



Outdoor Learning as a Strategy to Improve Young Children's Language Development

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the implementation of Outdoor Learning (ODL) as a strategy to enhance early childhood language development at Aisyiyah Cakru Playground, Jember. Grounded in the view that early language abilities are fundamental to cognitive, social, and academic growth, ODL was introduced through contextual activities such as visiting a traditional market and exploring a local herbal garden. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents, and documentation of children's learning activities. The findings show that ODL provides authentic, meaningful, and multisensory learning experiences that significantly improve children's receptive and expressive language skills, including vocabulary acquisition, sentence formation, confidence in communication, and spontaneous verbal interaction. These results align with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning, demonstrating that real-world engagement strengthens language use through social interaction and experiential stimuli. The study concludes that ODL is an effective and relevant pedagogical approach for supporting early language development, particularly in rural PAUD settings rich in local environmental resources.

Keywords: *Outdoor Learning; Early Childhood Education; Language Development; Experiential Learning; Qualitative Study; Contextual Learning.*

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) plays a crucial role in supporting children's holistic development (Bisma et al., 2023; I. P. Sari et al., 2023; Warmansyah et al., 2025). Early childhood is a critical phase for establishing cognitive, social, emotional, and language foundations (Efrideanti et al., 2025; D. A. Sari et al., 2025; Wahyuni et al., 2023). One of the most fundamental aspects is language development, as it serves as the main medium for communication, learning, and building social relationships (Desmita et al., 2023; Laela et al., 2023). Well-developed language skills influence academic achievement, the ability to express ideas, and the capacity to build healthy social interactions. In this context, PAUD holds a strategic role in nurturing children's language abilities through a structured learning environment supported by active involvement of teachers and parents (Aisyah et al., 2024).

The language development of young children is not a simple process but rather the result of complex interactions among various factors such as language diversity, socioeconomic conditions, and exposure to digital media (Nurqodriah et al., 2023;

Schoppmann et al., 2023; Syarfina et al., 2024). These challenges may create language barriers that affect children's social and emotional development. For example, linguistic diversity in the home environment can lead to confusion if not managed properly. However, multilingualism also has positive effects on children's thinking skills and cognitive flexibility, thereby requiring adaptive learning strategies (Tomora, 2024).

One important factor in supporting language development is the learning method applied. Appropriate pedagogical approaches can provide meaningful, rich, and enjoyable learning experiences. The integration of various learning models such as constructivist, experiential, collaborative, and project-based learning has been shown to improve children's language abilities. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of any method is strongly influenced by sociocultural contexts and learner characteristics, thus necessitating inclusive and contextual teaching strategies (Kırbaş, n.d.).

Outdoor Learning (ODL) is one approach that is highly relevant to the developmental needs of young children. ODL utilizes the outdoor environment as a learning resource, allowing children to learn directly through exploration and concrete experiences. Outdoor activities not only enrich cognitive experiences but also support motor development, physical and mental health, and ecological awareness. The high level of engagement in ODL makes it an enjoyable and effective learning strategy (Craig et al., 2024).

However, the implementation of ODL in practice still faces various challenges. Many early childhood teachers recognize its potential, yet remain limited in terms of training, activity planning, and optimal use of the environment as a learning resource (Golubović-ilić & Mikarić, 2023). In fact, research has shown that children tend to use more complex sentence structures and interact more actively when learning outdoors than in the classroom (Novikova et al., 2023).

In the context of this study, Outdoor Learning (ODL) was implemented through activities closely related to children's daily lives, such as shopping at a traditional market and visiting an empon-empon (herbal) garden. These activities provide authentic learning experiences, enabling children to observe, interact, and communicate directly with both social and natural environments. During the market visit, children learned about transaction concepts, types of goods, and practiced using language to interact with vendors. In the empon-empon garden visit, they enriched their vocabulary by observing plants, smelling herbal scents, and engaging in conversations with the farmer. Such activities foster both receptive and expressive language skills while simultaneously nurturing curiosity, self-confidence, and social competencies. Most previous studies have tended to highlight the general impact of ODL on children's overall development, without examining its specific effects on language skills (Lindfors et al., 2021; A. N. I. Sari, 2016). This research gap forms the basis for the present study.

This study aims to describe the implementation of outdoor learning activities in improving early childhood language skills at Aisyiyah Cakru Playground, Kencong, Jember. The institution is situated in a rural social and environmental context that holds strong potential as a learning resource (Shama, 2025). Through this research, it is expected that empirical insights will be obtained regarding effective and contextual ODL practices, while

also providing innovative contributions to language learning practices in early childhood education settings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at understanding and portraying in depth the implementation of outdoor learning in enhancing young children's language abilities. A qualitative approach was selected because it emphasizes natural settings, participant perspectives, and contextual interpretation. It allows researchers to explore social phenomena through interactive methodologies that prioritize participants' lived experiences (Anggarani et al., 2022). The descriptive design was used to systematically describe factual characteristics of outdoor learning activities and the language development observed, without manipulating variables or establishing causal relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). In this approach, the researcher functions as the primary instrument, directly involved in field data collection to capture the meaning behind interactions and learning processes, which contributes to the validity and depth of the findings.

Research Site and Duration

The study was conducted at Aisyiyah Cakru Playground, located in Igir-Igir Hamlet, Cakru Village, Kencong District, Jember Regency. The site was selected because the institution actively implements outdoor learning as part of its early childhood learning activities. The school's openness to research and the availability of relevant data further supported this selection. The research was carried out over a three-month period, from March to May 2025, allowing the researcher to observe outdoor learning activities and children's language development comprehensively.

Research Subjects and Focus

The subjects of this study consisted of 10 children aged 3–4 years from KB I Aisyiyah Cakru. Two classroom teachers and four parents also served as key informants to provide a broader understanding of the implementation and effects of outdoor learning. The research focus was the application of outdoor learning as a method to enhance children's speaking, listening, and expressive abilities through real-life and meaningful learning experiences.

Research Procedure

The research procedure followed several systematic stages. First, the preparation stage involved obtaining institutional permission and developing research instruments such as observation sheets, interview guides, and documentation checklists. Data collection was then conducted through direct observation of outdoor learning sessions, interviews with teachers and parents, and documentation of activities. The next stage involved analyzing the collected data through reduction, organization, and interpretation. The final stage was the preparation of the research report, which presents a comprehensive description of how outdoor learning contributed to children's language development. All procedures were carried out continuously during the research period from March to May 2025.

Data Collection Techniques

Multiple techniques were used to ensure the depth and richness of the data. Observation was conducted to directly examine how outdoor learning activities were implemented and how children demonstrated language skills in natural settings. Although highly informative, observation may be influenced by researcher presence (Arianti, 2022). Semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents were used to gather insights regarding the role and effectiveness of outdoor learning. This technique provides rich contextual information but may require considerable time and is susceptible to bias (Pramitasari et al., 2023). Documentation, including photos, children's learning notes, and lesson plans (RPPH), served to support and validate observation and interview data. The combination of these three techniques enabled a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the primary instrument is the researcher, who actively engages in data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Supporting instruments included observation sheets, interview guides, and the Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH) used to monitor the implementation of outdoor learning. All instruments were systematically developed to align with the research focus and are provided in the appendix.

Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by selecting and simplifying relevant information from observations, interviews, and documentation. The quality of reduction depends on well-structured methodological planning to ensure data relevance and accuracy (Ojoboh & Igben, 2024). Data were then presented in descriptive narratives, tables, and interview excerpts to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn continuously throughout the analysis process by identifying recurring patterns and validating them with the collected evidence. Clear and systematic data presentation plays a crucial role in enhancing the clarity and accuracy of research findings (Vasileiou & Paraskeva, 2010).

Data Validity

To ensure data validity, triangulation was applied across sources, techniques, and time. Source triangulation compared information from children, teachers, and parents. Technique triangulation combined observations, interviews, and documentation for the same events. Time triangulation involved collecting data at different moments to confirm consistency. Although triangulation strengthens credibility, some scholars argue that it may unintentionally impose quantitative logic on qualitative interpretive research, potentially limiting the richness of meaning (Wang, 2024).

Research Ethics

Ethical principles were upheld throughout the research process. Formal permission was obtained from Aisyiyah Cakru Playground prior to data collection. Teachers, parents, and

children were clearly informed about the research purpose, and participation was entirely voluntary. The confidentiality of participants specially young children was ensured by withholding real names and using initials when necessary. The researcher also ensured that no physical or psychological harm occurred during the study. All data were used solely for academic purposes and presented with honesty, responsibility, and integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Description of the Research Site

This research was conducted at Aisyiyah Cakru Playground, located in RT 06 RW 11, Igir-Igor Hamlet, Cakru Village, Kencong District, Jember Regency. Aisyiyah Cakru Playground is an early childhood education institution under the Aisyiyah organization, committed to developing children's potential through active, creative, and joyful learning. The group consists of 10 children aged 3–4 years, facilitated by two teachers who actively design and implement learning activities, including outdoor learning (ODL).

The school environment is conducive to outdoor learning, supported by an open yard and surrounding areas that are safe for exploratory activities (A. N. I. Sari, 2016). Outdoor learning has begun to be implemented as a strategy to enhance young children's language development through direct engagement with nature and the environment. The school's peaceful atmosphere, its geographic proximity to rice fields and residents' gardens, and the positive relationship among teachers, students, and parents serve as major supporting factors in implementing contextual and meaningful learning.

Research Findings

This study aimed to describe the implementation of outdoor learning activities in improving early childhood language skills at Aisyiyah Cakru Playground. Data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. The outdoor learning activities were carried out in two main sessions:

Visit to Igir-Igor Traditional Market

This activity took place on Thursday, 20 March 2025. Children were guided by teachers to visit the nearby traditional market based on a pre-designed lesson plan (RPP). They interacted directly with vendors, identified various goods, and learned to mention names of items such as vegetables, fruits, food products, and household tools. Teachers encouraged children to ask questions and engage in simple dialogues, such as "What is this?" or "How much is it?" Such interaction stimulated vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, sentence construction, and confidence in speaking in real social settings.

**Table 1. Summary of Language Ability Observation During Market Visit
(20 March 2025)**

Indicators of Language Ability	Findings
Naming objects observed	8 out of 10 children could name objects such as "banana," "carrot," and "scale."
Asking simple questions	6 children asked spontaneous questions, such as "What is

	this?" or "What is it for?"
Answering teachers' or peers' questions	7 children responded with relevant short answers.
Using new vocabulary	Several children repeated and attempted to use newly introduced words.

The table indicates that 8 children could identify object names, while 6 actively asked simple questions. Seven children were able to answer the teacher's questions, and some began using new vocabulary they encountered during the activity.

A teacher expressed positive impressions of the activity:

"The children were more confident speaking at the market than in class. The real environment made them more curious." (Interview with Mrs. Dewi, 20 March 2025).

A parent also confirmed changes at home:

"After returning from the market, my daughter Amanda immediately told stories and named vegetables at home. She even pretended to be a seller, which she rarely did before." (Interview with Mrs. Rina, 21 March 2025).

These findings demonstrate that the activity effectively fostered children's language development by providing real-life stimuli, promoting new vocabulary use, encouraging communication, and enhancing contextual understanding.

Visit to the Empon-Empon Herbal Garden

The second activity was conducted on Thursday, 24 April 2025, at a resident's empon-empon herbal garden located near the school. Children were introduced to various herbal plants such as ginger, turmeric, kencur, and temulawak. They described colors, shapes, scents, and the functions of the plants, guided through dialogues facilitated by the teacher. Children were also asked to retell their experiences after the activity. This session emphasized vocabulary building related to plants, sensory descriptions, and expressive language skills.

Table 2. Summary of Observation Results-Herbal Garden Visit (24 April 2025)

Indicators of Language Ability	Findings
Naming observed herbal plants	9 out of 10 children could mention plants such as ginger, turmeric, and kencur.
Asking simple questions	6 children asked questions such as "What is this for?" and "What does it smell like?"
Answering teachers' or peers' questions	8 children responded accurately to questions such as "What plant is this?" or "What color is this?"
Repeating and using new vocabulary	Most children repeated new words such as "empon-empon," "ginger," "turmeric," and "herbal drink."

The results show that 9 children were able to identify plant names, while 6 asked spontaneous questions. Eight children gave simple but accurate responses to the teacher's prompts, and most were eager to repeat new vocabulary.

A teacher stated:

"They usually only know traditional drinks like rice-kencur. After seeing the plants directly, they finally understood the ingredients, and they became more enthusiastic." (Interview with Mrs. Santi, 24 April 2025).

Similarly, a parent shared:

"My son Fatir came home excited, showing me the empon-empon in our kitchen and saying they could be made into herbal drinks." (Interview with Mrs. Zahra, 26 April 2025).

Both activities provided authentic and meaningful experiences that significantly enhanced children's speaking, listening, vocabulary enrichment, and confidence in expressing ideas verbally.

Discussion

Implementation of Outdoor Learning to Improve Early Childhood Language Skills Language Interaction through Outdoor Learning

Outdoor learning at Aisyiyah Cakru Playground was carried out through two main activities: visiting the traditional market and exploring the herbal garden. Both were designed to provide real-life experiences that stimulate children's language development through social and environmental interaction (Kiran & Tiwari, 2023). During the market visit, children engaged in conversations with vendors, asked about product names, and practiced expressing their needs. In the herbal garden, they described plants' characteristics and functions, fostering expressive and descriptive language skills (Lindfors et al., 2021). These interactions serve as natural scaffolding in line with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where adults and peers support children's learning.

These findings confirm Vygotsky's view that language develops optimally through social interaction and meaningful engagement. The activities also align with the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL), emphasizing learning through direct experience and multisensory engagement (Suyadi, 2015). The results are also consistent with studies by Novikova et al., (2023), which show that community-based learning environments enhance children's vocabulary and speaking skills; and Abimanyu et al.,(2024) who note that ODL connects theoretical concepts with real-world experiences.

The Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning on Language Development

Observation data reveal notable improvements in children's language abilities after participating in outdoor learning activities. Children became more active in speaking, more articulate in forming sentences, and more confident in asking and answering questions. These developments indicate that outdoor learning stimulates receptive and expressive language skills through real contexts that require listening, repeating, and speaking. This aligns with Luckin et al.,(2016) who state that children aged 3–4 begin forming simple sentences, asking questions, and developing more complex structures skills that outdoor learning environments naturally support.

Synthesis of Findings, Theory, and Previous Studies

Table 3. Relationship between Research Findings, Theory, and Previous Studies

Research Findings	Theoretical Linkages	Support from Previous Studies
Children's language abilities improved through market and garden visits	Vygotsky's ZPD: children learn through social interaction with scaffolding from adults and environment	Luo (2023): Psychological environment and curriculum implementation mediate the effectiveness of outdoor learning in language development
Children were more active in speaking during real-world interactions	CTL: learning occurs through direct, meaningful, multisensory experiences	Lien (2023): Authentic environments increase motivation and verbal engagement
Increased spontaneous conversations outdoors compared to the classroom	Integration of CTL & ZPD: real experiences trigger deeper social interaction	Novikova et al. (2023): Children use more complex syntax in outdoor learning settings

The synthesis presented in Table 3. demonstrates a strong convergence between the research findings, theoretical foundations, and empirical evidence from previous studies. The improvement in children's language abilities during market and herbal garden visits aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where children acquire new skills through guided participation and meaningful interaction with adults and the surrounding environment (Prastio et al., 2023). This theoretical linkage is reinforced who emphasized that outdoor learning environments enrich linguistic development when supported by intentional interaction and curriculum implementation.

The findings also indicate that children became more verbally active during real-world engagement, which is consistent with the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) (Hadziq, 2016; Wulandari et al., 2021). CTL posits that authentic, multisensory experiences support deeper understanding and encourage children to use language more spontaneously (Lase & Zai, 2022; Susanti et al., 2020). Lien,(2023) supports this perspective by demonstrating that authentic learning settings significantly increase children's motivation and verbal involvement.

Furthermore, the increased frequency of spontaneous conversations in outdoor settings compared to classroom activities reflects the integration of ZPD and CTL concepts indicating that real-life experiences not only stimulate language expression but also promote more complex social interaction (Wibowo et al., 2025). This is consistent with the findings of who reported that children tend to use richer vocabulary and more complex sentence structures during outdoor learning sessions (Harefa & Suprihatin, 2023). Collectively, these linkages confirm that outdoor learning activities serve as a powerful pedagogical approach for enhancing early childhood language development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of outdoor learning at Aisyiyah Cakru Playground through contextual, environment-based activities such as visits to traditional markets and local herbal gardens effectively enhances young children's language development by providing meaningful, real-world learning experiences. Guided interaction, teacher scaffolding, and rich verbal stimulation during outdoor activities significantly strengthen children's vocabulary, expressive abilities, confidence in communication, and spontaneous sentence construction. These findings align with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, emphasizing the role of social interaction in optimal development, and with the principles of Contextual Teaching and Learning, which highlight the value of experiential and authentic learning. Overall, outdoor learning emerges as a relevant and impactful pedagogical strategy for fostering early language development, particularly within rural early childhood settings enriched by local environmental potential.

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