JURNAL PAUD AGAPEDIA

Journal homepage: https://ejournal-tasikmalaya.upi.edu/agapedia/index

Implementation of Outdoor Learning Environment as Active Learning Strategy on Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Outdoor learning environments have become one of the learning strategies capable of creating active and enjoyable learning experiences for early childhood children. However, the implementation of outdoor learning in early childhood education institutions is still not optimal because most learning activities remain focused inside the classroom. In addition, studies discussing the implementation of outdoor learning environments as an active learning strategy for early childhood education, especially in Banda Aceh, are still limited. The novelty of this study focuses on teachers' experiences and perspectives regarding the implementation of outdoor learning in improving children's active participation. This study used a descriptive research design and a qualitative methodology. The study was carried out on April 20, 2026, in several early childhood education institutions in Banda Aceh involving 10 PAUD teachers as respondents. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The findings revealed that outdoor learning environments were able to increase children's activeness, social interaction, motor skills, and create more enjoyable and less monotonous learning situations. However, several obstacles were found, including weather conditions, limited facilities, and the need for more intensive supervision during outdoor activities. In conclusion, outdoor learning environments can be considered as an effective active learning strategy for early childhood education.

Keywords: *outdoor learning environment, active learning, early childhood education, PAUD, qualitative learning*

INTRODUCTION

Originally, early childhood learning must be designed to be active, concrete, and meaningful. Children do not learn effectively merely by sitting quietly, listening to teacher instructions, and completing classroom assignments. In early childhood learning, direct experiences, physical activities, environmental exploration, and direct interaction with surrounding objects and individuals facilitate conceptual understanding. Based on the explanation above, active learning is mandatory in early childhood education because children learn best when participating directly in the learning process rather than passively receiving information (Mulyasa, 2022; Yusuf, 2019).

Early childhood learning must inherently be planned in an active, concrete, and meaningful manner. Children do not acquire knowledge optimally by remaining sedentary, listening to teacher lectures, and executing classroom tasks. At this developmental stage, hands-on experiences,

physical engagement, environmental exploration, and direct interactions with people and proximal objects assist children in understanding the subject matter. Therefore, active learning is one of critical importance in early education.

Active learning is an approach that emphasizes the direct involvement of learners in the educational process through activities that stimulate both physical and mental engagement. This method is highly vital for early childhood education because children construct knowledge through concrete experiences, exploration, and interaction with their surrounding environment. Previous research indicates that active learning enhances children's engagement, motivation, and critical thinking skills, as they do not merely absorb information but actively construct knowledge through firsthand experiences (Laely et al., 2023; Luthfy et al., 2023). Furthermore, active learning is closely aligned with the constructivist approach, which posits that knowledge is generated through interactions with the environment and peers; thus, activities such as play, observation, and exploration become critical components in the early childhood learning process (Rohmawati et al., 2025; Sudaryanti & Prayitno, 2023). Accordingly, the implementation of active learning by utilizing the outdoor environment can serve as an effective strategy to optimally support children's cognitive, social, and motor development.

An outdoor learning environment is a specific pedagogical setting that aligns closely with the developmental needs of early childhood. Outdoor environments encompass school yards, parks, gardens, playgrounds, and other open spaces utilized for educational purposes. Outdoor learning does not merely entail relocating indoor activities outside the classroom; rather, it represents a pedagogical approach that provides children with opportunities to learn through direct experience, play, exploration, and observation. Outdoor activities allow children greater freedom of movement, exposure to natural phenomena, familiarity with their surroundings, and the acquisition of knowledge via direct engagement (Laely et al., 2023; Luthfy et al., 2023).

Child development within outdoor environments yields numerous benefits. Outdoor learning can enhance social connectivity, foster curiosity, improve gross motor skills, and support cognitive and language development through concrete experiences. Furthermore, outdoor learning promotes student creativity, independence, concentration, and enthusiasm. When learning occurs in an open, enjoyable environment proximate to children's real-world contexts, they tend to exhibit greater activity, enjoyment, and engagement (Rohmawati et al., 2025; Sudaryanti & Prayitno, 2023). Thus, the outdoor environment can serve as an essential instrument to facilitate active learning that corresponds to the innate nature of children.

Utilizing the outdoor environment also offers substantial advantages for child development within the learning process. Outdoor learning cultivates student independence, creativity, concentration, and enthusiasm, while simultaneously enhancing social interaction and gross motor skills. Learning in an open, engaging environment that mirrors children's real-world lives tend to augment their participation, activity levels, and overall engagement (Rohmawati et al., 2025; Sudaryanti & Prayitno, 2023). As a result, the outdoor environment plays a pivotal role in enabling active learning that aligns with early childhood characteristics.

Based on these circumstances, it is imperative to conduct research on how learning within outdoor environments can foster active learning in early childhood. This scholarly discussion is necessary to ensure that early childhood educators no longer view the outdoor environment merely as a recreational playground, but rather as a contextual, experience-rich, and meaningful learning space. When implemented appropriately, the outdoor environment can serve as an excellent pedagogical methodology to support holistic child development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The study aimed to enhance the understanding of utilizing outdoor learning spaces as an active learning strategy for early childhood learning. The focus of this research is to understand naturally occurring social phenomena by engaging directly with the research subjects and the environment under investigation. Sugiyono (2023) asserts that researchers utilize qualitative research as the primary instrument to collect and analyze data to examine the conditions of natural objects.

This research was conducted on April 20, 2026, across several early childhood education (PAUD) institutions in Banda Aceh. A purposive sampling technique was used to determine research sites, focusing on early childhood institutions that have integrated outdoor learning activities into their curricula. Ten early childhood educators were also selected as research subjects through a purposive selection process, which involved choosing informants based on specific criteria aligned with the research objectives. The selected teachers possessed experience in implementing outdoor learning and demonstrated an understanding of active learning approaches for early childhood.

Data collection was obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observations were conducted to examine the outdoor learning process, children's participation in activities, and teacher-student interactions in fostering active learning. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the early childhood teachers to obtain deeper insights into the utilization of outdoor learning, its benefits for child development, and the challenges encountered by teachers during the implementation (Agustini et al., 2023).

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument that collects data directly in the field. This aligns with the with Riasnugrahani and Analya (2023) who mention that qualitative research centers on the use of methodical approaches—comprising observation, interviews, and data analysis—to explore meanings and acquire a more profound understanding of a phenomenon.

Data analysis encompassed data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To facilitate the understanding of the findings, data from observations, interviews, and documentation were first selected and simplified according to the research objectives before being presented descriptively. The final step involved drawing conclusions based on the research findings regarding the utilization of outdoor learning environments as an active learning method for early childhood education (Sugiyono, 2022).

The validity of the data in this study was established through source and technical triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing data obtained from different early childhood educators, while technical triangulation involved cross verifying the results of observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure that the gathered data were valid and consistent (Miles et al., 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Enhancing Chidlren's Activeness through Outdoor Learnig

Based on the interviews conducted with 10 early childhood teachers in Banda Aceh, the findings revealed that outdoor learning environments significantly enhanced children's activeness during the educational process. The teachers reported that children appeared more enthusiastic, physically active, and more readily engaged in learning activities when instruction was conducted outside the classroom. Children also exhibited higher levels of curiosity compared to when learning took place indoors.

One teacher noted that children comprehended instructional material more rapidly when they could directly observe and interact with the learning objects in the surrounding environment. Outdoor learning provides children with opportunities to learn through tangible experiences, thereby creating

a more enjoyable and less monotonous learning atmosphere.

The result of this study is in line with research by Maynard (2022) and Rohmawati et al. (2025), which asserts that outdoor learning enhances children's active engagement because they acquire direct learning experiences from their proximal environment. Instruction involving real-world experiences also assists children in maintaining focus and remaining active throughout the educational activities (Maynard, 2022).

Chidlren's Social Skills Development

The interview results also demonstrated that outdoor learning supports the development of social skills in early childhood. Teachers explained that children interacted, cooperated, and communicated more actively with their peers when activities were shifted outdoors. Several teachers further noted that children who were typically reserved became more expressive and actively participated in group activities.

Activities such as group games, school environment exploration, and collaborative tasks were deemed effective in building children's self-confidence and enhancing their social communication skills. The outdoor environment offers a less restrictive space for children to express themselves and interact naturally with their peers.

These findings are supported by research from Ali et al. (2023) and Dankiw et al. (2020), which demonstrates that playing and learning activities in open nature can improve social capacity, cooperation, and communication skills in early childhood. The outdoor environment provides a broader scope of social experiences compared to indoor classroom settings (Dankiw et al., 2020).

Outdoor Learning and Chidlren's Motor Development

In addition to social development, the research findings indicated that outdoor learning contributes positively to children's motor development. Teachers reported that activities such as sand play, walking around the school yard, relay games, and environmental exploration tasks helped children become more physically active.

Instructional activities outside the classroom enable children to utilize their limbs more optimally, thereby facilitating better gross motor development. Children were observed to move more freely, jump, run, and engage in other physical activities during outdoor learning sessions.

These results align with the findings of Qadafi (2023) and Rakhmania et al. (2023), which state that outdoor environments play a critical role in enhancing gross motor development and movement coordination through active play in open nature. Natural environments offer physical challenges that can stimulate early childhood motor progression (Fjørtoft, 2021).

Obstacles in Implementing Outdoor Learning

Despite the numerous benefits provided by outdoor learning, interview data indicated that teachers still encounter several constraints during its execution. Weather conditions constitute the primary impediment, as outdoor activities become difficult to conduct during rain or excessively hot weather. Furthermore, several early childhood institutions face limitations regarding adequate facilities and outdoor play spaces.

Teachers also explained that the supervision of children during outdoor activities must be conducted more intensively because children tend to be more active and difficult to control outside the classroom. Consequently, teachers must establish clear rules and structured activities to ensure that the educational process proceeds smoothly.

These findings are supported by Ernst and Tornabene (2021), who explain that the success of outdoor learning is influenced by the readiness of school facilities, environmental conditions, and the competence of teachers in managing outdoor instruction.

Adequate infrastructural support and meticulous lesson planning are critical factors for the successful implementation of outdoor learning (Ernst & Tornabene, 2021).

Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning Environments as an Active Learning Strategy

The result of this study demonstrates that the outdoor learning environment is an effective strategy for supporting active learning in early childhood. Outdoor learning increases student participation, develops social and motor skills, and fosters a more enjoyable and meaningful learning atmosphere.

Through outdoor learning, children do not merely absorb theoretical instructional content; they gain firsthand experiences that help them understand their surrounding environment. Early childhood educators in Banda Aceh perceive that learning activities outside the classroom exert a positive impact on child development and can serve as an alternative strategy for more active and engaging early childhood education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the research conducted across several early childhood education (PAUD) institutions in Banda Aceh, it can be concluded that the outdoor learning environment is an effective active learning strategy for early childhood. Outdoor learning enhances children's activeness during the learning process, as evidenced by increased enthusiasm, participation, and involvement in various educational activities. Children become more physically active, show greater confidence in social interactions, and comprehend instructional material more easily through direct learning experiences in the surrounding environment.

The interview results from 10 early childhood teachers indicate that outdoor learning not only supports cognitive development but also aids the social and motor progression of young children. Educational activities outside the classroom provide opportunities for children to cooperate, communicate, and explore the environment with greater freedom, thereby rendering the learning experience more enjoyable and meaningful.

Nevertheless, the implementation of outdoor learning still faces several challenges, including weather factors, facility limitations, and the necessity for more intensive teacher supervision during activities. Therefore, environmental readiness within schools, supporting facilities, and meticulous pedagogical planning are required to optimize outdoor learning.

In conclusion, this study indicates that outdoor learning environments can serve as an effective alternative learning strategy to generate active learning in early childhood and support comprehensive, holistic child development.

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