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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### UTILIZATION AND PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PLAY FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT AMONG DAY CARE TEACHERS IN FLORA DISTRICT

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#### Abstract

This study examined the utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play for child development among Day Care teachers in Flora District during the School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, the study investigated the respondents' demographic profile, the level of utilization of outdoor play, the perceived developmental benefits associated with outdoor play, the relationships among profile variables, utilization, and perceived benefits, and the differences in utilization when respondents were grouped according to profile characteristics. The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design involving 17 Day Care teachers selected through total enumeration sampling. Data were gathered using a researcher-modified Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) questionnaire anchored on established theories of child development and experiential learning. Descriptive statistics, weighted mean, Spearman Rank-Order Correlation, Kruskal-Wallis Test, and Shapiro-Wilk Test were utilized in the analysis of data. Findings revealed that outdoor play was very highly utilized among Day Care teachers, particularly in the areas of creative play, physical skills, and social interaction. Likewise, respondents perceived outdoor play as very highly beneficial for children's physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and instructional development. Significant relationships were found between teachers' age, teaching experience, number of trainings attended, and both the utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play. Significant differences in utilization were likewise observed when respondents were grouped according to profile variables. Despite the positive findings, respondents identified challenges such as limited budget, inadequate equipment, poor maintenance of play areas, and unfavorable weather conditions. The study concluded that outdoor play remains an essential and developmentally appropriate strategy for promoting holistic child development in Early Childhood Care and Development programs. Continuous professional development, institutional support, and improved outdoor learning environments are recommended to strengthen the effective implementation of outdoor play in Day Care Centers.

*Keywords: outdoor play, child development, Day Care teachers, experiential learning, ECCD, early childhood education*

## Introduction

Outdoor play is widely recognized as an essential component of early childhood education because of its significant contribution to children's holistic development. Research consistently demonstrates that participation in outdoor play enhances children's physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and creative competencies (Bento & Dias, 2017). Through outdoor experiences, children develop motor coordination, problem-solving skills, communication abilities, emotional regulation, and social interaction skills. Outdoor environments likewise provide opportunities for experiential learning, exploration, imagination, and meaningful engagement with peers and the natural environment.

International organizations and educational institutions continue to advocate for outdoor and play-based learning approaches in early childhood education because of their positive developmental outcomes. UNICEF (2025) emphasized that learning through play strengthens children's curiosity, creativity, collaboration, and overall well-being. Similarly, constructivist and experiential learning theorists argue that children learn most effectively when they actively interact with their environment and construct knowledge through authentic experiences.

Despite the recognized importance of outdoor play, opportunities for outdoor engagement among young children have declined in many communities due to urbanization, safety concerns, increased screen exposure, limited recreational spaces, and academic pressures (Gray, 2011). Children now spend more time indoors engaged in digital activities, thereby reducing opportunities for active play, social interaction, and nature-based exploration. These changes have raised concerns among educators and child development specialists regarding the long-term implications of limited outdoor experiences on children's physical and psychosocial well-being.

In the Philippines, the implementation of early childhood education programs is guided by Republic Act No. 10410, otherwise known as the Early Years Act of 2013. The law institutionalized the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) System and emphasized the provision of developmentally appropriate and child-centered learning experiences for young children. Day Care Centers, operating under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and local government units, are expected to integrate play-based and experiential learning approaches that support children's total development.

Although outdoor play is recognized as beneficial, many Day Care teachers encounter challenges in implementing outdoor activities consistently. Previous studies identified constraints such as limited facilities, inadequate outdoor equipment, insufficient teacher preparation, safety concerns, weather disturbances, and competing academic demands (Ernst, 2014; Little & Wyver, 2008). These challenges are likewise evident in Flora District, Apayao, where some Day Care Centers experience limitations in outdoor facilities, instructional resources, and safe play environments.

Despite the educational importance of outdoor play, limited localized research has examined how Day Care teachers in Flora District utilize outdoor play and perceive its developmental benefits. The absence of empirical local evidence limits the ability of policymakers, administrators, and educators to formulate contextually appropriate interventions that strengthen outdoor learning practices in Day Care Centers.

Hence, this study was conducted to determine the utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play for child development among Day Care teachers in Flora District during the School Year 2025–2026. The findings of the study are expected to contribute to the enhancement of ECCD practices, teacher capability-building programs, and the improvement of outdoor learning environments in Day Care Centers.

## Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play for child development among Day Care teachers in Flora District during the School Year 2025–2026.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of:
  - a. age;
  - b. sex;
  - c. highest educational attainment;
  - d. length of teaching experience; and
  - e. relevant trainings attended in Early Childhood Education?
2. What is the level of utilization of outdoor play among Day Care teachers in terms of:
  - a. physical skills;
  - b. thinking or exploring skills;
  - c. social interaction skills;
  - d. emotional skills;
  - e. talking or language skills; and
  - f. creative play?
3. What are the perceived benefits of outdoor play in terms of:
  - a. physical development;
  - b. cognitive and learning development;
  - c. social and emotional development;
  - d. safety and risk management;
  - e. instructional value; and
  - f. school and community support?
4. Is there a significant relationship between:
  - a. profile variables and utilization of outdoor play;
  - b. profile variables and perceived benefits of outdoor play; and
  - c. utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play?
5. Is there a significant difference in the level of utilization of outdoor play when respondents are grouped according to profile variables?

## Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between:
  - a. profile variables and utilization of outdoor play;
  - b. profile variables and perceived benefits of outdoor play; and
  - c. utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play.
2. There is no significant difference in the level of utilization of outdoor play when respondents are grouped according to profile variables.

## Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on several major theories of child development and learning that emphasize active engagement, social interaction, environmental influence, and experiential learning as essential components of early childhood education.

Froebel's Kindergarten Philosophy emphasized that play is the highest expression of child development and that children learn best through active engagement with their environment. Froebel believed that outdoor play and interaction with nature support children's intellectual, social, emotional, and physical growth.

Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory explained that children construct knowledge through active interaction with their environment. Outdoor play enables children to explore objects, manipulate materials, and strengthen cognitive processes related to reasoning and problem-solving.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasized that learning occurs through social interaction and guided participation. Outdoor play provides opportunities for communication, collaboration, and scaffolding, which facilitate children's social and cognitive development.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlighted the influence of environmental systems on child development. Day Care Centers, teachers, families, and communities collectively influence children's participation in outdoor play and experiential learning.

Constructivist Learning Theory further supports outdoor play by emphasizing that learners actively construct meaning from authentic experiences. Outdoor activities promote exploration, inquiry, experimentation, and creativity among young learners.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory also provided support for the study by asserting that learning occurs through concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application. Outdoor play offers direct experiences that stimulate children's curiosity, understanding, and meaningful learning.

Collectively, these theories provide a strong foundation for understanding the utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play in promoting holistic child development.

## Methodology

### Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was used to describe the respondents' demographic profile, level of utilization of outdoor play, and perceived benefits of outdoor play. The correlational component was utilized to determine the significant relationships and differences among the study variables.

### Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Flora District, Apayao, Philippines. The municipality operates several Day Care Centers under the supervision of the Department of Social Welfare and Development and local government units pursuant to Republic Act No. 10410.

### Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of 17 Day Care teachers assigned in various Day Care Centers in Flora District during the School Year 2025–2026. Total enumeration sampling was employed to include all qualified respondents.

### Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in the study was a researcher-modified ECCD questionnaire composed of four parts: (1) demographic profile, (2) utilization of outdoor play, (3) perceived benefits of outdoor play, and (4) challenges encountered in implementing outdoor play activities.

The instrument utilized a five-point Likert scale to measure the level of utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play.

## Data Gathering Procedure

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the Graduate School, Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office, and concerned Day Care supervisors. Questionnaires were personally distributed and retrieved by the researcher. Respondents were informed regarding the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality.

## Statistical Treatment of Data

Frequency, percentage, and weighted mean were used to analyze descriptive data. Spearman Rank-Order Correlation was utilized to determine significant relationships among variables, while the Kruskal-Wallis Test was employed to determine significant differences in utilization when respondents were grouped according to profile variables. The Shapiro-Wilk Test was used to determine the normality of data distribution.

## Ethical Considerations

The study strictly observed ethical standards in research. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was secured, and confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were maintained throughout the study.

## Results and Discussion

### Profile of the Respondents

The findings revealed that all respondents were female and possessed a bachelor's degree as their highest educational attainment. Most respondents belonged to the 39–45 years age bracket, while nearly half had 1–5 years of teaching experience. Most respondents had attended only 1–3 relevant trainings in Early Childhood Education.

The findings imply that the Day Care teachers were still developing professional competencies through teaching experience and training exposure. Previous studies emphasized that teacher preparation and professional development significantly influence instructional effectiveness and classroom practices.

### Level of Utilization of Outdoor Play

The study found that outdoor play was very highly utilized among Day Care teachers, with an overall weighted mean of 4.52. All dimensions, including physical skills, thinking or exploring skills, social interaction skills, emotional skills, talking skills, and creative play, were interpreted as very highly utilized.

Creative play obtained the highest mean rating, indicating that teachers strongly integrated imaginative and experiential learning activities during outdoor sessions. The findings suggest that teachers recognized outdoor play as an essential instructional strategy that promotes children's holistic development.

The findings support Bento and Dias (2017), who emphasized that outdoor play contributes significantly to children's physical, social, emotional, and cognitive growth.

### Perceived Benefits of Outdoor Play

Respondents perceived outdoor play as very highly beneficial, with an overall weighted mean of 4.53. Physical development and cognitive or learning development obtained the highest ratings.

The findings indicate that teachers strongly recognized outdoor play as an effective strategy for enhancing children's health, active learning, emotional well-being, social interaction, and experiential learning.

The results are consistent with UNICEF (2025), which emphasized the importance of play-based learning in promoting holistic child development.

## Relationship Between Profile Variables, Utilization, and Perceived Benefits

The findings revealed significant positive relationships between age, teaching experience, number of trainings attended, and both the utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play.

The results imply that teachers with greater professional exposure and training were more likely to integrate outdoor play effectively and perceive its developmental benefits positively. Likewise, a strong positive relationship was found between utilization and perceived benefits, suggesting that teachers who highly valued outdoor play were also more likely to implement it consistently.

These findings support previous studies emphasizing that teachers' beliefs, professional preparation, and instructional understanding significantly influence the implementation of play-based learning approaches.

## Significant Differences in Utilization According to Profile Variables

The study also revealed significant differences in the level of utilization of outdoor play when respondents were grouped according to age, teaching experience, and number of trainings attended.

Teachers with longer teaching experience and greater exposure to professional development activities demonstrated higher levels of utilization of outdoor play. The findings suggest that professional growth and capability-building programs contribute to improved instructional practices in early childhood education.

Despite the positive findings, respondents identified several challenges affecting outdoor play implementation, including inadequate budget, insufficient equipment, poor maintenance of play areas, and unfavorable weather conditions.

## Conclusion

The findings of the study confirmed that outdoor play is a highly utilized and developmentally valuable instructional strategy in Early Childhood Care and Development programs among Day Care teachers in Flora District. Outdoor play was consistently recognized as effective in promoting children's physical, cognitive, emotional, social, language, and creative development.

The study further established that teachers' age, teaching experience, and relevant trainings significantly influence both the utilization and perceived benefits of outdoor play. These findings highlight the importance of sustained professional development and institutional support in strengthening outdoor learning practices.

Although teachers demonstrated positive implementation and perceptions regarding outdoor play, challenges related to facilities, equipment, resources, and environmental conditions continue to affect its effective implementation. Overall, outdoor play remains an essential and developmentally appropriate strategy that requires continuous support, improved learning environments, and teacher capability-building programs.

## Recommendations

1. Day Care teachers should continuously strengthen the integration of outdoor play activities into daily instructional practices to further enhance children's holistic development.

2. The Department of Social Welfare and Development, local government units, and school administrators should intensify professional development programs related to outdoor play and play-based learning.
3. Local government units and stakeholders should provide adequate resources, outdoor equipment, and properly maintained play facilities to support safe and effective outdoor learning experiences.
4. Day Care Centers should strengthen safety and maintenance practices to ensure that outdoor play environments remain child-friendly, secure, and developmentally appropriate.
5. Future researchers may conduct similar studies involving larger populations and additional variables to further validate and expand the findings of the present study.

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