

**From Indoor to Outdoor Play: How Forest Kindergarten Impacts Social and
Emotional Development of Young Children in Lebanon.**

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Abstract

It has been shown that outdoor play is an important tool for fostering kids' social and emotional growth. The goal of this study is to investigate the relationship that exists between children's outdoor play and social-emotional development. Also, it examines the various ways that outdoor play might support the growth of emotional and social skills including self-control, communication, and empathy. The effect of the environment on social and emotional growth while engaging in outdoor play is also examined. The procedure includes a review of the literature on numerous studies that have studied the connection between outdoor play and young children's social and emotional development. The results imply that outdoor play gives kids the chance to express themselves during play, which helps in developing their self-regulation abilities. Children may engage with their friends when playing outside, which helps them develop their social and communication skills. Children's empathy and compassion also have a higher chance of growing in the natural setting of outdoor play. Moreover, the value of outdoor play in supporting children's emotional and social development is one of this paper's main findings. The results highlight the necessity for parents and educators to prioritize outdoor play and give children the opportunity to have a part in it.

Introduction

Since 2020, several important incidents have taken place in Lebanon, including the Port Explosion, the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown procedures, and economic difficulties. Young students who were forced to switch from in-person to online learning encountered a dramatic

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influence on their everyday lives because of these events. Since many kids have spent a lot of time at home, this has impacted their social and emotional health. Therefore, it is crucial to consider how we can guarantee students' effective learning while also being attentive to their social and emotional needs.

Taking advantage of outdoor education is one method that is expanding lately. Environmental learning, hands-on training, exploring, and other activities are all included in the idea of outdoor education. Children's physical health, learning abilities, control of emotions, social skills, and awareness of the environment have all been found to improve as a result (Bento & Dias, 2017). Particularly since the COVID-19 outbreak, there has been an increase in interest in outdoor schooling in Lebanon. In response to the need to give kids the opportunity to interact with nature, communicate with other children, and enhance their emotional health, many schools have begun to include outdoor activities in their curricula. The effectiveness of these activities and their long-term effects on kids' social and emotional development are still unknown yet.

This study examines the significance of outdoor play for young children in Lebanon in an attempt to address this topic. We will primarily focus on kids between the ages of four and six. Our research question is: Can outdoor activities in Lebanon promote social and emotional skills and competencies of young children between the ages of 4 and 6?

To complete our research goal, we are going to review the literature on earlier studies on outdoor education, concentrating on how it supports social and emotional development in young children. Furthermore, we will gather information from a private school located in Beirut, Lebanon, using the method of observation. To learn more about how outdoor learning helps children develop important social and emotional skills and capabilities, the observational data will be recorded and analyzed. We will make sure to follow ethical norms and research

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principles when gathering our data. Informed consent will be gathered from participants, and we will make sure to share the results of our research. We will conduct an exploratory narrative review of the observational notes following the data collection. By using this approach, we may identify recurring patterns in the student's actions. We will take advantage of the information to form conclusions on how outdoor activities can help young children between the ages of four and six develop their social and emotional skills in Lebanon. To determine whether our results are consistent with earlier studies on this subject, we will relate them to the literature review.

We presume that the results of our study will highlight the benefits of outdoor learning for young kids. According to our research, children's participation in outdoor activities can help them develop their social and emotional skills and abilities. Our results may play a role in inspiring teachers and parents to include more outside activities in their kids' educational experiences. This could help solve some of the difficulties children in Lebanon encounter, because of the pandemic and economic issues, and have a beneficial impact on children's social and emotional development. By encouraging outdoor learning, teachers and parents can provide kids with a chance to interact with nature, which could improve the way they feel overall (Nah & Lee, 2017).

Literature review

Outdoor play for young children has always been an immensely debatable topic. This is because some caregivers believe that outdoor play has a lot of risks and dangers for their child, while others believe that outdoor play helps the child strengthen physically and mentally. Research shows that outdoor play has a lot of positive effects on the social-emotional development of the child. Outdoor play often involves unstructured and spontaneous activities and can take place in various natural environments, such as parks, playgrounds, backyards, and

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streets. Outdoor play is considered an essential component of childhood development, as it provides opportunities for physical exercise, exploration, and social interaction with peers. In addition, social and emotional development refers to the process by which children acquire the skills and competencies necessary for successful social and emotional functioning. This development encompasses a range of skills, including communication, empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and interpersonal relationships. This literature review will explore the existing research on the effects of outdoor play on the social and emotional development of young children. Through a comprehensive analysis of empirical studies, theoretical frameworks, and best practices, this review aims to provide a thorough understanding of how outdoor play can support children's social and emotional growth, as well as identify gaps in knowledge and opportunities for future research in this field.

Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Skills

Many pieces of literature have demonstrated the strong relationship between emotional, social, cognitive, and outdoor play. Emotional, social, and cognitive skills cover several competencies such as self-esteem, confidence, autonomy, empathy, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. To begin with, in an article concerning the importance of outdoor play for healthy development, Bento and Dias (2017), discuss the different developmental aspects that are positively affected by outdoor play. They started by mentioning how outdoor play can help shape the child and develop their self-esteem, confidence, and autonomy (Bento & Dias, 2017). These skills are part of social and emotional development. Strong emotional and social skills lead to positive relationships with oneself and others, which are important for our mental health, self-esteem, and sense of belonging. These skills also contribute to academic and career success by enabling effective communication and teamwork, and they help individuals to cope with stress,

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manage difficult emotions, and build resilience. The authors explained their point by presenting the outdoor education project. This project had many goals, such as proving the impeccable effects outdoor play has on the child's mental and physical health since it would not only boost their immunity but also their sense of belonging to nature, which would make nature a source of comfort to the child. This, therefore, enhances social and emotional development (Bento & Dias, 2017). The findings of this project stated how children had the chance to explore and have a new experience in nature, which enhances the development of social and emotional skills, problem-solving skills, creativity, and critical thinking (Bento & Dias, 2017). In addition, Bento and Dias (2017), focused on the positive impact outdoor play has on emotional and social development (Bento & Dias, 2017). Outdoor play helps children develop social skills that could not be easily developed indoors. To illustrate, because of all the restrictions present indoors, according to the authors, children cooperate during their time outdoors, to accomplish certain activities (Bento & Dias, 2017). Also, when children spend their time outdoors, they begin to better understand the needs of those around them and they start to better understand the feelings of others. This would help in the development of emotional skills as well (Bento & Dias, 2017). Moreover, Coates and Wilson (2018) made a similar point as Bento and Dias, when stating how outdoor play gives the child a chance to develop social connections with people of the same age, which is considered one of the most important aspects of outdoor play experience (Coates & Wilson, 2018). The authors also do not fail to mention the important role outdoor play has in emotional development. In their article, they mention how outdoor play has advantages on the emotional resiliency of the child (Coates & Wilson, 2018). To add to that, the two authors mentioned one important aspect that affects the social-emotional development of the child, which is that it helps strengthen the relationship between child and adult (Coates & Wilson, 2018).

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Other authors, such as Mainella et al. (2011), stated the benefits of outdoor play differently. In their article, the authors mentioned the effects of isolation from outdoor play, such as an increase in stress levels and the loss of ability to function socially (Mainella et al, 2011). One very important outcome of outdoor play mentioned by the authors is that it helps children develop empathy and allows them to practice emotional regulation. The reason behind this is that children will cooperate and better understand the emotions of others around them when they share, take turns, and work together during play (Mainella et al, 2011). Similarly, the article by Cooper, (2014), discusses how nature has a role in the healthy development of the child. Cooper states how natural outdoor spaces that encourage social gatherings, tummy time, theatrical play, team games, music and movement, and locations for peaceful and quiet activities all assist social-emotional development (Cooper, 2014). Like the article of Coates and Wilson, Cooper mentions that when natural elements are included in the outside environment, children's socialization, physical competence, and spatial cognition all improve (Cooper, 2014). Moreover, the author mentions an important point in the article, by stating how the early years' program is preparatory for school, thus children's needs must be catered to and well-considered to ensure healthy development from all aspects; social, emotional, and stress, to perform well at school (Cooper, 2014). Related to the previous articles, Wells and Evans (2003), also stated the impact of outdoor play on child development in the social and emotional areas. The authors mentioned how the availability and usage of green outside spaces promote cognitive function and well-being as well as social engagement and social connectivity. Furthermore, a systemic synthesis was conducted on nature-based ECE that focuses on the social, emotional, and cognitive growth of children between the ages of 2 and 7 years old (Johnstone et al., 2022). This review was conducted to determine whether participation in nature-based ECE is related to kids' social,

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emotional, and cognitive growth. Additionally, explore how children, parents, and/or professionals view nature-based ECE. According to the quantitative research, social and emotional development was better in children who attended nature-based ECE. This year, the Mental Health Foundation cited research showing that one in five children and adolescents experience psychological issues, with one in ten needing professional assistance. The lack of outdoor play and play being replaced by television and video games is said to be a major issue for many kids. Besides, kids can take challenges, recognize their choices available, and generate strong self-confidence and resilience through unrestricted play. To conclude, children cooperate, empathize with each other, and form good bonds in outdoor play.

Social and Civic Skills

Recent studies have suggested that outdoor play has a significant role in improving social and civic skills. It is important to further explore the potential impact of outdoor play to gain a more comprehensive understanding of social and civic skills development. Social and civic skills stand for the range of abilities and competencies that enable individuals to effectively engage with others and contribute to their communities. Social skills help children form positive relationships with peers and adults, communicate effectively, and constructively resolve conflicts. Children who have developed strong social skills are better equipped to manage stress, cope with challenging situations, and navigate complex social dynamics. Civic skills, on the other hand, encourage children to become active and engaged members of their communities. When children learn about civic responsibility and participate in community service activities, they develop a sense of empathy and social awareness and gain a deeper understanding of their role in society. To illustrate, Nah, K. and Lee, S. (2016) investigated how an outdoor play initiative in an early childhood school can actualize children's participation and acknowledge

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their perspectives. In their study, 25 children between the ages of five and six, as well as a South Korean educator with seven years of experience, took part in this research. This study was conducted to enhance children's ability for opinion formation and expression, a participatory approach was used. This gave the kids the ability to lead a project to develop outdoor play with the assistance and cooperation of adults. As they studied, the kids began to perceive themselves as capable students. The kids started to think of themselves as confident learners, they also learned how to interact and bargain with other kids and adults. They also showed initiative and enthusiasm, and they formed a democratic viewpoint. This proves how outdoor play contributes to the development of the social and civic skills of young children.

According to the qualitative synthesis of a previously mentioned review found that children's play is more varied, they have more imagination and creativity, and they interact better with classmates and instructors (Johnstone et al., 2022). Children who attended nature-based ECE engage in more play interactions than children who attended conventional ECE, which may help them develop more prosocial skills. A mixed methods study was conducted to study and identify the social and emotional behavior of 26 preschoolers between the ages of 3 to 5 years old in outdoor play at an early childhood center (Rosiek, M. A, 2020). The author found that outdoor play places children to face conflicts and problem-solve, engage in teamwork, and develop social relationships with their peers. The most important finding discussed by the author is that children reform their social skills with each other. In another article, Coates and Wilson (2018), also referred to the same effects of the topic, by discussing the concept of Forest Schools (Coates & Wilson, 2018). The authors discuss how experiential play in FS leads to the development of social functioning (Coates & Wilson, 2018).

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It is worth mentioning that the authors Well and Evans (2003) stated how isolation from outdoor playing results in weaker social, behavioral, and motor abilities, unlike in the kids who had easy access to the outdoors and could play there unaccompanied. Therefore, outdoor play significantly impacts social and civic skills.

Self-Regulation

Studies have also covered the importance of outdoor play in perpetuating self-regulating skills in children. It involves the development of self-control, self-awareness, and self-monitoring skills, which enable children to regulate their responses to different situations and stimuli. Children who have developed strong self-regulation skills are better able to cope with stress, manage frustration, and control their impulses. Many kids' ability to play has been drastically restricted because of parental concerns. Parents worry about their kids playing outside which prevents children from developing self-confidence and developing their emotional skills (*Lack of Risk in Play Is Damaging Children Report - ProQuest, n.d.*). In Eastern Ontario, a research project was established to thoroughly examine the four kids' time spent in a natural learning setting (Coe, 2017). Photographs, teacher-student interviews, and observations were used in the research. The study was done in a 190-acre learning environment that included hills, cliffs, open spaces, and boulders. They also gave the kids two tents for refuge indoors. It was found that children's methods of play and risk-taking varied. The author talked about how children's lives have become more inactive and disengaged from their surroundings in recent years. As a result, the kids were able to reconnect with their surroundings and grow in confidence and passion for learning and development because of the forest kindergarten program. The author states that children who participate in physical challenges experience a variety of emotions, from pure exhilaration to fear. They frequently seek out risk and excitement

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that lead to rewarding emotions like joy and excitement. Regarding this, taking risks and having risky play situations benefit children's physical, mental, and emotional well-being in addition to their social and emotional growth.

Methods

Data Collection

As a means to understand the relationship between the social and emotional development of young children in outdoor play, an observational research project was conducted. We used observation as a method to study our research to replicate El-Haj et al. (2018) data collection technique and interpretive process to analyze data. Following the work of El-Haj et al. (2018) in their techniques to study civic education in Early Childhood classrooms, we conducted our research. We used observation as a tool to allow us to directly observe and record real-life behaviors, events, and interactions of students in outdoor play. This method provides us with the opportunity to gather first-hand data, which can be analyzed and interpreted to answer the proposed research question. Observational methods are particularly useful in fields such as psychology, sociology, education, and anthropology, where researchers aim to study human behavior in a natural setting. These methods allow researchers to gather rich and detailed data that cannot be obtained through other research methods, such as surveys or experiments.

Raya Al Hasnaa El Agha Kasbah (a substitute teacher at the school since September of 2022), and Fatima Assaf (a student-teacher in the same school with Raya since the September of 2022), both in the field of early childhood education, cooperated to design a collaborative study. We brainstormed our ideas and divided our labor in a way that ensured that we were contributing to the success of the project. We synthesized and analyzed five articles each for the literature review and annotated five articles each for the annotated bibliography. Additionally, results and

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analysis were completed individually, where each person analyzed and wrote about their respective observations. (Check Appendix B-Timeline Table).

We conducted our research at a private school located in Beirut. We engaged in observational research starting in January of 2023 and observational experience since September of 2022. The study was conducted in two early childhood classrooms which are KG1 (ages 4 to 5) and KG2 (ages 5 to 6). Fatima conducted her research with KG2 students aged between 5 and 6. While Raya conducted her research with KG1 and KG2 children, between the ages of 4 and 6. In January of 2023, we started our intensive observational research, where we observed around forty students for full days at least two times a week. Our observations were focused on the behavior of children when they are playing and learning outside (in the playground where there are many trees) as well as when the kids went on field trips. For instance, the school owns land in Deir Al Amar and students are frequently taken there. We accompanied the children several times to Deir Al Amar to take it as an opportunity to observe the kids and their behavior and to take pictures during outdoor play in nature. We captured all aspects of their behaviors in vivid detail, including their emotional well-being and how they are socializing with each other. We recorded dialogues on notepads between the children, incidents, interactions between the children and the teachers, and so forth. Additionally, we took pictures of things they discovered outside. We paid close attention to when the children were outside and how their behaviors changed when they were indoors.

Our teamwork has established many strengths including diverse perspectives which lead to more comprehensive and rigorous research. It has also contributed to an increase in productivity and efficiency. For instance, we held consistent meetings to discuss the data that we recorded and collectively analyzed the data, and looked for patterns in behaviors to develop our findings. We analyzed how children behaved in different environments (indoor and outdoor) and looked closely

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at how children dealt with conflicts outside the classroom versus inside. We gathered our observational data during the study, including any notes, pictures, or other materials gathered during the observation period. Next, patterns or themes that emerged from the data were identified. We used the interpretive process method to analyze our data. We linked our observations to the findings we reviewed in the literature review. These links could be behaviors, interactions, or any other observable phenomena that occur repeatedly during the observation period. Based on these patterns, hypotheses were generated about what they might mean. This can involve thinking about the underlying causes of the observed behaviors or interactions, and considering how they might relate to the social and emotional competencies. Once the hypotheses were generated, they were tested by collecting additional data or by examining existing data differently. Based on the results of hypothesis testing, interpretations of the observed phenomena were refined, which may involve revising initial hypotheses or developing new ones. Finally, conclusions were drawn about how emotional and social development is perpetuated in outdoor environments. (Check Appendix A-Artifact)

Ethical Procedures

To protect the rights and well-being of the participants in the observational study, several procedures were followed. We have obtained the approval of the Institutional Review Board (LAU IRB) to collect data outside the LAU campuses and an oath to protect the rights and anonymity of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from the principal of the preschool. The observation lasted only between the duration of our attendance at the school. We ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants while collecting our data. The names of the students and their faces are kept anonymous to protect their privacy. As well as making sure we do not cause any harm that may result in our research.

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Data Analysis

On January 26, 2023, KG1 children were taken to Deir Al Amar from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. On this day, Raya accompanied them and got the chance to see the other version of each child. On our way there, I noticed how the kids were excited and kept looking out the window. They looked so happy to be there, and they were asking questions that showed how curious they are, such as

“What is the name of that tree? Does it have any flowers?”

One kid said to the other: “I can’t wait to smell the flowers.” The other kid replied by saying:

“Me too!”

When we reached there, the kids hurried to get off the bus and ran freely in nature. Since the school owns the land and is guarded by fences, they are not restricted to one specific area. They are usually never this energetic in the classroom.

Children started picking up sticks and making shapes with them, in a highly creative way. They started playing “Guess the shape” after using the sticks to draw random shapes in the mud like circles, squares, and triangles. I then followed another group of children who went to observe a group of ants carrying their food, and one of them said, “They are all working together to hold this piece of food, just like we helped each other carry the branch piece minutes ago!” Another child added, “They are taking the food to their children at home.” (Check Appendix C for Figure 1).

This dialogue shows how outdoor play affects the learning of the children positively. I noticed how they are using their imagination to relate to what they are seeing, and how they worked cooperatively to achieve their goals of carrying the tree branch and expressing their happiness throughout their adventures.

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On March 13, 2023, we both went with KG2 students on a field trip to a farm near Deir Al Amar where ACS has a property. The noises and sights of birds and chicks welcomed us when we arrived. The children excitedly explored the area, while their faces were beaming with joy. While the farmers kindly responded to their curious questions, children learned about the many animal species, their habitats, and their habits. The kids also got the chance to participate in practical tasks like sowing seeds, picking vegetables, and even milking a cow. They participated and took turns working together, encouraging a spirit of collaboration and cooperation. When they got their hands dirty, made a connection with the ground, and enjoyed being in nature, they laughed with joy. Also, they got to try fresh fruits and vegetables, which helped them appreciate where their food originates from and form healthy eating habits. The children's imaginations were stimulated as they spent time in nature. Kids developed their creativity and social abilities by making up stories and playing make-believe activities. While they took care of the animals and plants, they also gained responsibility and empathy. The children returned to school as the field trip ended, carrying with them fond memories and experiences. We believe that the kids' time spent playing outside had not only been enjoyable and informative, but it had also made a significant impact on their emotional and social development.

Check Figure 2 in Appendix C.

On March 6, 2023, Fatima joined the kids (Ages between 5 and 6) at Deir Al Amar. As soon as we arrived the kids ran into the field filled with excitement and enthusiasm. I observed several groups of children during our stay there, which lasted from 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Children spent their day discovering nature and asked many questions about many things that they found.

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Check Figure 3 in Appendix C

For example, a child came up to me and asked,

“Miss what are those holes in the ground.” (Check Figure 4 in Appendix C)

We then started discussing and teaching the kids how snakes live in nature and that they dig holes into the ground to hide in them. It was beautiful to see the kids noticing new things and sharing them with their friends. Also, the children were more eager to learn and curious to discover new things unlike when they are indoors.

At around 10:30 a.m., the kids found a group of worms on the soil. Two kids were curious to touch it and another three feared coming near them. So, I explained to the kids that these are black caterpillars, and they grow to be beautiful butterflies that you see. They then changed their expressions and called for their other friends, and they explained to them what they are. One of the kids came and said,

“We need to protect them from being stepped on, we should put rocks around them so everyone can see them”. (Check Figure 5 in Appendix C).

This is evidence of the relevance of emotional development in nature. The kids learn how to be emphatic with nature. They are learning how to be gentle and respect the environment they are in.

Moreover, I went to observe other children and one child came up to me and said,

“Miss come see what I have found.”

The child showed me a snail they found in the bush, and they told me that they wanted to feed it.

This is another example of emotional development. Kids love to care for insects and animals they are getting to see. It is important for children to encounter nature to learn how to build empathy, care, and connection with nature. (Check Figure 6 in Appendix D).

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During that day, a group of four children asked,

“The clouds look beautiful, and we want to work together to draw them.”

So, they were given paper and scissors to cut the shapes of the clouds. The kids sat and observed the clouds and discussed what they were seeing. A child pointed at a cloud and said,

“Look at that cloud it looks like a heart” Another child pointed to his friend to another cloud and said, “Well look at that one it looks like a hat.” Check Figure 7 in Appendix D

The kids were discussing their ideas together and then started cutting up papers into the shapes they were seeing. Kids in nature seemed to be more relaxed and excited to learn. They are more willing to share their ideas and their things. Which has been different from our observations in the classroom. For instance, we have noticed that children are less willing to share their things such as their books, crayons, and toys. We concluded that kids in a traditional classroom feel more confined and less relaxed from the way they are outdoors. For that, kids are less willing to share and discuss their thoughts with each other. When they are outdoors, they feel free and more outgoing and that is something we found to be absent from the classroom.

I, Fatima, have noticed that lots of kids were collecting things from nature. I asked some of the children who were holding things about what they wanted to do with them. One said, “I want to take them home and create things with them.” another child told me “I want to give those flowers to my best friend.” They were so excited to share what they found and to explore their creativity to create new things.

While I was observing, I saw a child collecting sticks and then doing the initials of their name. Their friend came and asked them what they were doing, and the child explained. Their friend then did the same. Kids were exploring their creativity and they were excited to create new things out of objects they found around the field. They were learning while playing.

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Check Figure 8 in Appendix D

On the 20th of March, during exploration time, which is an indoor session, I, Raya, observed a group of kg1 students playing with toys and games in centers, I noticed that they were frequently playing alone or in small groups. Even though they were communicating with each other, their play lacked the spontaneity and independence I have seen in children while playing outside. While I was observing some children in the center of the blocks, one kid got upset when another child took a block away from him. This led to a fight between the two of them, which disrupted the other kids' play. This incident shows how indoor play may occasionally result in arguments and tension, which can have a negative impact on emotional and social development. On the other hand, I remembered when I had seen a group of children in Deir El Amar playing more together and creatively, pretending to be animals or creating structures out of natural things. They collaborated to create an enjoyable play experience, being supportive of each other. The children were able to explore and experiment freely in this natural setting, which I believe facilitated the development of their social and emotional abilities, including creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork. This observation, in my opinion, suggests that outdoor play in nature offers a more favorable setting for healthy social-emotional development.

The field trips to Deir Al Amar had a significant impact on the emotional, social, and cognitive development of KG1 and KG2 children. During the field trips, the children were excited, curious, and enthusiastic, eager to explore and discover the natural environment. The positive effect of outdoor play on children's emotional development was notable. As they showed empathy and care towards animals they encountered as well as developed a sense of responsibility towards the environment. The field trips also facilitated social development, as children worked together in groups, sharing ideas, and fostering teamwork and collaboration.

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Additionally, the field trips provided opportunities for cognitive development, as children asked questions, observed their surroundings, and made connections between what they saw and their prior knowledge, demonstrating curiosity and creativity. In conclusion, the field trips had a positive impact on the children's emotional, social, and cognitive development, highlighting the importance of outdoor play and nature exploration in early childhood education. Our findings state that engaging in outdoor activities gives young children the chance to practice important socio-emotional skills including problem-solving, emotion regulation, and social engagement. From their curious questions, it was obvious that the kids were more interested in and engaged with their environment. These results are consistent with the research question and suggest possible benefits of outdoor play for young children's social and emotional abilities.

Discussion

The current study analyzed the relationship between outdoor play and the social/emotional development of young children on different levels. What we analyzed in our findings was similar to the findings discussed by the authors in the literature review section. For instance, in our observational study, we found that children expressed signs of empathy and compassion towards animals and nature. They offered to feed the animals and to care for them gently. This is a strong indication that social and emotional skills are perpetuated in outdoor environments. This finding was similar to what Mainella et al. (2011) found as outdoor play helps children become more empathetic and it is a way for them to control their emotions. This also supports what Bento and Dias (2017) discussed in their findings as children develop better skills in understanding those around them.

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This study found how much the children showed excitement, curiosity, enthusiasm, and eagerness to explore the area around them. The children were running around the field as soon as they arrived and showed their excitement by calling their friends. These are interesting findings that prove what Coe (2017) has discussed in the study. Coe (2017) also found that the children were reconnecting with their surroundings and growing in confidence and passion for learning and development because of the forest kindergarten program. Additionally, this author also documented how the children showed a variety of emotions varying between excitement and fear. This is something we have observed in our study as children established a variety of emotions as they were seeking risks which lead to more rewarding emotions such as joy like what the author has discussed.

In our findings, we discussed how the children were asking questions about things they were seeing and discovering. The children have established curiosity and creativity, and this was evident by how the children were collecting elements from nature and creating something with them. This is explicit evidence of cognitive development that Bento and Dias supported in their literature. They discussed how outdoor play contributes to the development of critical thinking. Problem-solving skills, and creativity.

Moreover, our observations have indicated that the field trips facilitated the social development of the children. They showed signs of collaboration and teamwork when they discussed their ideas and thoughts together. This is compatible with the findings of Rosiek (2020) who stated that outdoor play is an opportunity for children to face conflicts and problem-solve, engage in teamwork, and develop their social skills. This is also in line with what Nah, K. and Lee, S. (2016) found in their investigation where they discussed how outdoor play actualizes children's participation and recognizing the perspectives of others. The findings showed how

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much the children were confident and outgoing in their play. This proves that children see themselves as capable learners who can negotiate and bargain with their friends and teachers. This finding was discussed by Nah, K. and Lee, S. (2016) who also concluded that this is a demonstration that children have formed a democratic perspective. These findings show how social and civic skills are fostered in outdoor play environments.

Furthermore, an interesting finding in our review found that nature-based ECE shows more engagement in play interactions than children who were enrolled in traditional ECE indoor classrooms. (Johnstone et al., 2022). This is in alignment with what we found when we compared the behavior of children in the field trips and their indoor traditional classrooms. For example, the child refused to share their toy with their classmate, and this is a shred of evidence that indoor learning areas hinder the children's ability to share and communicate their needs. This is a result of several factors, some of which are stress, agitation, and lack of freedom. This is what Mainella et al. (2011) have also supported as loss of outdoor play causes increased stress and the inability to function socially.

Although our research was able to gather some answers to our research question, as with any other research, it has some limitations. For instance, observational research hinders the ability to control independent variables which makes it difficult to draw a cause-effect relationship. In our study, the children we have studied may have been outgoing in their nature and more social than others which allows them to engage in outdoor play instead of indoor playing causing increased social skills. Additionally, our results may not be generalized as the sample studied might have been more likely to engage in outdoor play because of the differences in social/emotional skills and cannot represent the broader population.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the present study have aligned with the findings of previous literature and proposed new findings. This observational study sheds light on how outdoor play affects young children's social and emotional growth. Children act and process information differently when playing and learning outside as compared to indoors, according to the data gathered and evaluated. According to the findings, children are more cooperative, creative, and energetic when they are playing outdoors and expressing themselves. Additionally, they show greater enthusiasm, passion, and joy.

To better understand how outdoor play affects young children's social and emotional development, future studies should take a wider range of contexts, as well as real-life experiences, into consideration. Additionally, future studies may implement different methods, qualitative and quantitative, to increase the reliability and validity of the research findings. But this research adds to the expanding body of evidence that supports the advantages of outdoor play in early childhood education. Additionally, it shows parents and teachers the benefits when children engage in more outside activities as part of their daily lives to improve their social and emotional development. The results emphasize the importance of outdoor play, in multiple areas, during the early childhood stages.

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Appendix A: Artifacts

Description of the class (e.g., time, number of people present, activities conducted)
<p>January 26, 2022- Deir Al Amar- between 9 a.m. and 12 p.m.: 2 children were looking at the flowers. Asked questions about a tree. 3 children got sticks and leaves to create shapes. One child shaped their initials with the sticks. 4 children found a group of ants and started discussing them.</p> <p>On March 13, 2023, a trip to the farm: Children learned about the many animal species, their habitats, and their habits. The children showed excitement and enthusiasm the whole trip. 5 children took turns working together. They learned about the origins of fruits and got to enjoy eating them.</p> <p>On March 6, 2023: Deir Al Amar-between 9 a.m. and 12 p.m.: As soon as we arrived, the children ran through the field with excitement. Children asked questions about holes in the ground. They then shared this with their other friends. At 10:30- 3, the children found a group of worms on the ground. They learned about caterpillars. They then decided to protect them so other children will not step on them. A child showed me a snail that they wanted to feed. A group of 4 children 11 p.m. started talking about the clouds. They asked to cut the shapes they are seeing in the clouds. Several children were collecting flowers, leaves, and pinecones to share with their siblings, parents, or teachers.</p> <p>On March 20, 2023: Classroom observation at 11: 30 p.m.: During exploration time, 2 children were fighting over toys. The children were unwilling to share their toys and take turns. The child got agitated and snapped the toy from their friend.</p>
Reflections on what was observed (e.g., patterns or trends that emerged, relationship to theoretical concepts, main takeaways to inform analysis)
<p>In the literature review, we found three themes of skills. Social, emotional, cognitive, social, and civic skills and self-regulation skills. We used interpretive processes to analyze the observational data we collected. We were able to connect what we found to the theoretical concepts we reviewed. For instance, children caring for animals, and offering to feed them, and protect them is evidence of empathy. Empathy is a sign of emotional skills. Children asking questions, creating new things from found elements in nature, and making connections with the new things they are encountering are a sign of cognitive development. In addition, the children who were unwilling to share their toys are evidence that indoor play hinders learning social and civic skills. Children discussing what they are seeing and sharing their thoughts when they saw the clouds is evidence of social development.</p>

Table 1 Example of how the data was collected.

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Appendix B: Timeline

To meet the set deadlines, we followed this tentative timeline:

February 23	Start drafting our Literature Review
February 27	Start writing our Annotated Bibliography
March 10	Finalize our Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography
April 2	Share the documented observations we collected so far
April 5	Analyze the observation and start drafting the findings
April 8	Finalize our findings
April 10	Write the data analysis section and the findings
April 30	Write the Discussion and conclusion
May 5	Finalize the paper (abstract, introduction, references, and appendix) + work on the poster
May 8	Poster presentation

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Appendix C: Photographs



Figure 1 a child discovering the ants.



Figure 2 Children in the outdoor play



Figure 3 Children running the field.



Figure 4 A child discovers the holes in the ground.



Figure 5 Children discover the worms.

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Appendix D: Photographs



Figure 6 A child points at the snail and they took it to feed it.

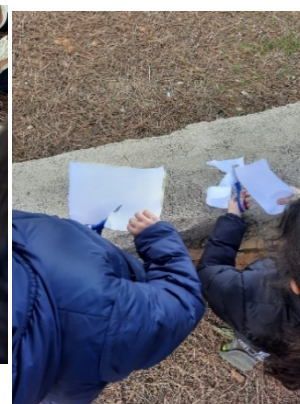


Figure 7 Children sharing their ideas.

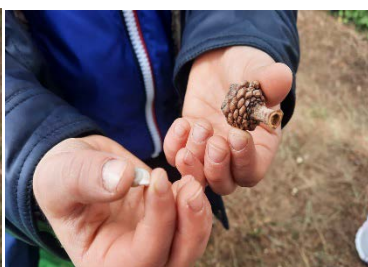


Figure 8 Things children collected and created.