

JP2KG AUD (Jurnal Pendidikan, Pengasuhan, Kesehatan dan Gizi Anak Usia Dini) PG PAUD Universitas Negeri Surabaya E-ISSN: 2599-2910 Vol.06 No.1, 2025, Page 56-74 FUN OUTBOUND AS A HOLISTIC LEARNING STRATEGY TO SUPPORT GROSS MOTOR DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A NARRATIVE STUDY IN TK ABA BAYEN

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#### **Article Info**

#### ABSTRACT

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Outbond Motoric Skills Early Chillhood Outbound activities offer an experiential and play-based approach to physical learning that supports the development of gross motor skills in early childhood. This study aims to explore how outbound activities contribute to the physical, social, and emotional growth of children aged 5-6 years at TK ABA Bayen. Using a narrative inquiry approach, the research captures the lived experiences of children, teachers, and parents during the outbound program involving activities such as rope bridge walking, throwing the glass, fits hands and feet, relaying water and crossing suspension bridge. Data were collected through observations, reflective journals, and interviews, and analyzed thematically to reveal patterns of growth and meaning-making. The findings indicate that outbound activities foster noticeable improvements in children's balance, strength, coordination, and overall confidence in movement. Beyond physical gains, the narratives also highlight enhancements in self-confidence, socialemotional and social interaction. The study concludes that outbound activities, when intentionally designed and facilitated, serve as a powerful medium for holistic development in early childhood. It is recommended that early childhood education institutions integrate outbound activities into the learning environment to support children's physical and psychosocial growth through embodied, meaningful experiences.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Human growth and development is a dynamic and lifelong process that

encompasses various domains of human functioning, including the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral aspects. Among the most critical phases of this developmental trajectory is early childhood, which is universally recognized as a foundational period marked by rapid physiological and neurological growth. It is during this period, typically defined as the age span from birth to eight years, that children experience the most profound transformations in their ability to think, move, feel, and interact with the world around them. Early childhood represents a sensitive phase of growth, during which both the body and mind are especially receptive to environmental stimuli (Aida Farida, 2016; Etzel & Landrigan, 2024; Raghavan & Ruta, 2022). Therefore, it is essential for caregivers, educators, and policymakers to optimize this phase by ensuring that children receive appropriate stimulation to support their developmental progress.

Motor development, particularly gross motor development, stands out as one of the central pillars of early childhood growth. This form of development refers to the child's ability to perform movements that involve large muscle groups, such as walking, running, jumping, climbing, throwing, and balancing. These abilities are not merely physical accomplishments; rather, they serve as the biological foundation upon which children build autonomy, exploration, self-efficacy, and even social interaction. The maturation of gross motor skills during the formative years plays a crucial role in a child's holistic development, enabling them to participate actively in daily activities and fostering the capacity for further cognitive and emotional growth (Candra et al., 2023; Ushtelenca et al., 2024; Williams & Monsma, 2017).

In the context of the digital era, however, the landscape of childhood experience has changed significantly. A growing body of research and observation indicates that modern children are increasingly immersed in screen-based activities—interacting with smartphones, watching television, and engaging in video games—often at the expense of physical play. The World Health Organization (2024) reports that over 80% of children and adolescents globally do not engage in sufficient physical activity to maintain healthy development. This trend is deeply concerning, as reduced physical movement has been closely linked to the stagnation of gross motor development, affecting children's ability to engage in fundamental motor tasks such as running, hopping, or catching a ball. The direct relationship between physical activity and the development of muscle strength, balance, and coordination, warning that an inactive lifestyle can hinder the natural



JP2KG AUD (Jurnal Pendidikan, Pengasuhan, Kesehatan dan Gizi Anak Usia Dini) PG PAUD Universitas Negeri Surabaya E-ISSN: 2599-2910 Vol.06 No.1, 2025, Page 56-74

progression of these motor abilities (Faizah et al., 2024; Kathleen M. Haywood, 2020).

The rise in physical inactivity, especially among young children, calls for urgent educational strategies. One effective approach is incorporating outbound activities—physical, hands-on, often outdoor tasks that challenge children in enjoyable ways. These activities go beyond exercise by promoting problem-solving, risk evaluation, teamwork, and emotional control. Since they are framed as play, children find them naturally motivating, encouraging ongoing participation without pressure (Brand, 2023; Schwab & Dustin, 2014). An effective gross motor program requires educators, parents, and caregivers to work together to create activities suited to children's developmental stages. Key growth principles—cephalocaudal (head to feet) and proximodistal (center to limbs)—guide the design of challenges that match a child's abilities. This ensures proper support, avoiding under- or overstimulation, and promotes healthy physical development. (Brand, 2023; Giráldez et al., 2025).

In recent years, outbound learning models have emerged as a recognized method for supporting gross motor development in young learners (Masruroh et al., 2021; Putro et al., 2024). Globally, outbound activities are valued not only for enhancing physical development but also for promoting nature-based learning, reconnecting children with the outdoors. In Indonesia, TK ABA Bayen integrates these activities through its Outing Class program for children aged 5–6. This program offers structured physical challenges like rope bridge walking, tire jumping, sack racing, and tunnel crawling, all designed to develop motor skills such as balance, agility, endurance, and spatial awareness. These carefully chosen activities provide hands-on experiences that link motor development with cognitive and emotional growth, making them both developmentally appropriate and engaging (Kurniawati et al., 2022; Sholihah et al., 2024).

This study examines how children, teachers, and parents experience outbound activities and how these support gross motor skill growth naturally and meaningfully. Using narrative inquiry, it reveals how these activities foster confidence, joy, and development beyond just measurable progress. The research highlights the value of integrating physical activity into early childhood education as a key part of holistic development, with TK ABA Bayen's program serving as a transformative learning model.

Early childhood presents a unique window of opportunity for cultivating foundational motor skills that will influence a child's lifelong health, mobility, and self-concept (Garcia et al., 2002; Giráldez et al., 2025). Amid concerns about the sedentary lifestyles fostered by modern technology, educators must seek innovative and developmentally appropriate methods for restoring balance in children's daily experiences. Outbound activities offer one such method—a fusion of fun, challenge, social engagement, and physical growth. By exploring the narratives of those involved in these programs, this study aims to shed light on the transformative potential of movement and play in the lives of young children.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses a narrative approach or narrative inquiry, which is a qualitative approach that emphasizes the exploration and understanding of the meaning of personal experiences of an individual or group of individuals in a particular context (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Narrative inquiry was chosen because it is suitable for exploring in depth the authentic experiences of children, teachers, and parents in participating in outbound activities as part of the learning process in early childhood education. This approach allows researchers to capture subjective dynamics that cannot be measured by numbers alone, such as feelings of enthusiasm, anxiety, excitement, self-confidence, and the meanings formed by children and their companions during the outbound process.

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach that centers on personal stories and lived experiences as key sources of data (Kutsyuruba & Stasel, 2023). This study uses narratives from children, teachers, and parents at TK ABA Bayen to explore how outdoor activities impact young children's gross motor skills and socio-emotional growth. It focuses on rich, contextual insights rather than broad generalizations. Six children aged 5–6, along with two teachers and three parents, participated through observations, interviews, and reflective notes. Data collection included observing children's natural behaviors during physical challenges and using story-based interviews supported by visual aids. Teachers and parents contributed reflections on children's development. Thematic and narrative analysis, supported by member checks and triangulation, ensured trustworthy findings. Ethical standards were strictly followed. The study highlights outdoor activities as meaningful spaces where children learn, grow, and narrate their developmental journeys. The narrative study process and procedures in this research are described in the following figure 1.



JP2KG AUD (Jurnal Pendidikan, Pengasuhan, Kesehatan dan Gizi Anak Usia Dini) PG PAUD Universitas Negeri Surabaya E-ISSN: 2599-2910 Vol.06 No.1, 2025, Page 56-74



Figure 1. The narrative study process and procedures

# 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Outdoor learning experiences at ABA Bayen Kindergarten provide more than recreational enjoyment; they serve as a vital medium for supporting holistic development in early childhood. Through a narrative inquiry approach, this study explores how young children interpret, participate in, and transform through outbound activities. The findings underscore the role of outdoor engagement in promoting not only gross motor skills, but also emotional resilience, confidence, and social cooperation.

A compelling example is the story of a 5-year-old girl, identified as A, who recounted her first encounter with a rope bridge. Initially gripped by fear, A was reassured by her teacher and motivated by her peers. "I was scared I would fall, but the teacher encouraged me. I walked slowly and found it fun. My friends shouted, 'You can do it!'" she shared. This transition from fear to confidence highlights the emotional and physical growth facilitated by peer support and teacher guidance. From a developmental perspective, her experience illustrates advancements in coordination, balance, and motor control—key areas of gross motor development (Amelia et al., 2019; Williams & Monsma, 2017).

A similar transformation was observed in a boy, referred to as B, who was initially withdrawn but eventually joined a water relay activity after witnessing his friends' enjoyment. Encouraged by a supportive teacher, B found confidence in running while carrying water. "My friends said I'm fast," he said. His

narrative illustrates the emotional impact of physical play, demonstrating how outdoor activities can ignite enthusiasm and foster self-belief in hesitant learners.

The teacher, Mrs. R, noted continuous progress in children's motor abilities and social interactions. Children who initially struggled with balance-based activities, such as jumping over tires, demonstrated measurable improvement after repeated practice. She also observed the emergence of peer encouragement and cooperation, describing the children as becoming not only more physically competent but also more empathetic and collaborative.

Parental observations echoed these themes. One parent, Mrs. T, remarked on increased energy and initiative in her child following participation in the outdoor program. Her child began initiating similar play at home, often replicating school experiences in the backyard. Such instances demonstrate how positive physical engagement at school can influence behavior and learning outside the classroom.

The activities—ranging from tunnel crawling to balancing and running games—require coordinated full-body movements that enhance strength, agility, and motor planning. Kathleen M. Haywood (2020) emphasizes that these complex physical tasks in early childhood are foundational for developing advanced motor competencies later in life. Emotional development was another central aspect observed in the children's reflections. Their expressions of joy, pride, and courage revealed the deep emotional engagement elicited by physical challenges. This aligns with Piaget's perspective that young children construct knowledge through embodied, sensorimotor experiences. Thus, movement-based learning is not merely supplementary but central to early cognitive and emotional development (Nafiati, 2021).

The study revealed notable growth in children's social competence through group activities like tug-of-war and relay races, which encouraged turn-taking, communication, and teamwork. One child's comment, "When we play tug-ofwar with many people, we pull harder!" reflects the development of collaborative skills and shared understanding. This supports Bandura's social learning theory, emphasizing learning through observation, imitation, and social interaction. Children's varied preferences for physical activities—some favoring energetic tasks like climbing and jumping, others excelling in cooperative group play—highlight the importance of a child-centered approach that nurtures individual strengths. Despite challenges such as weather interruptions and initial



Vol.06 No.1, 2025, Page 56-74

reluctance from some children, consistent participation led to increased enthusiasm and perseverance, demonstrating the value of regular exposure to physical challenges.

Previous research supports these findings Supeni et al., (2020) emphasized the developmental value of structured outdoor activities when facilitated by attentive adults. Lita et al. (2023) highlighted how physical play supports empathy, leadership, and social awareness. Parental involvement further enhances the developmental impact. When families engage with school activities, either through direct participation or emotional reinforcement at home, children's learning becomes more integrated and enduring. This echoes Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which stresses the importance of interconnected systems—home, school, and community—in child development. The narratives illustrate that outbound learning not only strengthens motor development but also contributes meaningfully to emotional and social growth. These experiences lay a vital foundation for lifelong skills such as resilience, empathy, and cooperation.



Figure 2. Result The Narrative Study Outbound Activities

Gross motor development is an important aspect of early childhood because it is related to a child's ability to move freely, explore their environment, and build independence in daily activities. The findings of this study indicate that outdoor activities, which include activities such as jumping over tires, walking on a rope bridge, and crawling through tunnels, significantly improve children's gross motor skills. This finding is supported by the research of Supeni et al., (2020), which states that physically challenging outdoor activities can stimulate the growth and coordination of large muscles, thereby directly improving children's basic motor skills. Children who initially struggled with balance and coordination showed significant improvements in their ability to walk steadily and jump without losing body control after participating in outdoor activities several times. Similar findings were reported by Masruroh et al. (2021), who found that children aged 5–6 years who participated in outdoor activities experienced improvements in running, jumping, and balance within two weeks. Consistent motor exercises in the form of games have been proven to promote optimal neuromuscular development (Nurhalisa et al., 2024; Quilgars et al., 2024).

Furthermore, outdoor activities support the development of motor planning functions, which is the ability to plan and execute movements efficiently and in an organized manner. The children in this study learned to strategize their movements; for example, in the water relay game, they began to understand that they had to run at a steady pace so that the water would not spill. These findings align with previous research indicating that children frequently engaged in physically challenging games show improvements in motor planning, action reflection, and self-control (Arias Macias & Vargas Vera, 2024; Kolovelonis et al., 2022; Pesce et al., 2021).

Activities that demand visual-motor coordination, such as walking on a tightrope, help children integrate vision with body movements, which is crucial for school readiness. Research by Candra et al., (2023) supports these findings by stating that coordination exercises such as tightrope walking and relay races can accelerate connectivity between the brain and muscles through activation of the central nervous system, particularly the cerebellum, which regulates balance and movement coordination (Carson & Kelso, 2004; Kolovelonis et al., 2022).

Outdoor activities also provide diverse stimulation for children's sensory systems, including the vestibular system (balance), proprioceptive system (body position awareness), and tactile system (skin stimulation). In this study, children not only developed motor control but also enhanced body awareness and adaptive responses to the environment. Children who experience motor activities in complex and varied environments develop a more stable sensory foundation for subsequent learning activities (Danyliuk & Burkalo, 2024; Mochizuki & Kirino, 2008).

Observational results also indicate that children who regularly participate in outbound activities show improvements in physical endurance and large muscle strength, such as leg and back muscles. This aligns with previous



Vol.06 No.1, 2025, Page 56-74

research showing that active movement games performed repeatedly for at least two weeks can significantly enhance leg muscle strength in young children. In this context, outdoor activities are not merely recreational but also serve as physical therapy to strengthen children's bodily structures physiologically (Lita et al., 2023; Putro et al., 2024).

In addition to muscle strengthening, children also show improvements in movement accuracy and efficiency. For example, when participating in tirejumping games, children begin to learn how to estimate the distance between tires, adjust their body position before jumping, and balance their body upon landing. This indicates development in postural control and sensorimotor integration. These findings showed that jumping games can improve lower limb muscle control, rhythm regulation, and movement risk assessment (Alexandrovsky et al., 2016; Kato et al., 2025; Song et al., 2025).

Interestingly, these improvements are not only physical but also impact children's self-perception. Children who were previously hesitant or afraid of failing began to show expressions of confidence and joy after successfully completing the challenges. They often said, "I can do it!", "It's easy!", or even encouraged their friends to try the same game. Research by Hartati (2021) shows that success in challenging physical activities strengthens positive self-concept and increases children's intrinsic motivation to try similar activities in the future (Henning et al., 2022; Lohbeck et al., 2021).

Thus, these findings reinforce the position of outdoor activities as a strategy that is not only beneficial in strengthening gross motor skills but also in forming the neurological, sensory, and psychological foundations of children in an integrated manner. Outdoor activities provide children with opportunities for directed movement exploration, body awareness development, and training of bodily responses to environmental challenges in a fun and engaging environment. Therefore, outdoor activities are highly recommended as an integrated physical learning model within the early childhood education curriculum.

One significant outcome of this research is the enhancement of selfconfidence in young children, fostered by their active participation in outbound activities. Self-confidence refers to an individual's belief in their own abilities to face challenges and try new experiences without undue fear. In early

childhood, this trait is indicative of emotional maturity, social preparedness, and a readiness to engage in learning. Outbound activities, which involve physical and social challenges, naturally motivate children to take risks, confront fears, and overcome shyness, supported by their surrounding environment (Brussoni, 2020; McClain & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2016).

Activities such as crossing a rope bridge or jumping over tires require children to control their bodies in unfamiliar situations. Children's expressions like "I was scared of falling but I managed it!" or "I felt nervous initially but now I enjoy it" illustrate a shift from hesitation to confidence. This change is crucial for nurturing lasting self-confidence. Successfully overcoming physical challenges boosts children's self-esteem and sense of competence, as they realize they have control over their bodies and decisions (Howells & Bowen, 2016; Kyle et al., 2015). Moreover, self-confidence is strengthened through positive social interactions during these activities.

Children who initially hesitate often gain confidence after encouragement from peers or teachers, underscoring the role of social context in confidence-building. Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development highlights that children reach their potential through social support and guidance (Vygotsky, 1994). In outdoor settings, teachers and peers act as scaffolds, helping children exceed their current abilities.

Previous studies have shown that children regularly involved in outdoor programs demonstrate increased self-confidence, particularly in taking initiative, persistence, and public self-expression (Mayangsari et al., 2017). This study's findings align with these results, as children began volunteering to lead, strategize, and motivate peers. Such behaviors indicate that self-confidence develops not only individually but also within social and communal contexts.

It is important to recognize that self-confidence gained through outbound activities is gradual, emerging from meaningful and consistent experiences. When children successfully face fears or physical obstacles, they develop selfefficacy—the belief in their capacity to tackle new challenges (Suyanti & Wijarni, 2021). Bandura et al., (2001) describes self-efficacy as the foundation for courageous actions and lifelong learning. Outbound activities thus provide a tangible environment for children to cultivate this sense of capability (Brand, 2023). Outdoor activities serve not only to enhance gross motor skills but also to build robust, healthy, and enduring self-confidence in young children. This



## JP2KG AUD (Jurnal Pendidikan, Pengasuhan, Kesehatan dan Gizi Anak Usia Dini) PG PAUD Universitas Negeri Surabaya E-ISSN: 2599-2910 Vol.06 No.1, 2025, Page 56-74

self-confidence becomes a critical asset for children as they navigate academic, social, and emotional challenges in later developmental stages.

This study reveals that outdoor activities play a crucial role not only in enhancing children's physical abilities but also in significantly fostering their social and emotional growth. These developmental aspects are essential foundations for children's readiness to learn and their future success. When children engage in cooperative games such as water relays, paired jumping, or tug of war, they do more than just physical movement—they develop social skills by interacting, assuming roles, and collaboratively solving problems. This aligns with Lita et al. (2023), who found that such collaborative outdoor games effectively nurture empathy, cooperation, and patience in early childhood.

A key insight from this research is the increased courage children show in self-expression, such as volunteering to lead or encouraging peers. This transformation is closely linked to the relaxed, pressure-free environment of outdoor play, which emphasizes exploration through play. Prior studies support this, indicating that challenging outdoor games build self-confidence and promote positive emotional expression by allowing children to experiment and learn without fear of punishment(Kang, 2021; Thomas & Harding, 2011).

Outdoor activities also help children manage negative emotions like fear, shame, and frustration. For instance, in the rope bridge game, some children initially feared falling but overcame their anxiety with support from peers and teachers. Social support in active play environments aids emotional regulation (Ghosh, 2024), mental resilience (Garrett, 2014; Mawarpury, 2019), and healthy coping with failure (Whitman, 2018). Prosocial behaviors such as encouraging others, taking turns, and helping peers increased during these activities. Children learn to be attentive to others' feelings and engage in helpful actions voluntarily. Vygotsky's theory of moral and social development emphasizes that real-life social experiences are vital for learning values and norms. The outdoor activities effectively cultivate cooperation, social responsibility, and concern for others (Gross et al., 2025; Malloy, 2021; Ozono et al., 2019; Ramadhani & Rahmasari, 2011).

Communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal, also improve through outdoor play. Children learn to use positive language for instructions, role negotiation, and conflict resolution. For example, during relay games, children

strategize roles and motivate each other. The teamwork-focused outdoor play accelerates communication development due to its rich social context (Anggraeni, 2018; Torkos, 2018). Self-regulation is another important outcome. Children practice impulse control, patience, and adherence to game rules, maintaining focus despite distractions or fatigue. This findings showing that structured games improve emotional and behavioral regulation compared to children less exposed to social physical activities (Morales et al., 2016; Riggins & Liu, 2022; Uyanik et al., 2019).

Trust development is also evident, as children who feel supported by peers and teachers develop secure social attachments. This corresponds with Bowlby's attachment theory, which links early positive social experiences to stable future relationships. The collaborative outdoor experiences strengthen interpersonal skills and social bonds (Mursidi et al., 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2024; Suyanti & Wijarni, 2021). Interestingly, parents also observe these socialemotional improvements at home, noting increased openness, expressiveness, and spontaneous helping behaviors. The positive outdoor social experiences transfer learning to home life, showing that children internalize social values beyond the play context (Coburn & Wallace, 2017; Nazir, 2019; Thomas & Harding, 2011). Outdoor activities are highly effective in shaping children's social and emotional development. Games that require interaction, collaboration, and empathy provide meaningful experiences for children to understand themselves and others. This development is best achieved through active, emotionally engaging real-life experiences rather than verbal instruction alone. Fun Outbound Activities are described in Table 1.



### 4. CONCLUSION

Outbound activities have been proven to contribute significantly to the gross motor development of early childhood through challenging yet enjoyable physical activities, which not only improve balance, coordination, and muscle strength, but also foster self-confidence, courage, and the ability to work together in a natural social context. The narrative inquiry approach in this study allowed



Vol.06 No.1, 2025, Page 56-74

researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of children, teachers, and parents during outdoor activities, revealing that the success of motor development is also greatly influenced by the emotional and social context of children. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating movement-based learning and direct experiences into early childhood education curricula to achieve optimal holistic development. However, this study has limitations in terms of the limited number of participants, implementation in only one location, and the relatively short observation period, so the results cannot be generalized widely. In addition, the narrative approach used is qualitative and has not been accompanied by more objective quantitative measurements of children's gross motor development. Therefore, further research is recommended to involve a larger sample size with more diverse backgrounds, employ a mixed-methods design, and extend the observation period to capture the dynamics of children's development more comprehensively. It is hoped that the findings of such further research will strengthen empirical evidence and provide a stronger foundation for the implementation of outdoor activities as an active and contextual learning strategy in early childhood education institutions.

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Vol.06 No.1, 2025, Page 56-74

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