

The use of outdoor education to support physical activity during the school day in Swedish-language primary schools in Finland

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Purpose

Schools are important arenas for promoting physical activity (PA) among children. Outdoor education (OE) has in previous studies been identified as a teaching method associated with increased PA during the school day^{a, b}. The national curriculum for basic education in Finland emphasizes the use of various teaching methods and learning environments. Still, very little is known about the use of OE in Finland.

The aim of this study was to survey the use of OE to support PA during the school day in Swedish-language primary schools in Finland and to identify possible barriers to OE.

Methods

This study is part of the LärMiljö (Learning Environment) study. Data was collected through national web-based surveys among principals and teachers in Swedish-language primary schools in Finland. The surveys were answered by principals from 82 schools (76 principals, 42% response rate at school level) and 134 teachers from 44 schools. Descriptive statistics on OE use and perceived barriers to OE are presented.

Results

Preliminary findings show that OE was used to some extent in 97% of the schools, but regularly in 41%, as reported by the principals. In the schools using OE regularly, OE was used by most or all of the teachers in 50% (figure 1) and at least weekly in 31% (figure 2) of the schools. A fifth of the responding teachers reported that they use OE regularly. Of teachers using OE, 24% reported using it weekly (figure 3). Lack of time and teachers' motivation were the most frequently reported barriers to OE use by both principals and teachers (figure 4). Only a few principals and 24% of the teachers saw the local environment as a barrier to OE. Overall, principals reported less barriers than teachers.

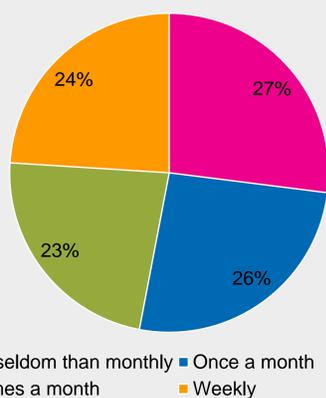


FIGURE 3 The frequency of OE use among teachers who used OE during the school year in question (2021-2022 or 2022-2023). The teachers' answers to the question "In general, how often have you been using OE during this school year?", (n=92).

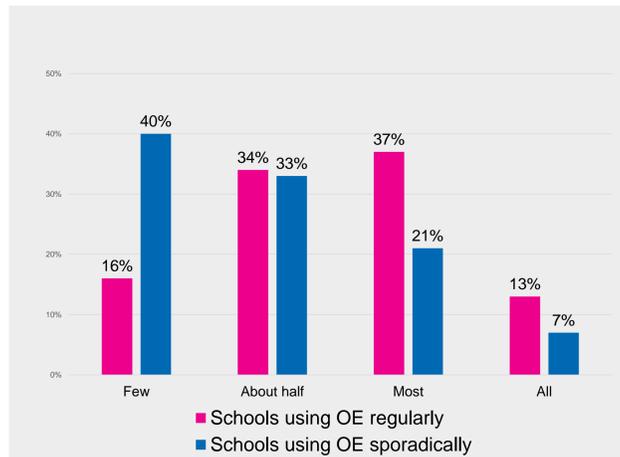


FIGURE 1 The amount of teachers that used OE in schools where OE was used regularly or sporadically, according to the principals. The principals' answers to the question "How many teachers in your school use outdoor education?", (n=75).

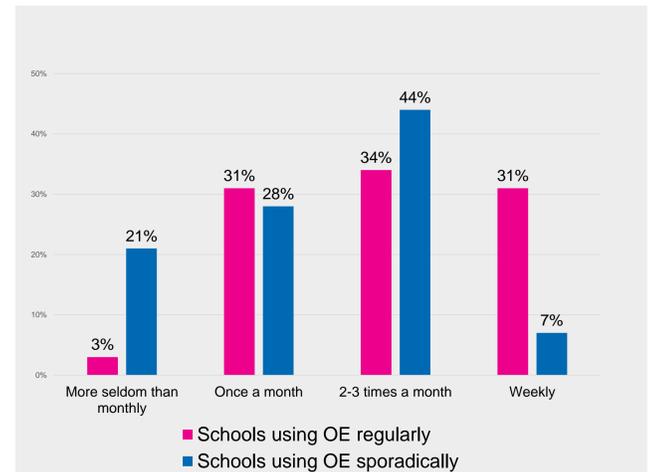


FIGURE 2 The frequency of OE use in schools where OE was used regularly or sporadically, according to the principals. The principals' answers to the question "In general, how often do these teachers use OE?", (n=75).

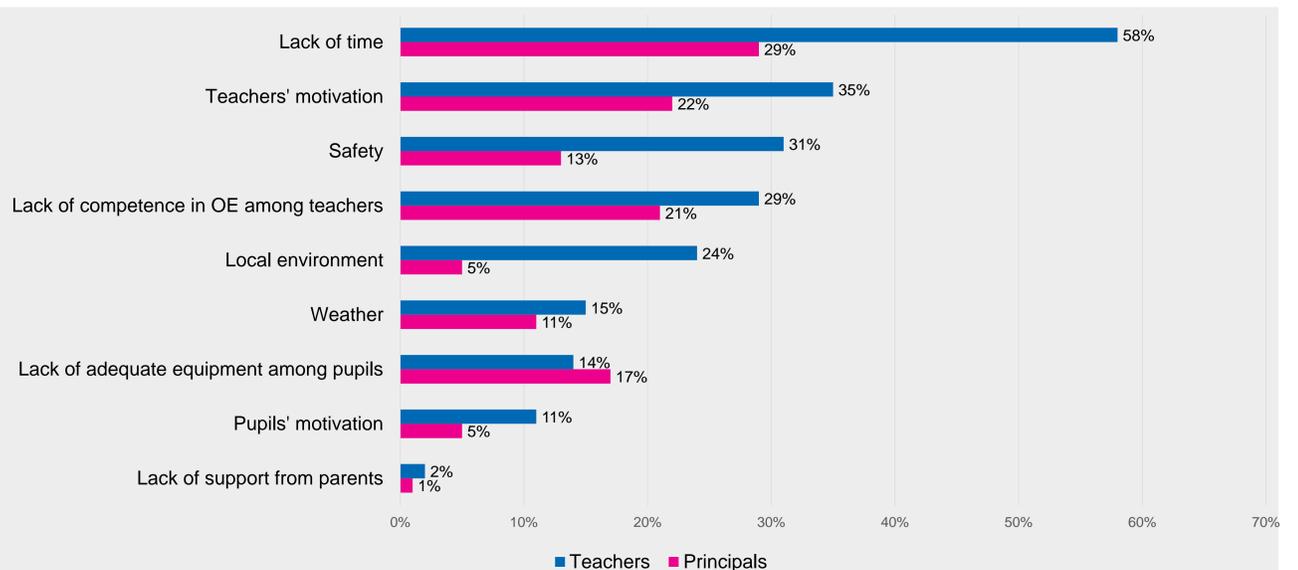


FIGURE 4 Barriers to OE use reported by teachers (n=125-128) and principals (n=75-76). The amount (%) of teachers and principals that saw the presented factors as barriers to OE use (i.e. chose the answer option "agree" or "totally agree").

Conclusions

- The findings suggest that OE is used as a teaching method in Swedish-language primary schools in Finland, though the frequency of OE use varies among schools.
- Teachers highlighted lack of time as an important barrier to implementing OE, this being in line with other international studies.
- Further research into teachers' perspectives on factors that support OE is needed to broaden understanding of OE implementation and to promote children's PA during the school day.

References

- ^a SCHNELLER ET AL. 2017. Are children participating in a quasi-experimental education outside the classroom intervention more physically active?
^b SCHNELLER ET AL. 2017. Children's physical activity during a segmented school week: results from a quasi-experimental education outside the classroom intervention.

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