

# Preschool Teachers Perspectives on Outdoor Play Among Malaysia's Preschoolers

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## Abstract

*This study investigates the significance of outdoor play environments for preschool children in Malaysia. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the research explores how preschool teachers and children promote outdoor activities within school curricula, while also examining barriers and concerns surrounding outdoor play provision. While international research suggests weather significantly influences perceptions of outdoor play, limited Malaysian perspectives exist. This study addresses this gap by exploring the perspectives of Malaysian preschool teachers, parents, and children, discussing strategies for promoting outdoor learning. Focusing on the physical, emotional, and well-being dimensions associated with young children's physical activity, the study highlights the importance of outdoor play in their learning and development. It examines how practitioners and parents perceive outdoor play, analyzes barriers hindering its provision, and assesses whether these barriers justify limited outdoor play opportunities. Findings reveal distinct perspectives on outdoor play between teachers and parents, yet a shared recognition of its importance and benefits. The study also identifies concerns regarding potential risks associated with insufficient physical activity and reflects on adult awareness and involvement in promoting outdoor play. Notably, the research incorporates children's voices, ensuring their perspectives are acknowledged and valued. This study has implications for early childhood teachers' practices and offers recommendations for future research. It aims to encourage increased outdoor play integration in preschools and motivate Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) organizations to prioritize outdoor learning. By exploring practitioner and parental perspectives on the importance of outdoor play and examining how adults plan and promote it in children's lives, this research contributes valuable knowledge to the field of early childhood education.*

**Keywords:** *Outdoor Play, Physical Activity, Preschool Teachers, Potential Risk, Children's Learning and Development.*

## Introduction

Childhood obesity has become a pressing global health concern, and Malaysia is no exception. The prevalence of childhood obesity among preschool children aged 4 to 6 years has steadily risen in recent decades. Despite various governmental strategies promoting physically active learning approaches, the issue persists. While the Malaysian Ministry of Health (MOH, 2022) advocates for a healthy lifestyle, encouraging a minimum of 180 minutes of daily physical activity for young children, the 2022 Active Healthy Kids Global Alliance (AHKGA) report reveals that Malaysian children are less physically active than their Southeast Asian counterparts in Singapore, Thailand, and Japan. This report underscores the benefits of outdoor learning environments, which enhance physical health, sensory skills, concentration, and practical life skills.

This article examines the disparity between outdoor play practices in various countries and Malaysia's current approach. It analyzes outdoor play models such as Bavarian Forest Schools (Germany), Finnish Forest Kindergartens (which emphasize risky outdoor play environments), and Nature Nurseries in Scotland, contrasting these with Malaysia's technology-driven childhood and academic-focused education system.

Despite the legal mandate for outdoor play within the Malaysian Ministry of Education's Blueprint (MOE, 2024), implementation is hindered by numerous barriers, including safety concerns and academic pressures. This study investigates these obstacles through observations and interviews with preschool teachers. Furthermore, it emphasizes the interconnectedness of children's learning and development within the

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framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), highlighting the crucial roles of parents, teachers, and the community in promoting outdoor play.

### *Theoretical Framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory*

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted influences on child development. This theory posits that development is shaped by a dynamic interplay of environmental systems, each embedded within the next. These systems encompass the microsystem (immediate environments like family and school), mesosystem (interconnections between microsystems), exosystem (indirectly influential external environments), and macrosystem (overarching cultural and societal contexts) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Applying this framework to outdoor play, the microsystem encompasses the child's immediate surroundings, including home and preschool environments. Parental attitudes and behaviors towards outdoor play, alongside the physical affordances provided by schools, significantly influence children's opportunities for outdoor engagement. The mesosystem encompasses the interactions between these microsystems, such as parent-teacher communication regarding outdoor play.

Extending beyond the child's immediate sphere, the exosystem comprises broader influences like local community resources, neighborhood safety, and the availability of public play spaces. These factors can either facilitate or hinder children's access to outdoor play. Finally, the macrosystem encompasses cultural norms, societal values, and public policies that shape the overall context within which outdoor play occurs.

Understanding these interconnected layers illuminates the multifaceted barriers to outdoor play and underscores the need for a holistic approach to its effective promotion. By considering the complex interplay of individual, familial, community, and societal factors, interventions can be more effectively designed to support children's engagement in outdoor play.

## **Literature Review**

### *Importance of Outdoor Play in Early Childhood Development*

Vygotsky's play theory (2016) emphasizes the critical role of outdoor play in children's holistic development, encompassing physical health, cognitive development, social skills, and emotional well-being. Empirical evidence indicates that children engaging in regular outdoor play are more likely to adhere to physical activity guidelines, mitigating the risk of obesity and associated health concerns (Dankiw et al., 2020; Timmons et al., 2007; Vygotsky, 2016). Moreover, outdoor play facilitates the development of gross motor skills, including balance, coordination, and agility (Lundy and Trawick-Smith, 2021; Ginsburg, 2007).

From a cognitive perspective, outdoor play stimulates curiosity, problem-solving, and creativity. Natural environments offer diverse stimuli that encourage exploration and learning (Louv, 2008). Socially, outdoor play fosters peer interactions, crucial for developing communication skills, empathy, and cooperation (Piaget, 2013; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Yao et al., 2021). Furthermore, outdoor play provides opportunities for risk-taking, resilience building, and stress reduction, thereby enhancing emotional well-being (Prins et al., 2022; Lundy and Trawick-Smith, 2021; White, 2014).

Brussoni et al. (2015) and Gopnik (2020) emphasize the importance of outdoor play, particularly risky play, in fostering risk management skills and resilience. This type of play allows children to explore their boundaries and develop self-efficacy. Prins et al. (2022) further demonstrate that children engaging in play within natural environments exhibit enhanced motor fitness, balance, and coordination compared to those playing in traditional playgrounds. These findings underscore the multifaceted benefits of outdoor play and its crucial role in facilitating children's optimal development.

### *Bavarian Forest School Initiative*

The Bavarian Forest School initiative in Germany exemplifies the successful integration of outdoor play into early childhood education. This initiative immerses children aged 3 to 6 years in daily outdoor activities, fostering a profound connection with the natural world. Teachers report significant enhancements in children's physical fitness, environmental awareness, and social skills. Furthermore, the initiative incorporates regular assessments of children's development, generating valuable data on the multifaceted benefits of outdoor play (Davis and Elliot, 2023; Ata Doğan and Boz, 2019).

A key characteristic of the Bavarian Forest School is its emphasis on unstructured play. Children are encouraged to explore the forest environment, engage in imaginative play, and interact with natural elements, supported by teachers and families. This approach diverges from the more structured activities often prevalent in traditional educational settings. Research indicates that unstructured play in natural environments enhances creativity, problem-solving skills, and emotional resilience (Ata Doğan and Boz, 2019; Gustafsson et al., 2012).

The success of the Bavarian Forest School is further attributed to its strong community involvement. Parents, local authorities, and environmental organizations collaborate to support the school's activities. This collaborative, community-based approach ensures that outdoor play is valued and sustained within the broader community, providing a compelling model for other regions to emulate (Cree and McCree, 2012; Hunter et al., 2020; Bautista et al., 2023).

### *Finnish Forest Kindergartens*

Forest Kindergartens in Finland provide a compelling example of comprehensive outdoor play integration in early childhood education. Operating almost exclusively in natural settings, these kindergartens afford children abundant opportunities for exploration, risk-taking, and play-based learning. Teachers observe significant advancements in children's motor skills, independence, and social interactions. The curriculum intentionally incorporates elements of risk, such as climbing trees and balancing on logs, fostering children's confidence and problem-solving abilities (Ratinen et al., 2021; Pyle, 2002).

The success of Forest Kindergartens has prompted their expansion throughout Finland and internationally. Studies demonstrate that children attending Forest Kindergartens outperform their peers in traditional settings across various developmental domains, including physical health, cognitive skills, and emotional well-being. This model challenges prevailing risk-averse attitudes towards children's play, highlighting the potential benefits of incorporating risk into outdoor play experiences (FNBE, 2022; Sjöblom et al., 2021; Gill, 2007; Galbraith, 2022).

Community support is integral to the success of Forest Kindergartens. Parents, local authorities, and environmental organizations collaborate to establish and sustain these outdoor learning environments. This collective effort ensures that children have access to safe, engaging, and enriching outdoor spaces that promote holistic development (Sjöblom et al., 2021; Gill, 2007; Kyttä, 2004; FNBE, 2022; Ernst et al., 2021).

### *Nature Nurseries in Scotland*

Nature Nurseries in Scotland exemplify the integration of outdoor learning within early childhood education. Children attending these nurseries spend a significant portion of their day engaged in outdoor activities, such as gardening, wildlife observation, and storytelling in natural settings. Evaluations indicate that children in Nature Nurseries demonstrate enhanced physical health, improved concentration, and greater creativity (Zamzow and Ernst, 2020; Hunter et al., 2020). The success of these nurseries underscores the benefits of embedding outdoor play within the early childhood curriculum (Bilton, 2010; Burges and Ernst, 2020).

Furthermore, Nature Nurseries prioritize environmental education. Children are immersed in learning about local flora and fauna, participate in conservation projects, and cultivate a sense of responsibility

towards the environment. This approach not only supports children's holistic development but also fosters a generation of environmentally conscious individuals. The integration of environmental education with outdoor play provides a comprehensive and interconnected approach to early childhood development (Cordiano et al., 2019; Knight, 2009; Dankiw et al., 2020).

The success of Nature Nurseries is reinforced by supportive policy initiatives that champion outdoor learning. The Scottish government has implemented policies encouraging outdoor education and provides funding for the development of outdoor learning environments. This policy support ensures that outdoor play is recognized and valued as an integral component of early childhood education (Davis and Elliot, 2023; DfE, 2021; Dunlop and Fabian, 2007).

To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the practical implementation of outdoor play, this section presents examples of outdoor play initiatives in various countries. These examples highlight successful strategies and challenges encountered, offering valuable insights for potential adaptation within the Malaysian context.

#### *Germany: Forest Schools*

Forest Schools in Germany prioritize immersive, nature-based learning experiences. Children are immersed in the natural environment for a significant portion of the day, engaging with the outdoors regardless of weather conditions. This approach fosters environmental stewardship, independence, and holistic development. Empirical evidence indicates that children participating in Forest Schools exhibit enhanced motor skills, creativity, and social interactions (Knight, 2009).

A case study from the Bavarian Forest School initiative illustrates the efficacy of this approach. Children aged 3 to 6 years engage in daily outdoor activities, including nature walks, creating nature-based crafts, and observing wildlife. Teachers report that these children cultivate a strong connection with nature, demonstrate increased physical fitness, and exhibit heightened environmental awareness (Warden, 2015).

The success of Forest Schools can be attributed, in part, to the comprehensive training that educators receive. Teachers are trained to facilitate outdoor activities, manage risks effectively, and seamlessly integrate environmental education into the curriculum. This professional development ensures that teachers are well-equipped to provide high-quality outdoor learning experiences (Galbraith, 2022; Murray and O'Brien, 2005).

#### *Finland: Embracing Risky Play*

Finland's approach to outdoor play embraces the concept of "risky play," wherein children are encouraged to engage in activities that involve manageable risks. This pedagogical approach is believed to enhance problem-solving skills, self-confidence, and resilience. Finnish children regularly participate in activities such as climbing, balancing, and exploring natural terrains. Empirical evidence suggests that this approach cultivates risk assessment skills and contributes to overall well-being (Sandseter, 2009; Galbraith, 2022).

The Forest Kindergarten movement in Finland exemplifies this approach. These kindergartens operate almost exclusively in outdoor settings, irrespective of weather conditions. Children are encouraged to explore, take risks, and engage in play-based learning within natural environments. Observations indicate that children attending Forest Kindergartens exhibit advanced motor skills, greater independence, and improved social interactions compared to their peers in traditional settings (Pyle, 2002).

The philosophy of risky play in Finland is underpinned by a societal belief in the developmental benefits of allowing children to experience and manage risks. This cultural acceptance of risk as a pedagogical tool contrasts with the more risk-averse attitudes observed in other countries. Finnish parents and educators recognize that exposure to manageable risks fosters the development of critical life skills and resilience in children (Little and Wyver, 2008).

### *United Kingdom: Integrating Outdoor Play into Curriculum*

In the UK, outdoor play is integrated into the early childhood curriculum through frameworks such as the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The EYFS mandates that educational settings provide access to outdoor play areas or incorporate daily outdoor activities. This integration ensures that outdoor play is not considered an optional addendum, but rather a fundamental component of children's education (Galbraith, 2022; Vincent, 2023; EYFS, 2014).

The implementation of outdoor play in UK schools is exemplified by the Nature Nurseries in Scotland. These nurseries embed outdoor learning within their daily routines, with children spending a significant portion of the day engaged in outdoor activities. These activities encompass gardening, wildlife observation, and storytelling in natural settings. Evaluations reveal that children attending Nature Nurseries exhibit enhanced physical health, improved concentration, and greater creativity (Davis and Elliot, 2023; DfE, 2021; Bilton, 2010).

Furthermore, Nature Nurseries emphasize environmental education. Children learn about local flora and fauna, participate in conservation projects, and cultivate a sense of responsibility towards the environment. This approach not only supports children's holistic development but also fosters a generation of environmentally conscious individuals. The integration of environmental education with outdoor play provides a comprehensive and interconnected approach to early childhood development (Davis and Elliot, 2023; DfE, 2021; Knight, 2009).

### *What Malaysia's Preschools Can Learn from The International Preschools on Outdoor Play*

#### *Risk and Safety in Outdoor Play*

A key distinction between the approaches to outdoor play observed in Germany, Finland, and the UK lies in the cultural attitudes towards risk and safety. In Finland, there is a prevailing acceptance of risk as an integral and valuable component of children's play. This contrasts with the more cautious approaches observed in the UK and Malaysia. Embracing risk within play has been shown to foster the development of children's risk assessment skills, resilience, and self-confidence (Cheung, 2018; Bedard et al., 2019; Sandseter, 2009; Vincent, 2023).

While German Forest Schools also incorporate elements of risk, they do so with a strong emphasis on safety and supervision. Children are permitted to engage in activities such as climbing and using tools, but within a structured framework that prioritizes their safety. This balance between risk and safety is crucial for fostering children's independence and problem-solving skills while mitigating potential harm (Gupta, 2018; Knight, 2009; Lee et al., 2020).

In the UK, there is a growing recognition of the importance of risk in play, but practical implementation varies across educational settings. Some schools and nurseries actively embrace risky play, while others remain cautious due to concerns regarding liability and adherence to safety regulations. This inconsistency highlights the need for clear guidelines and professional development for educators on effectively managing risk in outdoor play (Gill, 2007; NFS, 2022; DfE, 2021).

In Malaysia, risk aversion presents a significant barrier to promoting outdoor play. Parents and educators often prioritize safety to the extent that opportunities for risky play are minimized or eliminated. This approach, while well-intentioned, can hinder the development of essential life skills in children. There is a need for cultural and policy shifts to achieve a balance between ensuring safety and recognizing the developmental benefits of risk in play (Little and Wyver, 2008; DfE, 2021; Elliott, 2021; Grigg, 2020).

#### *Curriculum Integration*

A further significant distinction between the examined approaches lies in the degree of outdoor play integration within the curriculum. In the UK, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework

mandates outdoor play as an integral component of the curriculum, ensuring that all children have access to outdoor activities. This contrasts with the more ad-hoc approaches observed in Malaysia, where outdoor play is often considered supplementary rather than fundamental to the curriculum (EYFS, 2014).

German Forest Schools and Finnish Forest Kindergartens exemplify how outdoor play can be seamlessly integrated into the curriculum. These approaches transcend merely providing outdoor time; they embed outdoor experiences within the learning objectives and daily routines. This holistic integration ensures that children benefit from the multifaceted developmental opportunities afforded by outdoor play, which is particularly crucial in mitigating post-Covid challenges observed in young children, such as hyperactivity, diminished sensory skills, and reduced social confidence (Knight, 2009; Pyle, 2002; IOL, 2022; Mygind et al., 2019; Gupta and Jawanda, 2020).

### *Community and Parental Involvement*

Community and parental involvement are integral to the success of outdoor play initiatives. In Germany and Finland, robust community support and parental engagement are key factors contributing to the efficacy of outdoor play programs. Parents actively participate in planning and supporting outdoor activities, while communities invest in establishing and maintaining safe, engaging outdoor spaces (Cree and McCree, 2012; Kytta, 2004; NFS, 2022; Oberle et al., 2021).

Similarly, in the UK, community and parental involvement are emphasized. Programs such as Nature Nurseries actively involve parents in outdoor activities and encourage community partnerships to enhance outdoor learning environments. This collaborative approach ensures that outdoor play is valued and supported by all stakeholders (Bilton, 2010; DfE, 2021; Piaget, 2013).

In Malaysia, there is a growing need to foster greater community and parental involvement in outdoor play (Saleh et al., 2018; Shaari et al., 2020; Sia et al., 2023). Engaging parents and communities in the planning and implementation of outdoor play initiatives can help address safety concerns and cultivate a supportive environment for outdoor learning. Public awareness campaigns and community outreach programs can play a vital role in promoting the benefits of outdoor play and encouraging active participation from all stakeholders (Hunter et al., 2020; IOL, 2022; Dunlop and Fabian, 2007).

### *Global Perspectives on Outdoor Play*

A cross-cultural comparison of outdoor play practices yields valuable insights. For instance, Forest Schools in developed countries, such as Germany, Finland, Scotland, and the United Kingdom, emphasize immersive, nature-based learning experiences that foster environmental stewardship and holistic development. These approaches extend learning beyond the traditional classroom syllabus and embrace the concept of risky play, allowing children to engage in activities that involve manageable risks, thereby enhancing their problem-solving skills and self-confidence (Prince, 2020a; Prince and Cory-Wright, 2022; Shaari et al., 2020; Knight, 2009; Mygind et al., 2019; Oberle et al., 2021; Piaget, 2013; Sandseter, 2009; Gupta and Jawanda, 2020).

In contrast, Malaysia's approach to early childhood education is often characterized by a strong emphasis on academic achievement and technology integration. This can result in limited opportunities for outdoor play and physical activity. By examining these global perspectives, Malaysia can draw upon successful models and adapt best practices to its unique cultural and environmental context (IOL, 2022; Hunter et al., 2020; MOE, 2024).

Furthermore, the United Kingdom's implementation of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework mandates outdoor play as an integral component of early childhood education. This integration ensures that outdoor play is not considered an optional activity, but rather a fundamental aspect of children's holistic development. Studies conducted in the United Kingdom have demonstrated that children who participate in regular outdoor play sessions exhibit significant improvements in physical health, social

skills, and cognitive development (Ouvry and Furtado, 2020; OEAP, 2015; Lundy and Trawick-Smith, 2021; Bilton, 2010).

### *Barriers to Outdoor Play in Malaysia*

Despite the well-documented benefits of outdoor play, several barriers hinder its widespread implementation in Malaysia. One significant impediment is parental concern regarding safety. Elevated crime rates and unsafe neighborhood conditions contribute to parental hesitancy in allowing children to engage in unsupervised outdoor play (Chaplin et al., 2011). Additionally, the tropical climate, characterized by high temperatures and heavy rainfall, can discourage outdoor activities (Saleh et al., 2018; Shaari et al., 2020; Sia et al., 2023; Gill, 2007).

Another significant barrier is the academic pressure faced by young children. The Malaysian education system often prioritizes academic achievement, potentially at the expense of physical activity and play. This is compounded by the increasing prevalence of technology use, which can encourage sedentary behaviors among children (Sjöblom and Svens, 2019; Sia et al., 2023; Palmer, 2006; Cheung et al., 2018). Furthermore, there is a lack of public awareness regarding the multifaceted benefits of outdoor play, leading to insufficient advocacy and support for outdoor learning initiatives (Sia et al., 2023; Vincent, 2023; Shaari et al., 2020; Neaum, 2010).

Therefore, a primary aim of this study is to promote outdoor play as a means of achieving a healthy lifestyle for young children, specifically by encouraging them to engage in physical activity for at least 180 minutes per week.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a multi-method approach to data collection to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing outdoor play in Malaysia (Yin, 2011; Yin, 2014; Sandelowski, 2010). Data were collected through three distinct methods: open-ended questionnaires completed by ten preschool teachers, six focus group interviews with parents, and six one-on-one interviews with preschool children. These instruments facilitated the collection of rich and unbiased qualitative data on participant perceptions, concerns, involvement, and practices related to outdoor play (Yin, 2014; Lockwood et al., 2020). This qualitative component involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with purposefully selected participants to explore their experiences and insights in greater detail (Sandelowski, 2010; Slife and Williams, 1995; Steven et al., 2016).

### *Participants*

The study population comprises twenty-two participants: ten preschool teachers, six parents, and six children aged 4 to 6 years residing in urban and suburban areas of Malaysia. A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure representation from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, educational levels, and geographic regions. This heterogeneity allows for a more nuanced understanding of the barriers and facilitators of outdoor play (Lockwood et al., 2020; Yin, 2014).

The teacher sample includes five senior teachers with more than five years of experience and five beginner teachers with less than five years of experience. The parent sample includes two parents under 30 years old, two parents between 35-40 years old, and two parents over 40 years old. The child sample consists of three boys and three girls, all 6 years of age. See research matrix below:

Research Methods	Participants Criteria	Research Objectives	Data Collection and Analysis
Open-Ended Questions	10 Preschool Teachers(5 Males, 5 Females)	Preschool teachers'	To analyse the data, thematic analysis will

	<p>5 Senior Preschool Teachers (More than 5 years of teaching experience)</p> <p>5 Beginner Preschool Teachers (Less than 5 years of teaching experience)</p>	<p>perception in outdoor play?</p>	<p>be applied. The researcher will use NVivo as it is the most suitable software to analyse qualitative research data. The descriptive data and information will allow the researcher to describe the data will be collected from the respondents where she can use to apply in her research study by coding the theme/topics from preschool teachers' perceptions in outdoor education from school management, parents and children.</p>
<p>Focus Group Interview</p>	<p>6 Parents (3 Males, 3 Females)</p> <p>2 Parents (20-30 years old)</p> <p>2 Parents (31-40 years old)</p> <p>2 Parents (41-50 years old)</p>	<p>Parents' concern about outdoor play.</p>	<p>To analyse the data thematic analysis will be applied, the researcher will use NVivo as it is the most suitable software to qualitative research. The descriptive data and information will allow the researcher to describe the data will be collected from the respondents where she can use to apply in her research study by coding the theme/topics, understanding parents' concern and awareness of outdoor education, how they view outdoor education from their perceptions.</p>
<p>One to One Interview</p>	<p>6 Preschool Children(6 years old)</p> <p>3 Girls</p> <p>3 Boys</p>	<p>Is play part of your right?</p>	<p>To analyse the data, thematic analysis will be used. The researcher will use NVivo as it is the most suitable software to qualitative research. The</p>



			<p><b>descriptive data and information will allow the researcher to describe the data will be collected from the respondents where she can use to apply in her research study by coding the theme/ topics, importance of outdoor education, how they encountered those challenges and how they solved these challenges in their work and outdoor education from professional, personal, and social life dimensions.</b></p>
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**Table 1.** Research Matrix

Sourced: Author's own work

### *Data Collection*

Data collection was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, open-ended questionnaires were administered to preschool teachers to gather qualitative data on participant demographics, perceptions of outdoor play, and reported practices. The open-ended format facilitated the collection of a broad range of information, providing a more comprehensive understanding of teacher perspectives (Lockwood et al., 2020; Yin, 2014). (See Appendix).

In the second phase, focus group interviews (see Appendix) were conducted with parents to explore their perspectives on outdoor play, including their thoughts, concerns, and levels of acceptance. Finally, one-on-one interviews were conducted with six young children to elicit their views on outdoor play. These qualitative methods provided deeper insights into the participants' experiences, challenges, and suggestions for promoting outdoor play (Yin, 2011; Yin, 2014; Sandelowski, 2010). All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for subsequent thematic analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

This qualitative study employed thematic analysis to analyze the data collected from open-ended questionnaires, focus group interviews, and one-on-one interviews. Thematic analysis involved a systematic process of coding the data to identify key themes and sub-themes, facilitating both descriptive and inferential interpretations (Yin, 2011; Yin, 2014; Sandelowski, 2010). This qualitative approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing outdoor play, participant behaviors, and the development of targeted recommendations.

## **Result**

### *Qualitative Findings*

The qualitative data analysis revealed several recurring themes. Parents, particularly those in the 40-55 age range, expressed a strong desire to provide their children with outdoor play opportunities but felt

constrained by safety concerns and time limitations. One parent stated, "I want my child to play outside, but I worry about their safety. The neighborhood is not very safe, and I can't always be there to supervise."

Senior teachers highlighted the need for professional development and resources to effectively integrate outdoor play into their teaching practices. An experienced teacher commented, "We understand the benefits of outdoor play, but we need training and support to create safe and engaging outdoor activities."

Another significant finding is the cultural perception of play in relation to academic success. Both parents and teachers acknowledged the pressure to prioritize academic achievement, which often leads to a reduction in time allocated for play. One parent remarked, "We live in a competitive society where academic success is highly valued. Sometimes, play is seen as less important."

The interviews also revealed that teachers who had received training in outdoor education felt more confident and capable of integrating outdoor play into their curriculum (Bautista et al., 2021a; Bautista et al., 2021b; Akpınar and Kandir, 2022). Preschool teachers with training in planning outdoor play demonstrated greater confidence in assessing and managing outdoor risks, such as weather considerations and ensuring adequate resources for outdoor activities with young children. This underscores the importance of professional development in empowering educators to embrace outdoor learning (Cheung, 2018; IOL, 2022; Grigg, 2020; Elliott, 2021).

## Discussions

The findings of this study underscore the importance of addressing both practical and cultural barriers to outdoor play in many Asian countries, including Malaysia. The academic pressures faced by young children in Malaysia highlight the need for a cultural shift in perceptions of play. Bautista et al. (2021a, 2021b) argue that play should not be perceived as a frivolous activity devoid of educational value. Parents, communities, and policymakers must reconsider their cultural beliefs regarding outdoor play. Rather than solely focusing on traditional academic learning within the confines of a classroom, preschool teachers can facilitate learning beyond the classroom, utilizing the outdoors as a rich and engaging learning environment (Cheung et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2020; Bautista et al., 2021a; Bautista et al., 2021b).

It is essential to recognize that outdoor play and academic success are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary aspects of a holistic education. Outdoor play can provide opportunities for learning across various domains. For example, children can develop numeracy skills by measuring the length of sticks or enhance their literacy skills by writing poetry inspired by their outdoor experiences. Integrating outdoor play into the curriculum can enhance children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, ultimately supporting their academic achievement (Bautista et al., 2021a; Bautista et al., 2021b; Gupta, 2018; Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot, 2011).

Safety concerns are a major deterrent for both parents and teachers, highlighting the need for improved community safety measures and supervised play areas. Additionally, the tropical climate necessitates the development of strategies to facilitate outdoor play in various weather conditions, such as shaded play areas and hybrid indoor-outdoor spaces (Elliott, 2021; Shaari et al., 2021; Saleh et al., 2018).

Furthermore, professional development for teachers is crucial to equip them with the skills and knowledge to effectively incorporate outdoor play into their teaching practices. This includes training on creating safe outdoor environments, designing engaging activities, and integrating play with curricular learning objectives (Shaari et al., 2020; Saleh et al., 2018; Sia et al., 2023).

### *Recommendations*

#### *Policy Recommendations for Preschools Outdoor Play*

Drawing upon international best practices, Malaysia can learn from these models by developing a national framework that mandates outdoor play as an integral part of the early childhood curriculum. In contrast to

the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework in the United Kingdom, which mandates outdoor play (DfE, 2021), the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education) does not explicitly reinforce the importance of outdoor play as a mandatory requirement. The Malaysian Education Blueprint should be revised to provide clear guidelines on the types of outdoor activities, recommended duration of outdoor play, and essential safety measures. Such an approach would ensure that outdoor play is not relegated to individual discretion but is formally recognized as an essential component of early childhood education (DfE, 2021).

Government should establish clear guidelines and standards for outdoor play within the national early childhood curriculum. This framework should specify the minimum recommended time children spend outdoors, the types of activities to encourage, and the necessary safety measures to implement. In addition, people who work closely with children can encourage the incorporation of manageable risks into outdoor play activities. Provide professional development for educators on safely and effectively facilitating risky play. Develop public awareness campaigns to educate parents and the community about the benefits of risky play for children's development. Besides that, government may come out with sufficient fundings to invest in developing safe and accessible outdoor play spaces. Ensure that all schools have adequate facilities, such as playgrounds, shaded areas, and natural environments, to support outdoor play.

Collaborate with local governments and communities to create and maintain public play spaces that are safe, accessible, and engaging for young children. On the other hands, the related departments may provide ongoing professional development opportunities for early childhood educators on the importance of outdoor play, risk management strategies, and innovative outdoor learning strategies. Ensure that teachers are equipped with the skills and knowledge to effectively integrate outdoor play into their curriculum. Nevertheless, schools and community campaigns should be actively involve parents and communities in the planning and implementation of outdoor play initiatives. Provide resources and support for parents to create safe and stimulating outdoor play environments at home. Foster community partnerships to promote outdoor play and enhance neighborhood safety. As for early years educators, they may support ongoing research to evaluate the impact of outdoor play initiatives on children's holistic development and learning outcomes. Utilize this data to inform policy decisions, improve program implementation, and share best practices. Encourage collaboration between researchers, educators, and policymakers to ensure that outdoor play policies are evidence-based and effective.

#### *Future Research Directions*

To extend the findings of this study, future research should prioritize the following areas such as, the related departments and policymakers will conduct longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of outdoor play on children's holistic development, encompassing physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains. These studies should track children over several years to provide comprehensive data on the enduring benefits of outdoor play experiences. Besides that, it should explore the perspectives of children themselves on outdoor play. Utilize child-centered research methods, such as interviews, drawings, and participatory activities, to understand children's views, preferences, and experiences related to outdoor play.

Also, this research will provide valuable insights into how outdoor play can be tailored to meet children's needs and interests effectively. To do so, the schools and community may investigate the role of technology in enriching outdoor play experiences. By exploring how digital tools, such as mobile applications, augmented reality, and interactive devices, can be thoughtfully integrated into outdoor learning experiences to enhance engagement and learning outcomes. It can create critically evaluate the benefits and challenges of combining technology with outdoor play. Moreover, future research may examine how cultural values, beliefs, and practices influence outdoor play in different contexts. Comparative studies between countries with diverse cultural backgrounds can provide insights into how outdoor play can be adapted to meet the unique needs of various communities. This research will contribute to the development of culturally sensitive approaches to promoting and supporting outdoor play. The last but not the least, hopefully the government will evaluate the impact of policies and initiatives aimed at promoting outdoor play. Assess how policies are implemented at the local level, identify barriers to effective implementation, and measure

the outcomes of policy interventions. Utilize this data to refine and improve outdoor play policies and programs.

## Conclusion

Outdoor play is essential for the holistic development of children, particularly within the context of Malaysia's increasing childhood obesity rates and increasingly sedentary lifestyles (AHKGA, 2022; Akpinar and Kandir, 2022; Davis and Elliot, 2023; Bautista et al., 2021a; Bautista et al., 2021b). By addressing barriers to, and actively promoting, outdoor play, Malaysia can improve children's physical activity levels and overall well-being. The findings of this study underscore the importance of a collaborative approach involving parents, teachers, and the broader community to prioritize outdoor learning in early childhood education (Sia et al., 2023; Saleh et al., 2018; Cheung, 2018).

Implementing the recommendations presented in this study can contribute to the creation of a supportive environment for outdoor play, ensuring that children have regular opportunities to engage in physical activities that promote their health and development (Grigg, 2020; Gupta, 2018; Cheung, 2018). The success of outdoor play initiatives in countries such as Germany, Finland, and the UK provides valuable models that can be adapted to the Malaysian context. By learning from these international examples and addressing the unique challenges faced in Malaysia, policymakers, educators, and communities can collaboratively prioritize outdoor play and enhance the quality of early childhood education (IOL, 2022; Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot, 2011).

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## *Appendix*

### *Appendix 1*

#### Staff Interviews-Open-Ended Questions

#### Interview Questions on Outdoor Play

What is your position?

Assistant Teacher

How do you think outdoor play will benefit the children's learning?

They learn how to socialise with others. Turns taking and sharing.

Can you tell me what type of outdoor play you provide in your teaching?

Climbing frames, slides, swings, football, ball games, cycling.

Can you share with me how do children learn through types of play that you have just mentioned?

They learn everything especially in communication.

Do you see the benefit in play? Why and why not?

Yes. Children love play outdoors. They need to release their energy.

How do you assess learning? What evidence do you have that children are learning through play?

I will arrange the toys or resources, checking if anything is broken and I will exclude it for safety reason. I can see their improvements in all aspects especially physical development.

What age group do you work with?

Reception(4-5 years old) or Key Stage 1(5-6 years old)

How long have you been working in this position?

1 year

What are your qualifications?

Level 2 in childcare (Diploma)

How many times a day you will bring children outdoor play?

It depends on the teacher that I work with. Sometimes more than 3 times, sometimes zero.

Do you involve in outdoor play learning?zYes. Normally I will assist the key teachers to arrange the resources and safety check. I am still learning.

How long will your outdoor play takes place?

I didn't count, maybe 30-40 minutes.

What would stop outdoor play when the activities are already planned?

Heavy rain. I hate raining weather.

How often do you changed the play resources?

Depends on the school.

What natural resources will you use during the play?

I don't know. Pebbles, leaves, grass.....

How is safety managed?

Key teachers will give me a list to check and I will go around to check if any broken sharp things.

Do you think some risk taking is essential? Why?

Yes. Otherwise if children get injured, parents' will come.

Do you think sustained shared thinking with an adult should always occur when children are playing outdoor?

Yes. We are important to supervise them.

Did you setting support your outdoor play?

Yes. But not the Mrs P from Key Stage 1. She hates outdoors.

Do the parents support in outdoor play?

50/50

What is the plan for ongoing improvements in outdoor play?

Bigger space for children to move around.

Are there any negative aspects to outdoor play?

Serious injuries from accidents.

Would you get consent from the parents when taking children outdoor play?

Yes. Normally the seniors will do it.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

### *Appendix 2*

#### Staff Interviews-Open-Ended Questions

##### Interview Questions on Outdoor Play

What is your position?

Teaching Assistant

How do you think outdoor play will benefit the children's learning?

Yes

Can you tell me what type of outdoor play you provide in your teaching?

Football, badminton and etc.

Can you share with me how do children learn through types of play that you have just mentioned?

They learn how to hit the ball, kick the ball or improve their physical skills.

Do you see the benefit in play? Why and why not?

Yes. Because they become stronger and more confident. After outdoor times, they will become more behave and listening to us in classroom.

How do you assess learning? What evidence do you have that children are learning through play?

I will arrange the toys for them to choose. They learn how to set rules when playing. They are able to kick the ball, complete the monkey bars without help.

What age group do you work with?

4-5 years old (Reception)

How long have you been working in this position?

2 years

What are your qualifications?



Level 3 in childcare (Advanced Diploma)

How many times a day you will bring children outdoor play?

2

How do your outdoor play learning planned?

Normally I will discuss with Mr T and Ms

How long will your outdoor play takes place?

30-40 minutes

What would stop outdoor play when the activities are already planned?

Parents' complaints normally put me off. Some of them are too overprotective.

How often do you changed the play resources?

I will ask children what they want to lear or play, then I will pull out the resources from the storage.

What natural resources will you use during the play?

Trees, leaves, stones.

How is safety managed?

Me and Mr T will take turn to do the safety check.

Do you think some risk taking is essential? Why?

Yes. Then they will learn from the experience.

Do you think sustained shared thinking with an adult should always occur when children are playing outdoor?

No. I just let them play on their own. Only when they need me, I will help.

Did you setting support your outdoor play?

Yes.

Do the parents support in outdoor play?

Sometimes.

What is the plan for ongoing improvements in outdoor play?

Good weather.

Are there any negative aspects to outdoor play?

One time a child fell down from the monkey bars and broke his arm.

Would you get consent from the parents when taking children outdoor play?

Yes.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

### *Appendix 3*

#### Staff Interviews-Open-Ended Questions

##### Interview Questions on Outdoor Play

What is your position?

Reception Teacher

How do you think outdoor play will benefit the children's learning?

Yes, definitely.

Can you tell me what type of outdoor play you provide in your teaching?

Sometime, I will organise the adult-led activities such as football, fieldtrip like visiting a park nearby the school area. Or I just let children go out and play.

Can you share with me on how do children learn through types of play that you have just mentioned?

Children can learn to count, they can develop their physical skills. They can gain knowledge and understand of the world by experiencing the natural park.

Do you see the benefit in play? Why and why not?

Yes. There are so many positive impacts on children's outdoor plays in learning. Most important, they are children, they can't sit still for whole day.

How do you assess learning? What evidence do you have that children are learning through play?

I can see their hands-eyes coordination skills are improving; I can see they are making more friends when they are playing outside. Their body are getting stronger and attendance are improving because they love coming to school and play with their friends.

What age group do you work with?

4 and 5 years old

How long have you been working in this position?

5 years

What are your qualifications?

Degree in Teaching

How many times a day you will bring children outdoor play?

Twice a day.

How do your outdoor play learning planned?

Normally I will refer to the weather. If it is a sunny day, I might move my classroom lesson to outdoors, it will be more interesting.

How long will your outdoor play takes place?

Around 40minutes each time.

What would stop outdoor play when the activities are already planned?

Weather. If it is too bad.

How often do you changed the play resources?

I tried to change and propose to the management about new resources but still waiting for the approval.

What natural resources will you use during the play?

Everything from the natural environment.

How is safety managed?

I will do the health and safety check before I bring children go outdoors.

Do you think some risk taking is essential? Why?

Yes. It will encourage children's cognitive development and awareness in surrounding.

Do you think sustained shared thinking with an adult should always occur when children are playing outdoor?

Sometimes. It may help them to achieve better skills by scaffolding.

Did you setting support your outdoor play?

Yes, positive.

Do the parents support in outdoor play?

Some yes, some not.

What is the plan for ongoing improvements in outdoor play?

I think more choice in outdoor toys. Some toys need a replacement.

Are there any negative aspects to outdoor play?

Maybe some accidents will occur. But parents are not happy about that.

Would you get consent from the parents when taking children outdoor play?

No. Only when we are taking them to the park(Field trip).

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

#### *Appendix 4*

#### *Staff Interviews-Open-Ended Questions*

#### *Interview Questions on Outdoor Play*

What is your position?

Key Stage 1 Teacher

How do you think outdoor play will benefit the children's learning?

Partially yes. Maybe in physical development.

Can you tell me what type of outdoor play you provide in your teaching?

I just let them out to play. Normally I will ask the assistants to help to put out bicycles, bats, balls.

Can you share with me how do children learn through types of play that you have just mentioned?

They can improve their gross motor and fine motor skills.

Do you see the benefit in play? Why and why not?

Not really. Children will get too rough in outdoor plays.

How do you assess learning? What evidence do you have that children are learning through play?

I will give them guidance such as how to ride on the bikes. They learn how to balance themselves.

What age group do you work with?

5-6 years old

How long have you been working in this position?

8 years

What are your qualifications?

BA(Hons) in Teaching

How many times a day you will bring children outdoor play?

Twice

Do you involve in outdoor play learning?

No. Normally I let my TA to set out the plays for them. We do our lessons mostly indoor.

How long will your outdoor play takes place?

30 minutes

What would stop outdoor play when the activities are already planned?

When they are not completed their lessons in English and Mathematics. Sometime is parents' preference on their academic improvement. Some of them still not being able to read A-Z.

How often do you changed the play resources?

It depends on the school budget.

What natural resources will you use during the play?

Everything from the natural.

How is safety managed?

I will send the Teaching Assistants a safety checklist to check to avoid the accidents/injuries.

Do you think some risk taking is essential? Why?

No at school. Because parents will be upset.

Do you think sustained shared thinking with an adult should always occur when children are playing outdoor?

Yes, they need to watch all the times especially boys.

Did you setting support your outdoor play?

Yes.

Do the parents support in outdoor play?

Some.

What is the plan for ongoing improvements in outdoor play?

More new resources or a canvas canopy to prevent the hot sun or heavy rain.

Are there any negative aspects to outdoor play?

When accidents happened because children get too wild when playing outside.

Would you get consent from the parents when taking children outdoor play?

Yes.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

*Appendix 6*

*Staff Interviews-Open-Ended Questions*

*Interview Questions on Outdoor Play*

What is your position?

Reception Teacher

How do you think outdoor play will benefit the children's learning?

Yes. Their result in overall are getting better since learning outside the classroom programme.

Can you tell me what type of outdoor play you provide in your teaching?

Anything.

Can you share with me how do children learn through types of play that you have just mentioned?

They learn through interactions and working as a team.

Do you see the benefit in play? Why and why not?

Yes. Outdoor play is a big part of healthy growth, learning, development and wellbeing for children.

How do you assess learning? What evidence do you have that children are learning through play?

Yes. Children gained wide benefits from the outdoor play because of their natural born curiosity. They love to move around and explore things around them.

What age group do you work with?

4-7 years old

How long have you been working in this position?

7 years

What are your qualifications?

Post Graduate in Teaching

How many times a day you will bring children outdoor play?

At least 2 times

How do your outdoor play learning planned?

I will read at the weather reports two days before and move my learning classroom outside as much as possible in an open-air environment.

How long will your outdoor play takes place?

Sometimes an hour or longer under the shade. If is too hot, we may move indoor.

What would stop outdoor play when the activities are already planned?

Weather condition

How often do you changed the play resources?

Quite often, children love to explore new toys. Sometimes I just use my own money to buy new resources.

What natural resources will you use during the play?

Leaves, branches, rocks, hay, sand. Those are free.

How is safety managed?

I will check through the surroundings and minimise the hazardous.

Do you think some risk taking is essential? Why?

Yes, children will gain new skills and confidence through the experiences.

Do you think sustained shared thinking with an adult should always occur when children are playing outdoor?

Yes. Children learn through by seeing role models.

Did you setting support your outdoor play?

Yes.

Do the parents support in outdoor play?

Some parents don't really support the outdoors but I will spend more time to explain to them.

What is the plan for ongoing improvements in outdoor play?

Better designated outdoor areas and more outdoors time.

Are there any negative aspects to outdoor play?

Perhaps is when children get injured. Or having allergic reactions towards some plants.

Would you get consent from the parents when taking children outdoor play?

Yes. It is essential in working partnership with parents.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

*Appendix 7*

*Staff Interviews-Open-Ended Questions*

*Interview Questions on Outdoor Play*

What is your position?

Trainee Teacher

How do you think outdoor play will benefit the children's learning?

It becomes more interesting when learning outside the classroom.

Can you tell me what type of outdoor play you provide in your teaching?

Bicycles, playground, ball games, skipping ropes, water and sand play.

Can you share with me what on how do children learn through types of play that you have just mentioned?

They love being outdoors and it promote their development in all areas.

Do you see the benefit in play? Why and why not?

Yes. Isn't it stated in MOH BluePrints that every child need to be outside for more than 3 hours per day. Children will have a strong body.

How do you assess learning? What evidence do you have that children are learning through play?

I will make lesson plans and seek advices from the teachers that I am working with. Children's emotional and well-being are more calm after outdoors.

What age group do you work with?

Reception and Key Stage 1

How long have you been working in this position?

6 months practicum

What are your qualifications?

Trainee in Early Years Teacher-(PGCE)

How many times a day you will bring children outdoor play?

Three times

How do your outdoor play learning planned?

Depends on the weather condition.

How long will your outdoor play takes place?

40 minutes. It is set by the school.

What would stop outdoor play when the activities are already planned?

Weather or the Key Teacher's planning on that day. I am still learning but we will discuss about the lesson plans a day before.



How often do you changed the play resources?

I don't know about it.

What natural resources will you use during the play?

Shells, feathers, driftwood, seaweed, bark, hay, pinecones, rocks/pebbles, leaves, flowers, cotton bags filled with lavender.

How is safety managed?

I will each time I take children outdoors.

Do you think some risk taking is essential? Why?

Yes. To prevent any unnecessary accidents/injuries.

Do you think sustained shared thinking with an adult should always occur when children are playing outdoor?

Yes, children sometimes need guidance in some certain task like riding bicycles.

Did you setting support your outdoor play?

Yes.

Do the parents support in outdoor play?

Yes.

What is the plan for ongoing improvements in outdoor play?

Replacement on the broken toys. Such as a swing.

Are there any negative aspects to outdoor play?

Sometimes parents will upset about their child's fall or bruises.

Would you get consent from the parents when taking children outdoor play?

Yes.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

*Appendix 8*

*Staff Interviews-Open-Ended Questions*

*Interview Questions on Outdoor Play*

What is your position?

Trainee Teacher

How do you think outdoor play will benefit the children's learning?

It will be fun to stay outdoor, more stimulating and fun for young children especially in their physical development.

Can you tell me what type of outdoor play you provide in your teaching?

Bicycles, ball games, skipping ropes, playground, water and sand play.

Can you share with me what on how do children learn through types of play that you have just mentioned?

They love being outdoors and it promote their development in all areas.

Do you see the benefit in play? Why and why not?

Yes. Isn't it stated in Malaysia's BluePrints that every child need to be outside for more than 3 hours per day. Children will have a strong body.

How do you assess learning? What evidence do you have that children are learning through play?

I will make lesson plans and seek advices from the teachers that I am working with. Children's are easier to focus and control after outdoor play, otherwise they are very hyperactive especially after Covid time.

What age group do you work with?

4 years old, sometimes 5 and 6 years old.

How long have you been working in this position?

6 months from now.

What are your qualifications?

Degree in Early Childhood Studies

How many times a day you will bring children outdoor play?

Three times

How do your outdoor play learning planned?

Depends on the weather condition.

How long will your outdoor play takes place?

40 minutes. It is set by the school.

What would stop outdoor play when the activities are already planned?

Weather or the main Key Teacher's planning on that day. I am still learning but we will discuss about the lesson plans a day before. Sometimes those typical parents' safety concerns or academic-drilled parents. They see 'outdoor play' is a sinful activity, I feel sorry to their kids.

How often do you changed the play resources?

I don't know about it. If is broken, I will discard it. And find those available resources from natural environment. Such as sticks, leaves or branches.

What natural resources will you use during the play?

Shells, feathers, driftwood, seaweed, bark, hay, pinecones, rocks/pebbles, leaves, flowers, cotton bags filled with lavender.

How is safety managed?

I will carry out inspections each time I take children outdoors.

Do you think some risk taking is essential? Why?

Yes. To prevent any unnecessary accidents/injuries. I am so scared of those overprotective parents' complaints.

Do you think sustained shared thinking with an adult should always occur when children are playing outdoor?

Yes, children sometimes need guidance in some certain task like riding bicycles.

Did you setting support your outdoor play?

Yes.

Do the parents support in outdoor play?

50/50

What is the plan for ongoing improvements in outdoor play?

Replacement on the broken toys. Such as a swing. More new resources please!

Are there any negative aspects to outdoor play?

Sometimes parents will upset about their child's fall or bruises. Or they just want their kids to study and stay indoor whole time.

Would you get consent from the parents when taking children outdoor play?

Yes.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

*Appendix 9*

*Staff Interviews-Open-Ended Questions*

*Interview Questions on Outdoor Play*

What is your position?

Homeroom Teacher

How do you think outdoor play will benefit the children's learning?

Of course it is great to learn beyond the classroom especially physical activities. It is better to stay outdoor, more interesting and fun for young children especially to kill off their excessive energy and calm their stress.

Can you tell me what type of outdoor play you provide in your teaching?

Bicycles, ball games, skipping ropes, playground, water and sand play. Anything!

Can you share with me what on how do children learn through types of play that you have just mentioned?

They learned about weather, seasons, measurements, physical balance, hand-eye coordination when climbing, sharing and taking turns, all sorts of development and most important, they are enjoying outdoor play so much and be happy! They just love being outdoors and being wild in nature.

Do you see the benefit in play? Why and why not?

Yes. Children will have a strong body and balance mind after long hours of learning in academic. Especially those kids who has been restrained at home since Covid time. They need more outdoor play opportunities and making friends.

How do you assess learning? What evidence do you have that children are learning through play?

I just let children be free and unwind themselves when we go outside. I will set some simple ground rules for them, such as sharing, turn-takings, do not hurt or injure themselves or others. The rest, they are good to go! I can see my children's emotional and well-being are more calm and smiley after outdoors.

What age group do you work with?

6 years old.

How long have you been working in this position?

5 years

What are your qualifications?

Master in Education and trained in outdoor play

How many times a day you will bring children outdoor play?

Three to five times, whenever we have free time after kids completed their tasks. They are pretty fast and high in cooperation when they are in my class, they will finish all their given tasks very fast, because they want more outdoor play time.

How do your outdoor play learning planned?

I will check on the weather forecast condition and plan around the weather. If is sunny day, we will play outdoor. If is rainy day, we will move to a covered outdoor and play on that

compound. Although our school empty compound is small, but it is better than none, children are still happy to run, jump and play outdoor.

How long will your outdoor play takes place?

30-40 minutes. It is set by the our school play policies.

What would stop outdoor play when the activities are already planned?

Weather or the child's health condition. Or some kids are not listening to me or being abusive towards other kids. Then I will punish those misbehaved children from outdoor play as their consequences.

How often do you changed the play resources?

I will spend my money from my pocket to buy some balls, hula hoops or long lasting outdoor resources. I just want to see my students are happy and have more fun when they are in my care.

What natural resources will you use during the play?

Dry leaves, branches, shells, pine cones, rocks or pebbles, sticks or sand.

How is safety managed?

I will work together with my assistant to check thoroughly before we are going out. If those sharp or broken resources we will put away immediately. We will also advise and counselling those parents who are not ready for outdoor play concept by giving them some information, educational chats and encouragement. Hopefully it will ease their worries and stress when seeing their kids are playing outside. Childhood is not just about study or academic drilling life.

Do you think some risk taking is essential? Why?

Yes. It is important for us educators to insure children's safety, and for kids we hope they can learn from the falls or injuries. So they know how to measure the safety and take care themselves.

Do you think sustained shared thinking with an adult should always occur when children are playing outdoor?

Not really. Our kids are 6 years old. They have a good understanding and able to follow the ground rules. They are pretty mature when going outdoor play because they don't want me to grounded them, hahaha!

Did you setting support your outdoor play?

200 % Yes.

Do the parents support in outdoor play?

Yes. After I talked to them. Parents sometimes just want their kids to be healthy and happy although they are worrying about safety, injuries or their academic is far behind. But, more communication and it will make them feel better and confident in outdoor play. It is important to get parental involvement and support from school, parents and the community too!

What is the plan for ongoing improvements in outdoor play?

Replacement on the broken toys. Or give me higher salary to buy more outdoor resources. More outdoor playtime and a supportive management.

Are there any negative aspects to outdoor play?

Sometimes management will reprimand me for staying too long outside or children got sunburn, injuries or bruises. Or other preschool teachers who hate outdoor will dislike me because children love me more, I am the fun teacher compared to them who always give homework or stay indoor by their lessons.

Would you get consent from the parents when taking children outdoor play?

Yes.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

### *Appendix 10*

#### *Staff Interviews-Open-Ended Questions*

##### *Interview Questions on Outdoor Play*

1. What is your position?

Trainee Teacher

How do you think outdoor play will benefit the children's learning?

I am not sure because I just started to work for three months. But I think it will benefit the children when we learn outdoor. I love to get some fresh air too to make me feel fresh and gain back my energy after a long hour study or teaching. It is good to get some natural fresh environment for teachers and students.

Can you tell me what type of outdoor play you provide in your teaching?

Water play, sand play, ball games, parachute, cooking and many other my childhood games. I want to share all my experience and happiness with my students.

Can you share with me what on how do children learn through types of play that you have just mentioned?

Young children will love outdoor play and learn better after we have been outside. It will burn their excessive energy and refresh their minds, and physical healthy. They become more happy and sociable after outdoor play or lessons.

Do you see the benefit in play? Why and why not?

Yes. Children will become more confident, strong and talkative in play. However, I noticed some children whose parents' are not allowing them to outdoor play will keep telling me to go back to the classroom and do more homework because their mum and dad will not be happy of they play outside. Sometimes I don't know how to deal with this type of challenges. Because I am a new teacher, and those children looked so serious in study. Maybe play too long might

not be helpful to help them achieve better grade and get in to better school. I am still considering this question.

How do you assess learning? What evidence do you have that children are learning through play?

I try to make my learning lesson plans outdoor and I will consult those senior teachers or advices for the play. Rather than I will get into troubles because I don't want to lose my job. I can see children's emotional and behaviours are improved after outdoor activities.

What age group do you work with?

5-6 years old.

How long have you been working in this position?

3 months now

What are your qualifications?

Degree in Education

How many times a day you will bring children outdoor play?

Two times

How do your outdoor play learning planned?

I will draft my outdoor play and consult senior teachers. I am still learning to be more professional by having them to coach me. I will be more confidence sice they know what parents and management want.

How long will your outdoor play takes place?

20 minutes. It is very difficult for me because children are not following my instructions. So I will finish my outdoor play before they have any accidents or I receive any complaints from parents or management.

What would stop outdoor play when the activities are already planned?

Weather or parents' complaints. It is scary when I was called by management to listen to parents' feedback. I will have a very upset week.....and stop outdoor play when I am not capable or confident to take them outdoor.

How often do you changed the play resources?

I don't know about it. Normally is done by senior teachers.

What natural resources will you use during the play?

Flower, sticks or something I can find from the ground.

How is safety managed?

I will check everytime I go out. But children are hard to control when outdoors. They are very wild and quite aggressive.

Do you think some risk taking is essential? Why?

It is a must. Yes. I want to prevent any unnecessary accidents, bruises, injuries or bleeding cases.

Do you think sustained shared thinking with an adult should always occur when children are playing outdoor?

Yes, these children always and constantly need to shout to stop all naughty behaviours. Sometimes I feel so exhausted and sore throat after keep telling them not to risk themselves in play.

Did you setting support your outdoor play?

Yes, I support outdoor play but can I have 2 more teaching assistants to give me a hand, so I wont be drained out each time after outdoor play.

Do the parents support in outdoor play?

I don't know. I think some are not happy with outdoor play because their kids wanna get in to good school, they must study harder and harder, more homework tasks for them.

What is the plan for ongoing improvements in outdoor play?

Please can I have two more teaching assistants to help me supervise on those kids. They are like monkeys when playing outside and never listened to me.

Are there any negative aspects to outdoor play?

Children's accidnets or injuries, or children are gone too far when playing outdoor.

Would you get consent from the parents when taking children outdoor play?

Yes.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

*Focus Group Appendix (6 parents respondents)*

*Appendix 11*

*Focus Group Discussions*

*Appendix*

*Focus Group Interview on Outdoor Play in Learning(PARENTS/CARERS)*

- What is your relationship to the child? \_\_\_\_\_Grandmum\_\_\_\_\_
- How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_65\_\_\_\_\_
- How often do you take your child to play outdoor? \_\_\_\_\_No\_\_\_\_\_
- Do you like to go outdoor? \_\_\_\_\_Not now\_\_\_\_\_



- Please scale 1-5 as your answer (1-lowest, 5-highest)

Benefits children on:	1	2	3	4	5
Physical Development					x
Freedom to move					x
An Awareness of their surroundings		x			
Hands on experience					x
Improve Coordination skills					x
Cognitive development				x	
Social skills				x	
Improve Emotional Development			x		
Creativity and Expression				x	
Communication, Literacy and Language Skills					x
Maths Skills		x			

Please read and stated your answer:

	YES	NO
A. Outdoor plays encourage learning	x	
B. Outdoor play should take place in whatever weather		x
C. Outdoor plays are important in learning	x	
D. Practitioners should spend more time on outdoor play planning		
E. Practitioners should create adult-led outdoor play learning		x
F. Some risk taking in outdoor play is acceptable		x
G. Children should have sufficient time of outdoor play	x	

Please tick if you love outdoor play in learning provision.

YES	<b>NO</b>
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What are your views on outdoor play?

I am too old to bring my grandson to go out because he is too hyperactive and won't listen to me. He only goes out when his parents are picking up in the evening but it depends on the weather or time. If is too late, their parents will just take him home straight away. They are busy working.

*Appendix 12*

*Focus Group Interview on Outdoor Play in Learning(PARENTS/CARERS)*

- What is your relationship to the child? \_\_\_\_\_Daddy\_\_\_\_\_

- How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_38\_\_\_\_\_
- How often do you take your child to play outdoor? \_\_\_\_\_Always\_\_\_\_\_
- Do you like to go outdoor? \_\_\_\_\_Yes!\_\_\_\_\_
- Please scale 1-5 as your answer (1-lowest, 5-highest)

Benefits children on:	1	2	3	4	5
Physical Development					x
Freedom to move					x
An Awareness of their surroundings					x
Hands on experience					x
Improve Coordination skills					x
Cognitive development					x
Social skills					x
Improve Emotional Development					x
Creativity and Expression					x
Communication, Literacy and Language Skills					x
Maths Skills					x

Please read and stated your answer:

	YES	NO
A. Outdoor plays encourage learning		x
B. Outdoor play should take place in whatever weather		x
C. Outdoor plays are important in learning		x
D. Practitioners should spend more time on outdoor play planning		x
E. Practitioners should create adult-led outdoor play learning		x
F. Some risk taking in outdoor play is acceptable		x
G. Children should have sufficient time of outdoor play		x

Please tick if you love outdoor play in learning provision.

<b>YES</b>	N
	O

What are your views on outdoor play?

I love letting my children to go outdoors although she is a girl. She loves going outdoors and we always enjoyed taking her to the parks and run wild in the field, or doing fishing together. That's how we grown up, isn't it? No risk, no gain. I knew some parents are complaint about letting children go outdoors when is wet, it is totally wrong! After all, when she comes home in dirt, I am not the one doing washing, hahaha!

*Appendix 13**Focus Group Interview on Outdoor Play in Learning(PARENTS/CARERS)*

- What is your relationship to the child? \_\_\_\_\_ MUM \_\_\_\_\_
- How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ 22 \_\_\_\_\_
- How often do you take your child to play outdoor? Everyday
- Do you like to go outdoor? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- Please scale 1-5 as your answer (1-lowest, 5-highest)

Benefits children on:	1	2	3	4	5
Physical Development					x
Freedom to move					x
An Awareness of their surroundings		x			
Hands on experience				x	
Improve Coordination skills				x	
Cognitive development				x	
Social skills				x	
Improve Emotional Development			x		
Creativity and Expression			x		
Communication, Literacy and Language Skills				x	
Maths Skills		x			

Please read and stated your answer:

	YES	NO
A. Outdoor plays encourage learning	x	
B. Outdoor play should take place in whatever weather	x	
C. Outdoor plays are important in learning	x	
D. Practitioners should spend more time on outdoor play planning	x	
E. Practitioners should create adult-led outdoor play learning		x
F. Some risk taking in outdoor play is acceptable	x	
G. Children should have sufficient time of outdoor play	x	

Please tick if you love outdoor play in learning provision.

YES	N
	O

What are your views on outdoor play?

Me and my partner love to go outside when we were young. I hope that my child will enjoy their childhood just like us rather than just sitting in the classroom. It is fun to get dirty and fall down from climbing trees! But this is has to do with the management's decision, right?

#### Appendix 14

#### Focus Group Interview on Outdoor Play in Learning(PARENTS/CARERS)

- What is your relationship to the child? \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_
- How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_34\_\_\_\_\_
- How often do you take your child to play outdoor? \_\_\_\_\_Yes\_\_\_\_\_
- Do you like to go outdoor? \_\_\_\_\_Yes\_\_\_\_\_
- Please scale 1-5 as your answer (1-lowest, 5-highest)

Benefits children on:	1	2	3	4	5
Physical Development					x
Freedom to move					x
An Awareness of their surroundings					x
Hands on experience					x
Improve Coordination skills					x
Cognitive development					x
Social skills					x
Improve Emotional Development					x
Creativity and Expression					x
Communication, Literacy and Language Skills					x
Maths Skills					x

Please read and stated your answer:

	YES	NO
A. Outdoor plays encourage learning	x	
B. Outdoor play should take place in whatever weather	x	
C. Outdoor plays are important in learning	x	
D. Practitioners should spend more time on outdoor play planning	x	
E. Practitioners should create adult-led outdoor play learning	x	
F. Some risk taking in outdoor play is acceptable	x	
G. Children should have sufficient time of outdoor play	x	

Please tick if you love outdoor play in learning provision.

<b>YES</b>	<b>N O</b>
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What are your views on outdoor play?

Children are supposed to stay outdoors as much as they want, not being kept in the room. I love Miss S as my son always said that she will take them out to play.

*Appendix 15*

*Focus Group Interview on Outdoor Play in Learning(PARENTS/CARERS)*

- What is your relationship to the child? \_\_\_\_\_MUM\_\_\_\_\_
- How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_30\_\_\_\_\_
- How often do you take your child to play outdoor? \_\_\_\_SOMETIMES\_\_\_\_\_
- Do you like to go outdoor? \_\_\_\_YES\_\_\_\_\_
- Please scale 1-5 as your answer (1-lowest, 5-highest)

<b>Benefits children on:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Physical Development					√
Freedom to move					
An Awareness of their surroundings					
Hands on experience					
Improve Coordination skills					
Cognitive development					
Social skills					
Improve Emotional Development					
Creativity and Expression					
Communication, Literacy and Language Skills					
Maths Skills					

Please read and stated your answer:

	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>A. Outdoor plays encourage learning</b>		
<b>B. Outdoor play should take place in whatever weather</b>		
<b>C. Outdoor plays are important in learning</b>		
<b>D. Practitioners should spend more time on outdoor play planning</b>		
<b>E. Practitioners should create adult-led outdoor play learning</b>		
<b>F. Some risk taking in outdoor play is acceptable</b>		

<b>G. Children should have sufficient time of outdoor play</b>		
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Please tick if you love outdoor play in learning provision.

<b>YES</b>	<b>N O</b>
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What are your views on outdoor play?

It is good TO letting children play outside. Maybe a little older before entering the formal school only we will think about more time on writing or mathematics learning. It is always fun when playing during wet weather. They love to play on the puddles. Kids always will be kids.

*Appendix 16*

*Focus Group Interview on Outdoor Play in Learning(PARENTS/CARERS)*

- What is your relationship to the child? \_\_Father\_\_\_\_\_
- How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_45\_\_\_\_\_
- How often do you take your child to play outdoor? \_\_Rarely\_\_\_\_\_
- Do you like to go outdoor? \_\_No\_\_\_\_\_
- Please scale 1-5 as your answer (1-lowest, 5-highest)

Benefits children on:	1	2	3	4	5
Physical Development					x
Freedom to move		x			
An Awareness of their surroundings	x				
Hands on experience				x	
Improve Coordination skills					x
Cognitive development		x			
Social skills			x		
Improve Emotional Development		x			
Creativity and Expression			x		
Communication, Literacy and Language Skills			x		
Maths Skills	x				

Please read and stated your answer:

	YES	NO
A. Outdoor plays encourage learning		x
B. Outdoor play should take place in whatever weather		x
C. Outdoor plays are important in learning		x
D. Practitioners should spend more time on		x

<b>outdoor play planning</b>			
<b>E.</b>	<b>Practitioners should create adult-led outdoor play learning</b>	<b>x</b>	
<b>F.</b>	<b>Some risk taking in outdoor play is acceptable</b>		<b>x</b>
<b>G.</b>	<b>Children should have sufficient time of outdoor play</b>		<b>x</b>

Please tick if you love outdoor play in learning provision.

<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
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What are your views on outdoor play?

I don't like my kid to play outside because when they come home, always have bruises and covered in dirt. I think little outdoor play is enough so that they can focus more on reading stories or writing. If they play too much, at night they can't sleep well.

*One to One Interview (6 children)*

Child's Interview and recorded by the researcher with parents' consent

*Appendix 17*

How old are you?

6

Are you a boy or girl?

I am a girl, Miss.

Do you like going outdoor?

Yes, yes, yes, 2000 yes!

What are your favourite activities? Why?

I love playing soccer. And I love Miss S and Mr T will take us to natural walk in the park and feeding ducks, sometimes. I love to count how many steps we can walk to the park, and how many steps we have to go back from the park. It is always different steps.

How long you want to play outdoor?

As many as possible. I love to stay outdoor, classroom is boring. Mr T will take us learn mathematics and spelling outside the classroom and I love it!

What stop you from playing outdoors?

I think we have lessons sometimes, so we can't go out. Those teachers who are boring will make us stay inside the classroom and do more work.

Is there anything you want to change in the outdoor play?

Can we have a new swing? And some new bats? They are old and hard to play. I hope I can be in Miss T and Mr P's class forever because they will always take us outdoors. I love them.

Thank you for your participation.

*Appendix 18*

*Child's Interview and recorded by the researcher*

How old are you?

6

Are you a boy or girl?

Girl

Do you like going outdoor?

Yes.

What are your favourite activities? Why?

I like to walk on the bench and monkey bars. Sometimes, climbing on trees like other boys. Because it is cool!

How long you want to play outdoor?

1 hours? Maybe longer, 3 hours.

What stop you from playing outdoors?

Study. I am in Mrs P's class and she always said that we must prepare ourselves to go to the primary school. So we have many homework but I hate sitting indoor.

Is there anything you want to change in the outdoor play?

I wish to have longer time in outdoors especially sunny day. It is fun to throw balls or kick ball with your friends, and not homework all the times, it is boring.

Thank you for your participation.

*Appendix 19*

*Child's Interview and recorded by the researcher*

How old are you?

6

Are you a boy or girl?

Boy



What are your favourite activities? Why?

Football, monkey bars, climbing frames and so many. I love running around with my friends.

How long you want to play outdoor?

Long time!

What stop you from playing outdoors?

Mrs P and my parents. They think I must study because I am not good in spelling. I hate homework. If I don't finish my writing on time or I scored bad spelling, they will put me in classroom and I feel so sad because they all go out to play, only me stay in classroom. It feels sad and terrible. I want to go outside too!

Is there anything you want to change in the outdoor play?

Can we have a bigger playground? Because I always run and crashed with the girls and they don't like me.

Thank you for your participation.

#### *Appendix 20*

Child's Interview and recorded by the researcher

How old are you?

6 years old

Are you a boy or girl?

I am a boy.

Do you like going outdoor?

Yes for sure!

What are your favourite activities? Why?

I love football. Why, because I love to be a footballer.

How long you want to play outdoor?

More than 1 hour. Maybe whole day? I hate sitting down in the classroom..

What stop you from playing outdoors?

Teachers will call us in after the bell rings. Or when it is rainy or too hot day.

Thank you for your participation.

#### *Appendix 21*

Child's Interview and recorded by the researcher

How old are you?

6 years old

Are you a boy or girl?

Girl

Do you like going outdoor?

Yes. But my parents and teachers say I must read and do more homework because it is time for me to go standard 1 and I must learn more. Play is no good for my study. But I learn many things when I play outside, I feel my brain can be more smart.

What are your favourite activities? Why?

Hide and seek, catching ball. I can play with my friends.

How long you want to play outdoor?

Not too long because I will get too tired.

What stop you from playing outdoors?

Mummy don't like my dress to get dirty. Then Mrs P won't allow us to go outdoors if it is raining. Sometimes boys are too rough when playing.

Is there anything you want to change in the outdoor play?

Can we have more outdoor toys for girls? Boys have many toys but girls are so little. We want a doll house. I don't like bikes or ball games.

Thank you for your participation.

#### *Appendix 22*

Child's Interview and recorded by the researcher

How old are you?

5 years old and I will be 6 next month.

Are you a boy or girl?

Boy

Do you like going outdoor?

Yes

What are your favourite activities? Why?

I love Monkey Bars. It is fun. Mr T did it yesterday and he taught me that. He is strong!

How long you want to play outdoor?

I don't know.

What stop you from playing outdoors?

Mummy said I need to read to recognise words. Then other boys are too rough, they always pushed me. I preferred to play with girls.

Is there anything you want to change in the outdoor play?

More new toys and let us play with more cooking games. Only Mrs H and Mr T will let us play and the rest teachers will ask us do homework all times. I hope everyday is their class, so we can go out and play even a raining day! They will let us play with raincoats or umbrellas. But sometimes I can hear some parents are scolding them because it is raining.

Thank you for your participation