



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF  
MODERN EDUCATION  
(IJMOE)  
[www.ijmoe.com](http://www.ijmoe.com)



## AN EXPLORATION OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND THE SHAPING OF NATIONAL VALUES IN SINGAPORE

Zhu Meilan<sup>1\*</sup>, Ateerah Abdul Razak<sup>2</sup>, Nur Hafifah Jamalludin<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Language Studies and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia  
Email: 374896347@qq.com

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Language Studies and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia  
Email: Ateerah@umk.edu.my

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Language Studies and Human Development, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan, Malaysia  
Email: Hafifah@umk.edu.my

\* Corresponding Author

### Article Info:

#### Article history:

Received date: 26.06.2025

Revised date: 14.07.2025

Accepted date: 25.08.2025

Published date: 04.09.2025

#### To cite this document:

Zhu, M., Abdul Razak, A., & Jamalludin, N. H. (2025). An Exploration of Outdoor Education and the Shaping of National Values in Singapore. *International Journal of Modern Education*, 7 (26), 488-494.

DOI: 10.35631/IJMOE.726032

This work is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



### Abstract:

Outdoor education plays a key role in cultivating national values. Singapore's outdoor education system is closely linked to the cultivation of national values and is of great significance. Starting from the educational objectives, this study explores how the national educational objectives at different stages of Singapore's post-independence period have affected the requirements for outdoor education and national values. The aim is to provide a reference for the study of education in China.

### Keywords:

Outdoor Education; National Values; Educational Purposes

## Introduction

With the introduction of all kinds of electronic products into homes, more and more young people are addicted to the virtual world of television, mobile phones, animation and games. 'Nature deficit disorder' has become a common modern disease of humanity in the age of globalisation (Fletcher, 2017). And the lack of experience of nature is prone to sensory degradation, resulting in increased rates of obesity, attention disorders, depression and other pathologies that affect the physical and mental health of children (Pretty et al., 2009). Outdoor learning is essential for the development of young people and is the cure for 'nature deficiency' (Franco et al., 2017; McCurdy et al., 2010).

Outdoor education travel is of great significance to the healthy growth of today's youth and the development of national quality (Bakar et al., 2024). The development of modern educational travel in China is still at the initial stage of active exploration under the vigorous promotion of national policies, and the prospect and direction of future development are still uncertain. The development of outdoor education in Singapore is more mature, which is a good reference for China to carry out youth educational travel. Analysing and learning from Singapore's outdoor education development experience and influencing factors can play a certain reference role in completing China's educational travel development system.

## The Development of Outdoor Education in Singapore at Different Stages of History Building a Solid Nation Stage

In 1965, Singapore was forced to secede from Malaysia to form the Republic of Singapore. After independence, Singapore was faced with internal and external problems: politically, its racial diversity led to more conflicts and contradictions within the country; economically, it lacked agricultural conditions and had a weak investment base, and had to rely on trading and entrepot trade; diplomatically, it faced a major national defence crisis as a result of the accelerated withdrawal of British troops and poor relations with neighbouring countries. Survival became a major concern and a pressing issue for the entire population. Thus, the need to build up the country's defence capability, based on its unique history, also arose. Singapore's educational objectives at this stage revolve around building the country's defence force (Birger et al., 2008).

In response to this call, Singapore has embraced the British philosophy of outdoor education, drawing on its theories of character development and even war and combat readiness to build resilient citizens (Martin & Ho, 2009). The aims and philosophy of outdoor education have directly shaped what and how outdoor education is taught and practised in Singaporean schools.

## *Form And Content Of Outdoor Education*

Outdoor education in primary and secondary schools in Singapore during this period was based on outdoor military adventure activities, with the Outward Bound School (OBS) as the main delivery organisation. The Outward Bound School of Singapore (OBS), established in 1967, was administered by the Ministry of Defence from 1969 to 1990. Its main objective at the time was to prepare boys for military service through group outdoor training, which was an important part of the national military service programme, and was regarded as a 'rite of passage' for Singaporean males entering military training at the age of 18 (Abdul, 2018; Ho, 2014).

Since 1982, in order to develop strong and confident boys who will be more adaptable to military service when they join the armed forces, all boys in the National Youth Corps have been required to undergo rigorous training which, in addition to the Outward Bound School programme, includes military training activities such as marksmanship, rifle marksmanship, map reading or field orienteering, campcraft training and weekend camping. In addition to the Outward Bound School programme, the training included military training activities such as marksmanship, rifle marksmanship, map reading or field orienteering, campcraft training and weekend camping. Later, such activities were gradually extended to girls. Outdoor education promotes the physical, mental and emotional training and development of young people and creates resilient, courageous citizens who are not afraid of challenges (Chalman, 2019; Orson et al., 2020).

### **Focus On The ‘National Consciousness’ Stage**

In the 1990s, Singapore emerged from an existential crisis. With the rapid rise of the economy and the significant improvement in people's living standards, the focus of outdoor education on developing militaristic character values such as 'toughness' is problematic (Martin & Ho, 2009). Many problems have arisen, especially at the level of national values. In the face of new problems, Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, believed that focusing on developing a sense of nationhood among Singaporeans is the key to building a good nation (Quah, 2015; Udoh). The Singaporean government and scholars usually refer to patriotism as 'national consciousness'. The so-called 'national consciousness' is people's sense of belonging and identification with their own country. Cultivating national consciousness means uniting all citizens under the banner of One Nation, One State, One Singapore' to fight for Singapore. Cultivating national consciousness is essentially about shaping the kind of 'Singaporean' (Beng-Huat, 2005). At this stage, the Singapore Government and its leaders have attached great importance to the cultivation of national consciousness and education in school education, and have always insisted on the primacy of national consciousness as the foundation of Singapore's nationhood and its founding (Ortmann, 2009).

Outdoor education has been adjusted in terms of content and intensity in response to the objectives of National Consciousness Education (NCE). In Singapore, national awareness education has been introduced in primary and secondary schools since 1997 to enable every Singaporean to develop a fuller and more thorough understanding of the small size of the country, the scarcity of natural resources and the multiculturalism of the country during the 10 to 12 years of their schooling, thereby fostering a spirit of dedication to the country (Birger et al., 2008). The Ministry of Education (MOE) spent six months and S\$400,000 to develop this National Awareness Programme. It is divided into two main components: firstly, a 20-episode educational television programme called 'We Are Singapore Citizens'. The aim is to inculcate six core concepts in students' beliefs: community spirit, allegiance and belonging, survivability in the global community, law and order, realistic expectations, power and responsibility. Students from Primary One to Secondary Four are required to watch this television programme. Secondly, schools are required to take primary and secondary students on outdoor visits to national monuments and regional study tours programmes. They learn about the origins and customs of different ethnic groups, the limitations of Singapore and the survival skills required, so that students can appreciate what they have achieved.

### ***Implementation Of Outdoor Education***

Since April 1991, when Outward Bound Singapore (OBS) was taken over by the People's Association under the Ministry of Community Development and Sports, it has refocused its objectives in a similar way to the International Outward Bound Trust. Individual growth and team development of young Singaporeans have become the pillars of the OBS programme. A major step in Singapore's outdoor education policy for primary and secondary schools from the military training period to the outdoor recreation period is the restructuring of the physical education curriculum at the junior college (post-secondary) level, i.e. the Outdoor Education Department (OED) has reorganised the curriculum. It is hoped that by reforming the training of PE teachers, the outdoor education programme will be introduced into primary and secondary schools from top to bottom. With the confirmation and implementation of the camping policy at secondary school level, the main types of activities for the implementation of outdoor education in primary and secondary schools at government level during this period have been established. At the same time, a series of reforms at the Outward Bound Centre have laid the foundations for further promoting the implementation of outdoor adventure programmes in primary and secondary schools, including both domestic and overseas programmes, and for achieving implementation in primary and secondary schools. With more outdoor learning opportunities, pupils will be able to gain a deeper understanding of the local environment as well as the local culture, increasing their sense of local belonging and cultural affiliation (Fägerstam, 2012). Educational outcomes such as improved physical health and well-being, sense of place, risk assessment and coping skills will be realised.

### ***Promotion of the Whole Person Stage of Education***

Ho (2011) describes how the former Minister for Education, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, claimed that Singapore's lifestyle seemed to make young people 'weak', posing a major social challenge for the country (Ho, 2011). The Ministry of Education (MOE) promotes a form of outdoor education that aims to provide students with a holistic and broad-based educational experience, and during a parliamentary debate on the education budget in March 2004, the then Senior Minister of State for Education pointed out that "strenuous activities" such as sports, adventure camps and expeditions are "naturally good for developing qualities such as perseverance, self-reliance, a sense of adventure, self-confidence and a can-do, positive spirit". These are all important for the challenges we will face in life" (Ho, 2014).

The current Minister for Education, Mr Ng Chee Meng, stated that 'students gain important values and life lessons outdoors that they cannot learn in the classroom'. Outdoor learning can achieve desired educational outcomes and prepare learners for the 21st century (Kwek et al., 2023).

Singapore launched a new round of education reforms in 2018, with the concept of 'Learning for 21st Century Living' as the vision to 'develop confident Singaporeans', 'build a competitive Singapore' and 'build a cohesive society' (Ministry of Education, 2018). As in the past, the Singapore government is a strong advocate of outdoor activities and continues to see adventure-based outdoor education programmes such as adventure camps and expeditions as a useful medium for developing important life skills and qualities in students.

### ***Educational Initiatives***

Since 2016, MOE has established its own team of outdoor instructors to deliver high-quality outdoor education programmes. The team overhauled the training and development of outdoor

instructors by collaborating with staff from the Singapore Outreach Centre and the School of Outdoor and Adventure Learning at Republic Polytechnic's School of Sport, Health and Recreation to provide bespoke training for MOE outdoor instructors to equip them with the skills to design and deliver outdoor education programmes (Abdul, 2018). The media (Straits Times, 2016) reported on the MOE's plan to send all Form 3 students (an estimated 33,000 students at each level) to outreach training programmes from 2020. The MOE mandated that from 2020, teams of outdoor coaches would only work with the Singapore Outward Bound Centre to provide outdoor experiences for all Form 3 students. The SOC was recently handed over to the National Youth Council under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth to better coordinate its focus in support of Singapore's National Education Strategy. Today, outdoor education in Singapore has developed its own well-established *modus operandi* in three main areas: outdoor adventure activities, environmental education and personal and social development. Outdoor adventure activities and personal and social development make up the bulk of the programme compared to environmental education (Tan & Atencio, 2016).

### **Implications for the Development of Outdoor Education in Singapore**

Outdoor education contributes to the development of national values. With a focus on building resilience and adaptability in students, outdoor education aims to sharpen the individual's physical strength and will, foster a spirit of self-improvement and responsibility, promote a sense of belonging and identity at the level of national consciousness, and build a competitive Singapore and national cohesion in the face of the challenges of 21st century development. With the challenges of development in the 21st century and the need to build a competitive Singapore and national cohesion, outdoor education has become an important part of developing important life skills and qualities in students. Against the backdrop of the great changes of the century, the development of outdoor education at different stages of Singapore's History Educational Trip has the following implications for the development of outdoor education in China:

#### ***Outdoor Education Development Should Be Based on National Conditions***

At various stages in Singapore's history, outdoor education in Singapore has been prioritised by the country's national interest and has been redirected according to the national context. Singapore has always insisted on outdoor education to hone its young people and foster a positive attitude towards adventure and hardship, using outdoor activities to develop young people's resilience to war and the spirit of hard work. Later, it was to build a 'hardworking' society. Singapore's Ministry of Education has shifted its early emphasis on building resilience through outdoor education to a more inclusive focus, so that every child can develop the resilience to thrive in a globalised environment. At present, China's outdoor education is still in a relatively backward stage, although the national policy support, but many secondary schools because of the impact of various factors, the implementation of the still difficult, with a lot of room for improvement and broad prospects for development. Based on Singapore's experience, we should promote research education to proactively respond to the realistic needs of national development.

#### ***Outdoor Education Development Needs to Improve the School Education System***

The development of outdoor education in Singapore has so far formed a more complete curriculum system in schools by updating outdoor education initiatives and policies. It also relies on extracurricular activity bases to implement it, forming a system that combines both in-school and out-of-school activities. At present, outdoor education in primary and secondary



schools in China is still on the periphery of formal education, with little practical impact, and its role in individual development is difficult to fully realise. From Singapore's experience, outdoor education should be given a proper place in the current curriculum system, its specific educational objectives and curriculum content should be planned, and the quality of resources, joint teacher training, curriculum development and other aspects should be worked on. This will enable outdoor education to gradually enter students' learning careers, enrich young people's life experiences and fully play the role that outdoor education should play.

### ***Emphasis on Shaping Human Character Through Outdoor Education***

Singapore's lack of natural resources has led its leaders to make its people the country's greatest asset. Singapore's leaders have concluded that to survive, Singapore must be tougher, more disciplined, more organised and more flexible than other countries. On the contrary, China's outdoor education has very limited quantity, quality, breadth and depth of resources both in and out of school, low level of cooperation, and problems such as unsound management systems, low satisfaction with services, and lack of supporting facilities such as educational resources (Zhao, 2016). The baton of exam-oriented education still exists, and insufficient attention is still paid to the formation of national core value literacy.

### **Conclusion**

From the above analyses, it can be seen that outdoor education in Singapore has played a significant role in shaping the national character. Different character-building orientations have been constructed at different stages of Singapore's historical development. From sharpening the individual's physique and will, to enhancing the sense of national belonging and identity, to shaping the comprehensive literacy of the 21st century. Outdoor education has been a strong support for Singapore in cultivating quality nationals. At present, China's study tour is still in its infancy, with great room for improvement and broad prospects for development. Drawing on Singapore's experience, we should promote outdoor education to proactively respond to the real needs of national transformation.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my supervisors Dr Ateerah and Dr Hafifah for their careful guidance and sincerely appreciate their help in structuring the framework of the thesis.

### **Reference**

- Abdul, K. (2018). Nature and scope of outdoor education in the city-state of Singapore.
- Bakar, R. A., Fitri, M., Hidayat, Y., Ma'mun, A., & Lardika, R. A. (2024). The effectiveness of outdoor education on positive youth development and 21st century skills. *Journal Sport Area*, 9(3), 440-450.
- Beng-Huat, C. (2005). Culture, multiracialism, and national identity in Singapore. In *Trajectories* (pp. 166-183). Routledge.
- Birger, F., Lee, S. K., & Goh, C. B. (2008). *Toward a better future: Education and training for economic development in Singapore since 1965*. World Bank Publications.
- Chalman, C.-A. (2019). *Resilience, Adolescents and Outdoor Education: Is Resilience Context Specific?* Victoria University].
- Fägerstam, E. (2012). *Space and Place Perspectives on outdoor teaching and learning*. Linköping Universitet (Sweden).
- Fletcher, R. (2017). Connection with nature is an oxymoron: A political ecology of "nature-deficit disorder". *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 48(4), 226-233.

- Franco, L. S., Shanahan, D. F., & Fuller, R. A. (2017). A review of the benefits of nature experiences: More than meets the eye. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 14(8), 864.
- Ho, S. (2011). The purposes and functions of outdoor education in Singaporean education and society: An instrumental case study. *Doctoral Unpublished*, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria.
- Ho, S. (2014). The purposes outdoor education does, could and should serve in Singapore. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 14(2), 153-171.
- Kwek, D., Ho, J., & Wong, H. M. (2023). Singapore's Educational Reforms toward Holistic Outcomes:(Un) Intended Consequences of Policy Layering. Case Study. *Center for Universal Education at The Brookings Institution*.
- Martin, P., & Ho, S. (2009). Seeking resilience and sustainability: Outdoor education in Singapore. *Journal of Adventure Education & Outdoor Learning*, 9(1), 79-92.
- McCurdy, L. E., Winterbottom, K. E., Mehta, S. S., & Roberts, J. R. (2010). Using nature and outdoor activity to improve children's health. *Current problems in pediatric and adolescent health care*, 40(5), 102-117.
- Ministry of Education, S. (2018). Framework for 21st century competencies and student outcomes.
- Orson, C. N., McGovern, G., & Larson, R. W. (2020). How challenges and peers contribute to social-emotional learning in outdoor adventure education programs. *Journal of adolescence*, 81, 7-18.
- Ortmann, S. (2009). Singapore: The politics of inventing national identity. *Journal of current Southeast Asian affairs*, 28(4), 23-46.
- Pretty, J., Angus, C., Bain, M., Barton, J., Gladwell, V., Hine, R., & Sellens, M. (2009). Nature, childhood, health and life pathways. *Occasional Paper*, 2, 202009-202002.
- Quah, J. S. (2015). Lee Kuan Yew's enduring legacy of good governance in Singapore, 1959-2015. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 4(4), 374-393.
- Tan, Y. S. M., & Atencio, M. (2016). Unpacking a place-based approach—"What lies beyond?" Insights drawn from teachers' perceptions of Outdoor Education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 56, 25-34.
- Udoh, P. N. Lee Kuan Yew Political Idea And The Growth of Singapore.
- Zhao, H. (2016). Chinese Primary School Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Outdoor Education. In.