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Outdoor Learning and Self-Regulation in Early Childhood: A Forest School Case Study in an EYFS Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

People widely recognise self-regulation—the capacity to manage emotions, behaviour, and attention—as a critical predictor of school readiness and later life outcomes. This poster presents a case study from an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) kindergarten that investigates how outdoor learning experiences within a Forest School framework contributed to the development of self-regulation in children aged 4 to 5. During child-led outdoor sessions that included problem-solving tasks, risk-taking activities, and collaborative play, researchers collected observational notes and teacher reflections over four weeks. Preliminary findings suggest that children participating in outdoor learning exhibited significant improvements in impulse control, turn-taking, and persistence when confronted with challenges. Activities focused on risk, such as balancing and climbing, encouraged resilience and concentration, while group challenges promoted emotional regulation and conflict resolution. This context draws on developmental psychology literature, particularly Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction and current research on early childhood executive function. The case study underscores the potential of nature-based, play-oriented pedagogy as a meaningful link between developmental psychology theory and classroom practice. Recommendations for early years educators aim to promote outdoor learning as a strategy for enhancing self-regulation, alongside suggestions for future research.

Keywords: self-regulation, outdoor learning, early childhood, Forest School, developmental psychology