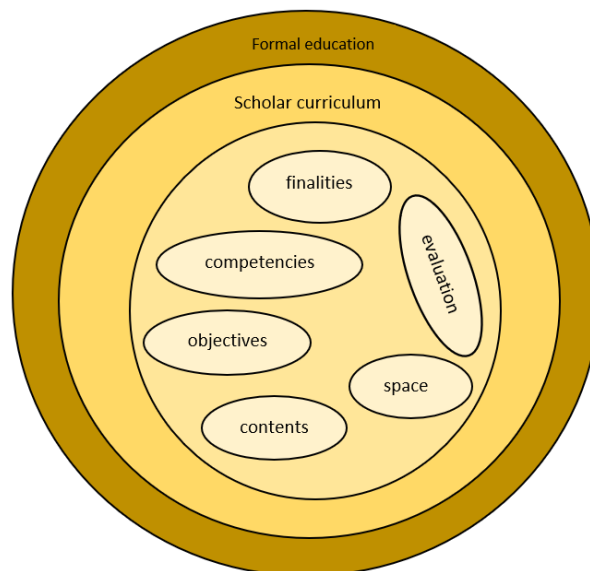
In countries such as Norway, Finland, Scotland or England, outdoor education is practiced as an independent subject even in formal education, being present in the national curriculum. Although in Romania it is present only in the form of an educational strategy, with its own philosophy and objectives, it is tried to introduce it in the curriculum in a form as efficient as possible for a use that facilitates the assimilation of the curricular contents. Following the analysis of the curricular documents, it can be seen that since the early preschool age, there is a major concern of the Ministry of education to bring the student as close to nature

as possible. As the methodical letter for preschool education in 2013 shows, the joy of learning or the equation that brings together the reflective teacher, the child involved and the anchor parent is the natural world and children's acquisitions about and through the natural world. From an early age, the child who investigates beyond the group room is driven by his own curiosity and not by the teacher's instructions, not needing instructions on how to feel and what to see or hear. The student is involved with all the senses, and the learning process goes by itself, the ideas appear naturally, the curiosity grows more and more, the experiences gather, the reflection increases and the conclusions appear, nature becoming at the same time enigma and answer. (Hasmidyani, 2021)

In these activities, the educator receives the role of organizer and coordinator of learning, not just a transmitter of information. The learner notices that nature alone answers all the dilemmas it raises, and the comfort of students in direct contact with it, the lightness with which the learner can operate without any constraints, is the best way to learn. Outdoor education is therefore a form of enriching the curriculum in the conditions in which the instructive-educational process takes place outside the classroom. (Neuman, 2004)

In the Romanian formal educational system, the place of outdoor education is present as is follows:

Figure 1. Outdoor education in the Romanian school curriculum and formal education
Source: Authors' own conception



As it is visible in the image presented above, even if there is not a specific frame for outdoor educational activities, it is present through all the elements that are specified through the scholar curriculum at the level of core procurement cycle: finalities, competencies, evaluation, deployment space, objectives and contents.

At a more deep analysis of the scholar curriculum at the level of core procurement cycle, we have selected some key words that show the presence of outdoor educational activities, in all school subjects and also at an integrated level:

Table 1. Short list of key words extracted from the school curriculum at the level of core procurement level, showing the presence of outdoor education throughout
Source: Authors' own conception

| Crt.Nb. | Key words |
|----------------|---|
| 1. | Familiar / open environments |
| 2. | Self discovery |
| 3. | Belonging to various groups |
| 4. | National identity |
| 5. | City / village environment |
| 6. | Caring for the environment |
| 7. | Natural Resources |
| 8. | The experience |
| 9. | Curiosity about phenomena / relationships |
| 10. | Communication |
| 11. | Observation / experimentation / measurement |
| 12. | Open / friendly working atmosphere |
| 13. | Knowledge |
| 14. | Active participation |
| 15. | Experience |
| 16. | Direct involvement |
| 17. | Reality |
| 18. | Contact |

Analyzing the competencies described in the scholar curriculum at the three levels of the core procurement cycle in Romania, it can be seen that cooperation, socialization, going out and participating in activities in as many and varied contexts as possible is desirable at this level. In the document presented by the specialists from the Ministry education, it appears that in each of the areas, the emphasis is on the use of natural materials, the most familiar and open environments, self-discovery and belonging to various social groups, the discovery of national identity. and belonging to the city or village environment, manifesting curiosity about phenomena, relationships, regularities in the immediate environment, showing concern for a clean and friendly environment, etc. Problem solving, critical thinking, making observations or comparisons, are required to be carried out in an environment as natural and friendly as possible, which offers countless natural resources. Discovering sensations or emotions can be done in a natural setting close to the group room. Noticing the beauty of everyday life, participating in various racing games, identifying simple ways to maintain good health in the family environment, are skills that need to be developed at this age, using activities in outdoor education, and adapting the contents presented in the natural environment, so that the familiarization of the students with this educational level is easier and more efficient.

The current school curricula promote experiential learning, through the direct involvement of the student in the studied reality. The emphasis is on capitalizing in real contexts on the knowledge, skills and values acquired, by increasing the share of practical-applicative activities within each school subject. Competence training largely depends on how the teacher

designs and organizes learning and the degree to which it emphasizes the applicative dimension of knowledge.

By analyzing the skills required of a pupil that has completed the level of core procurement cycle, one can see the need for a dynamic, natural, open education, an education that is in constant contact with society and its members, but especially an education constantly concerned with the environment, natural areas, harmonious physical and cognitive development in the natural environment. We also notice the encouragement of self-discovery and relationships that are based on communication, sharing, discovery, experience, learning being holistic and especially interdisciplinary.

3. Research methodology

The research of the present article was based on the method of survey. The main instrument used was the questionnaire, which was applied, with the purpose of collecting data regarding the opinions, knowledge and experiences of teachers from Arad County, on the main challenges that are faced when trying to implement outdoor educational activities in the core procurement cycle. The questionnaire was based on identifying information of the teachers that have participated in the study, educational experience, gender, age, the environment in which they profess and the specialization they have. The second part of the survey was made based on a few basic questions about the main challenges that teachers face when using outdoor educational activities.

The items were elaborated maintaining the same structure of the objectives, using different scales. The first items refer to the familiarity with the concept of outdoor education, following with the next set of items, which measures the rate of use, implication of parents, limitations and main challenges.

There were 77 participants, primary school teachers, from the core procurement cycle. The main limitations of the study, were all regarding the fact that the subject is still new in the Romanian specific literature, and also in the Romanian curriculum. The total number of 80 participants was consecutively selected according to the order of appearance, when completing the online questionnaire, that was shared on social media platforms, according to the convenient accessibility principle, also, 3 responses couldn't be used in the present research due to technical issues.

The main objective of the study, was to find out, what are the main challenges in the implementation of outdoor education in the daily activities of pupils from various primary schools from Arad County, at the level of core procurement cycle. The participants were randomly chosen, and the data collected was introduced in the SPSS 6.0 statistical program in order to be analysed.

Through the questionnaire-based survey, that was applied in the period: 10.02.2021-25.03.2021, the research analyses the main reasons that teachers state to have in order not to use outdoor education on a daily basis in the educational process. The main instrument used was the questionnaire. This tool was developed by the authors, and was applied, with the purpose of collecting data regarding the main challenges that primary school teachers face during the desire to implement outdoor learning activities in the formal curriculum.

There were 17 items in the questionnaire, 5 representing identification variables, 12 items giving participants the opportunity to select answer options. Out of the total number of surveyed teachers, 31% carry out their instructive-educational activity in rural areas, and 69% in urban area. The age groups of the participants, varied, and it is presented below:

Table 2. Age variation of the teacher participants

Source: Authors' own conception

| Percentage | Age variation of participants |
|------------|-------------------------------|
| 42% | between 19 and 25 years |
| 38% | between 26 and 35 years |
| 9% | between 36 and 45 years |
| 11% | between 46 and 55 years |

4. Results and findings

The collected data was introduced in the SPSS 6.0 statistical program, where both parametric and non-parametric statistical tests were used. There were different correlations made about the individual characteristics of the participants and the way that those influence the way participants think about challenges in outdoor educational activity implementation. The analysis has shown the following outcomes:

Figure 2. The universal knowledge of the participants on the main concept

Source: Authors' own conception

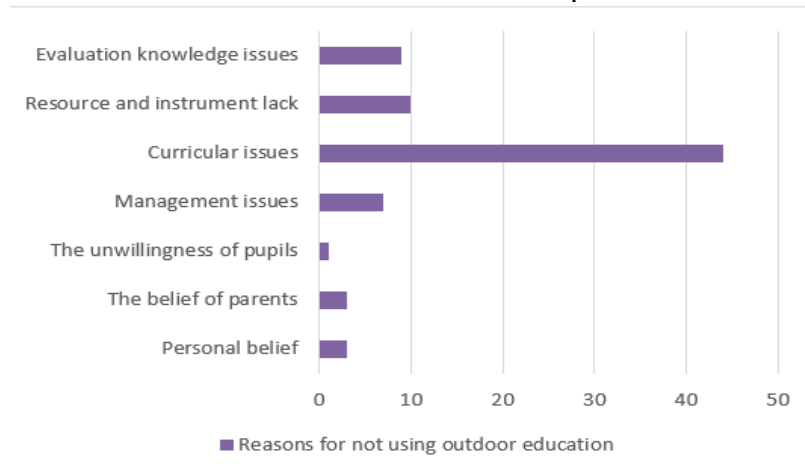


Due to the fact that 3 participants have stated that they know nothing about the concept, they were found in the impossibility to continue with the study, so their answers were not taken into account. The study has continued with 77 participants that have stated that they know the main concept and they know how to operate with it.

The main reasons why participants refuse to use outdoor education in their activities, are presented in the figure below:

Figure 3. Main reason categories that participants invoke for not using outdoor education at their classes

Source: Authors' own conception

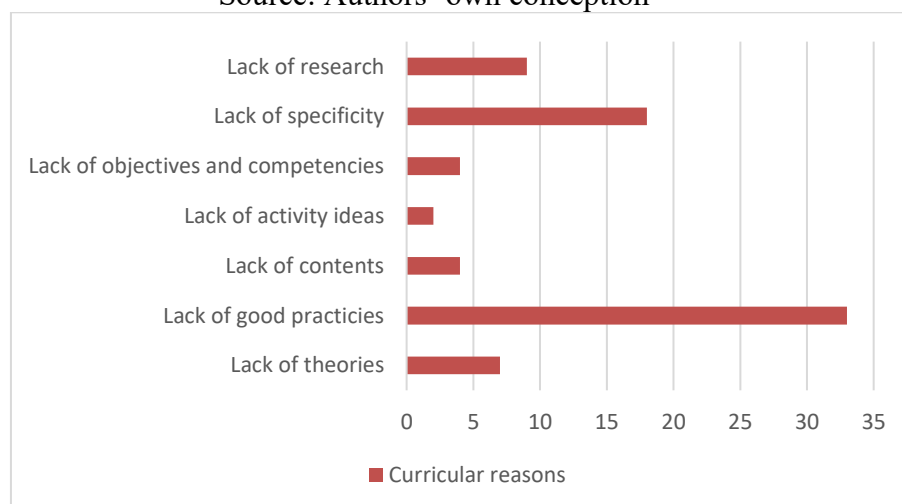


As the graph above shows it, most of the participant teachers say that curricular issues are the most important factor for not using outdoor education. The smallest percent of teachers, one participant have stated that the willingness of pupils from class is the reason for not implementing it. Personal belief and parents' belief, have gotten the same score, which can mean that both teachers and parents can influence themselves in the decision taking regarding the use or lack of use of some activities at class. Lack of instruments is another concern of teachers when it comes to implementation, and also management issues and the lack of preparation about the correct evaluation of the results.

We wanted to further develop the matter of curricular issues, because most of the respondents have chosen that as a reason for not using outdoor educational activities, and the results are presented below:

Figure 3. Main reason categories belonging to curricular issues

Source: Authors' own conception



Analysing the results, we have noticed that the main curricular reason is the lack of good practices, which comes from the fact that in Romania there isn't enough research on this topic, and teachers find it difficult to adapt curricular contents to the classroom and the needs of pupils,

without a set of well worked frames and good practices. The second reason chosen by teachers is the lack of specificity regarding the valences of this this type of education, and also regarding to specific activities and evaluation methods.

There have been noticed a positive correlation between those participants who have chosen as challenges curricular contents, those who stated that starting from this challenge lack good practices and those who have answered positively at the question regarding trust and desire to use outdoor education in the classes. This shows that those participants who would have more specificity in the curriculum, would use outdoor educational activities in their daily routines. Also, this shows that there is a great need for the Romanian education policies to change, in the direction of introducing more specific objectives, contains, finalities and good practices in the curriculum, and starting from this point, to make more research in the area of outdoor education, and publish it in the Romanian specialty literature.

Table 3. Positive correlation between the curricular specificities regarding outdoor education and the growth of participants trust in the method, and the use of it in class

Source: Authors' own conception

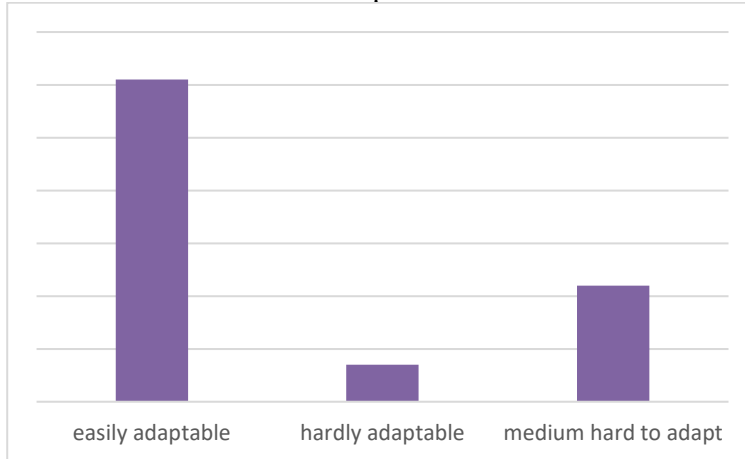
Independent Samples Test

| | | Levine's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|---|-----------------|-----------------------|-------|-------|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| TotalOEComp | Equal variances assumed | 7,605 | ,011 | 8,920 | 31 | ,000 | 6,089 | ,683 | 4,697 | 7,491 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 9,433 | 26,991 | ,000 | 6,079 | ,646 | 4,762 | 7,416 |

Another question selected to be presented in the study, because of its importance, is the participants opinion regarding the difficulty of adaptation of outdoor learning activities, if they would get more help and inspiration from the curriculum and from school programs. The answers are presented in the following graph:

Figure 4. Adaptation level of outdoor educational activities in correlation with the school curriculum

Source: Authors' own conception



The answers show the openness of teachers to adapt outdoor learning activities to curricular contents, in case they would get more help and support by curriculum, and also by scholar policies. This prove that outdoor education can be used as a great teaching-learning tool in the everyday routine of children, according to its various benefits, both on short and long term. This means, teachers from primary schools within the area of Arad County, are actually in standby, waiting for the support of the national decedents, in order to help them make outdoor educational activities closer to the needs of pupils from classes, and also, they are waiting for the support of university actors, at national level, in order to publish more research on the topic.

5. Conclusions and further discussions

Pupils are often kept indoors due to perceived challenges in outdoor learning. However, more time spent outside and less time confined within the four walls of a traditional classroom can benefit both teachers and students. While learning outside was once our only option, a shift inside into classrooms has resulted in misconceptions about the difficulty of implementing lessons outside. There are two critical considerations when it comes to outdoor learning barriers or challenges: factors that influence the provision of outdoor learning and factors that influence the nature and quality of young people's learning in outdoor settings. Outdoor learning provision is frequently influenced by perceived barriers to outdoor learning experienced by those in the teaching profession. (Waite, 2009)

In the article and research presented above, we have come to the following conclusions in terms of the most often encountered challenges in the use of outdoor education as part of the formal educational systems, at the level of core procurement cycle, in Arad County:

- Concerns about pupils' health and safety
- Teachers' apprehension about teaching outside
- Curriculum requirements in schools and universities limit opportunities for outdoor learning.
- Time, resources, and support are all in short supply.
- Changes that extend beyond the education sector.

Furthermore, it is suggested that outdoor teaching was not perceived as real teaching and that there were barriers to going outside. Outdoor lesson planning was perceived to be more difficult than regular lesson planning, and teachers reported time constraints as a result of

increased external syllabus changes. Despite these perceptions, outdoor learning provides a wealth of opportunities for teaching and learning, as well as increased student engagement. Numerous studies have found that learning outside has a positive cognitive impact. (Dughi & Ivasiuc, 2017) It is possible to find yourself teaching to a more engaged group of students by providing a contrast to traditional formal learning indoors. (Roman, 2020) Also, outdoor educational activities, along with formula educational activities within the classroom, used in primary school, can develop better communicational competencies. (Hossu, 2019)

According to research conducted in the same area, the most important effects of learning on school grounds/community settings include increased confidence, renewed community pride, stronger motivation to learn, and a greater sense of belonging and responsibility. In other words, students become more engaged in their own education. (Torkos, 2020)

Outdoor activities for students should not be limited to physical education, recess, or lunch breaks. Instead, lessons in math, science, and the arts – in fact, almost any lesson you want to teach – can be formatted to be delivered outside. (Rickinson et al, 2004)

In order to achieve this, there are some suggestions from the authors:

- More research in the domain of outdoor learning at national level
- More classes and workshops offered both by universities and formal educational institutions
 - More specificity within the curriculum
 - More good practices published by those teachers that have results from using outdoor education in their routines
 - More involvement from parents
 - More involvement from pupils, starting from the design of school yards and gardens and also from NGOs in term of sponsoring these activities
 - More involvement from local authorities in order to fund schools in this regard.

Challenges can be encountered at all times and levels, but it is up to us, as specialists in education to overcome them by transforming them into new ideas and suggestions, also in objectives that can be turned into competencies and benefits. (Coşarbă et al, 2021)

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