QUEEN RANIA FOUNDATION
مؤسسة الملكة رانيا

Outdoor Adventure Learning

Background

The summary below presents the research evidence on outdoor adventure learning in the Arab World context.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of outdoor adventure learning on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on outdoor adventure learning in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions and how they are perceived by school leaders, teachers and students using a range of research methods. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of outdoor adventure learning interventions that have been delivered in the Arab world.

Summary of the research in the Arab World

Outdoor adventure learning is an education intervention that provides students with collaborative learning experiences and practical problem-solving opportunities. In outdoor learning students are involved in outdoor activities and experiential learning to help them deal with their psychosocial problems. International research indicates an association between outdoor adventure learning and with a number of positive physical, social and emotional outcomes for students.

There are no studies to date that explored the efficacy of these programs on academic performance in the Arab world. The existing ones mostly explored teachers' attitudes about outdoor learning. In Oman, for instance, thirty kindergarten teachers from 15 private kindergartens recognized the importance of outdoor play in children's development and learning (Ihmeideh & Al-Qaryouti, 2016). Outdoor environments provide more fundamental stimulation for all aspects of children's development. However, Omani outdoor play environments were found to face specific difficulties, such as the hot climate, a shortage of materials and equipment, a lack of natural surroundings and the short length of time spent outdoors. Additionally, kindergarten teachers reported that outdoor learning was limited to free play and very minimal structured activities because they lacked guidance on how to plan, implement and evaluate these activities.

In Saudi Arabia, however, outdoor play in schools remained uncommon and there is a clear lack of support for outdoor activities in schools (Alansari, 2015). This is mainly associated to the extreme environmental and weather conditions as in most of the Gulf region (Ihmeideh & Al-Qaryouti, 2016). Not only that but in Saudi Arabia, teachers were not familiar with the term "outdoor activities" and unacquainted with the importance of outdoor activities for students learning and their physical health. That is why Alansari (2015) recommended for significant changes to be made in support of these activities in the education system.
In another study in Jordan, Abdul Qader (1993) explored teachers' attitudes towards science field trips. 125 (83 females and 42 males) Biology teachers with bachelor's degrees in biology showed high and positive attitudes towards using field trips as educational aid to teach science. Participants responses on the questionnaires showed no differences between the attitudes of male and female

teachers. Moreover, findings of this study uncovered the obstacles to implement scientific field trips in Jordan. These were lack of resources, academic problems (i.e, the overloaded curriculum and traditional textbooks) and teachers' workload. In a similar study and same context, Menazel (2015) explored upper primary level History teachers' attitudes toward the use of school field trips as an educational aid. Teachers questionnaires (n=50) reported the use of school field trips was practiced but in a medium level to create an interactive atmosphere for students. Teachers reports that school field trips strengthen student-student and student-teacher interaction as well as creating a connection to historical sites. Teachers regarded that school field trips as an aid in teaching history, such as to boost students interest in the subject, provide them with genuine experiences, and increase awareness of historical sites. Teachers also believed that school administration needed to give more attention and support (allocate time and budget) to school field trips to become an integral part of the education system and not merely a form of entertainment.

In a quantitative study, Badri et al. (2017) examined students' out-of-school experience and their engagement in informal learning in contextual outdoor environments as an approach to enhance their interest in learning more about biology and the living environment in general.

Analysis of 3100 secondary school students questionnaires in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) reported highest correlations between out-of-school experiences and science learning. Experiential outdoor learning increased students interest in science and particularly in biology (i.e, factor related to 'plant and animal farming and agriculture'). Outdoor activities provided students with 12 out-of-school experiences for a more authentic and practical learning environment in science. For out-of-school experiences, the two factors of 'digital applications' and 'medical treatment' received the highest scores while 'health and fitness' and 'disease control' factors received the highest interests among students.

Furthermore, results showed significant differences between boys and girls. More girls than boys were interested in disease control, reproduction (human biology), alternative science, health and fitness, zoology, and applied cosmetic biology.

Due to the above-mentioned benefits of outdoor adventure learning and its importance to the development of self-confidence, self-awareness, and self- care (Alansari, 2015), it was introduced in the year 2000 in Palestine as part of the national curriculum for grades 7 to 10. As such, Environmental Education (EE) is often taught or enhanced through outdoor experience to secondary students with two session per week. EE is considered as continuous process of outdoor education, and it aims to create awareness to the world's environmental problems. When comparing the goals of EE in the 10th graded textbook with the UESCO framework, Karama (2016) found out that a partial consistency of these goals. Findings of this study recommend curriculum designers to pay attention to the quality of environmental education in Palestine in the light of UNESCO environmental education goals.

Also, in Lebanon, EE was incorporated into the state school curriculum in the late 1990s as a response to the environment changes and in efforts to curb its impact. However, there was a need to expand Environmental education to include social justice. As such, Education for Sustainable Development was incorporated in the curriculum beginning 2012. Through a comparative analysis, Dansholm Kezaride (2015) found out that the current level of EE does not make focusing on environmental issues easy for teachers and therefore negatively affected youth's knowledge, values, and attitudes of environmental issues. Hence, EE as a process of enhancing outdoor education lacks and opportunities for pro-environmental action are few.

Summary paragraph:

Evidence of outdoor adventure learning in the Arab world is scarce and limited to teacher's views and perceptions. Studies in, Jordan, Oman, and United Arab Emirates reported that teachers perceived benefits of outdoor learning for students' active and experiential learning and their social skills and attitudes towards the subject.

However, researchers have highlighted some potential barriers for teachers to use outdoor adventure learning as a teaching approach mainly due to the extreme environmental and weather conditions as in most of the Gulf region. Furthermore, shortage of resources, teachers' workload, and lack of administration support were identified as additional obstacles.

To date, research in outdoor adventure learning is limited in this region despite the reported benefits. More research is needed in this area that could examine the types of outdoor activities which would best fit with the culture, weather, and education systems in the Arab world. Further studies on improving outdoor activities in schools could include educational authorities, principals, teachers, and parents.

References

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Search Terms

Outdoor Education; adventure Learning/ activities; Outdoor learning; adventure program; wilderness; bushcraft; bush experience; field trip; field instruction; experiential Learning.

Databases searched

Academic search complete
ERIC (EBSCO)
Education Source
Google scholar
ProQuest Central
ProQuest Dissertations
Web of Science