

## The Effectiveness of Outdoor Learning to Improve English Skills at Aceh Islamic Nature School (AINS)

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Received: 25/06/2023

Revised: 15/09/2023

Accepted: 29/10/2023

### Abstract

The existence of outdoor learning that began to be carried out by nature schools became an exciting learning method. This outdoor learning activity raises interest in students' enthusiasm for learning because students get new experiences and discover new things. This study used a qualitative method and was conducted at the Aceh Islamic Nature School (AINS) by examining students' understanding of English using outdoor learning. Data collection techniques were carried out by observing and interviewing English teachers at the school. As a finding, learning English with outdoor learning methods has various ways, such as inviting students to know directly in English. For each material, a song is sung together so they can remember the lesson and the material studied. Outdoor learning at AINS also has adequate supporting factors, such as the provision of vocabulary stickers on the walls of spaces/objects. The teacher gets used to speaking in English to improve students' listening so that they are used to it and can respond. Based on these results, From the data based on observations, interviews, and document analysis above, outdoor learning by inviting students to see material objects directly from nature is considered effective. What teachers apply with this method to students is successfully meeting all kinds of targets for each material, especially in increasing English language skills, which can be seen from their mastery of vocabulary. Apart from that, outdoor learning is also considered to prevent students from getting bored quickly and being enthusiastic about following all the material the teacher provides.

### Keywords

Outdoor learning; English learning; Nature School; Islamic School

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a process to gain knowledge that every human must demand from birth until he goes to the grave. According to Law No. 20 of 2003, education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have religious and spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills needed himself, society, nation, and state. In its application, education has various methods; several experts who have defined the method the researchers have summarized, including Purwadar Minta (1982) and Sudjana (2010), explain that the method is an orderly and well-thought-out way to achieve a goal. Of course, many definitions arise related to the meaning of this method itself. In the context of learning, the method, according to Djamarah (2008), is "a method used to achieve a predetermined goal." In teaching and learning activities, the method is needed by the teacher so that its use varies according to what you want to achieve after teaching ends (Bidabadi et al., 2016; Munir et al., 2019; Pido & Dewi, 2019; Veronika, 2019).

In learning English, this cannot be separated from the method. Various methods applied by the teacher have been successful, and some have not been successfully applied in learning. Of the various methods, the outdoor learning method is rarely discussed and highlighted (Harianto et al., 2019; Prasetya et al., 2020). When viewed from its understanding, outdoor learning is a teaching and learning activity carried out outside the classroom with a learning orientation with nature that is fun and can realize students' spiritual values by seeing, investigating, and directly observing nature as a learning base (Sekarini & Arty, 2019; Wulansari & Sugito, 2016). The same thing was also said by Munawar (2009) that outdoor activities or learning are activities in nature or activities outside the classroom and have fun characteristics because students can see, enjoy, admire, and learn about the creation of God Almighty that lies in nature, which can be presented in the form of games, observations, simulations, discussions and adventures as a medium for delivering material (Aprilia & Trihantoyo, 2018). So, inspiration from the presence of outdoor learning will be an alternative in creating a fun learning atmosphere and making children happy and feel that learning is a necessity and pleasure (Yıldırım & Akamca, 2017), not something boring and must be forced (Becker et al., 2017). With the concept of fun and not dull learning, it is proven that children will enjoy school all day long. So that later, the school will be able to increase the potential of each child in various ways (Maulana, 2016).

Nowadays, there are many schools with the theme of nature schools, which differ from the curriculum to the implementation method of public schools. Most of the learning methods applied by nature schools are based on outdoor learning. In Indonesia, learning outside the classroom through outdoor activities is a way of teaching by guiding students in the field using outside learning resources, for example, in markets, banks, plantations, natural environments, etc. Outdoor learning is honing physical and social activities (cooperation) and adaptability. According to Rohinah (2014), nature schools have three specific aspects, namely: 1) nature as a learning space, 2) nature as a medium and teaching material, and 3) nature as a learning object. Education like this is creativity in building a humanist paradigm of Islamic education. Nature school is an attempt to move away from the general educational culture in Indonesia; most of them only take place in the classroom, and most still apply conventional learning. Indoor learning offered by schools generally makes students only learn theoretically, without ever putting their knowledge into practice (Maryati, 2017). This way of learning is considered passive because they only learn what the teacher teaches in the book. The knowledge students possess is mere memorization, not a thorough understanding obtained due to direct experience of a process.

Based on Vera (2012), outdoor learning is divided into several types: 1) Education training plus is an educational activity that integrates the formal curriculum, nature, and character; education curriculum subjects such as art, science, and others with a pattern of getting to know nature while playing around. The character curriculum is more about the formation of personality and morals. In contrast, the nature curriculum includes gardening lessons, learning about plants and animals, raising

livestock, and honing students' independence and mentality. 2) Gathering Plus is a form of outdoor tourism designed in a recreational, relaxed, happy atmosphere with educational content; 3) Playgrounds and natural attractions are a series of game obstacles designed in such a way that they can simulate outdoor activities. This activity unlocks self-potential that has not been known so far, so a sense of self-confidence emerges through these Low and High Rope activities. 4) Experimental Base Study is a package of activities in the form of learning that is designed in such a way that it can be applied using the outdoors as a medium. The process of self-introduction, interests, and talents is based on the school curriculum, so this program is very effective for the participants because they are involved in seeing, hearing, and acting immediately; and 5) Knowledge Management is a package for distributing knowledge that will become shared learning. This knowledge management has been formulated as a source of shared knowledge and can be implemented with the meaning of studying nature.

In addition, outdoor learning methods such as those offered by nature schools are the primary goal. In nature-based schools, students can learn from their direct experiences interacting with the environment. In line with what was conveyed by Sudjana (2010) regarding the purpose of learning outside the classroom, as for the experience that students get directly, it is hoped that students will not get bored quickly, be more enthusiastic, and be more interested in exploring their knowledge. McGlashan et al. (2007) stated that there are several advantages to outdoor learning, namely 1) Students can observe various kinds of facts closely, 2) Students can answer questions or problems by seeing, trying to enjoy, hearing, and proving directly, 3) Extensive and actual learning material, 4) Students take part in learning happily, 5) Increase interest and liveliness, and 5) Eliminate student boredom. In learning English, an outdoor learning method is also often applied (Neville et al., 2023), as is done by one of AINS, where a lot of learning is done outside the classroom, including learning English. Based on the results of observations and interviews with AINS teachers, outdoor learning is not only applied to learning English but almost all subjects are applied to outdoor learning.

Furthermore, what is expected from outdoor learning is not only a change in learning methods but also an increase in the quality and educational outcomes to be achieved (Waite, 2011). With a direct learning system from nature, it is hoped that children will become more creative, dare to express opinions, foster curiosity, and be motivated to understand something (Vera, 2012). This research will complement previous research (Cintami & Mukminan, 2018; Kurniangsih et al., 2016; Nur et al., 2023). This research will add information that the urgency of this research seems to be about describing the effectiveness of outdoor learning methods offered by private schools. This method is a form of innovation from several educational institutions carried out by teachers to make students understand each subject based on what they encounter in the field, but what makes it different from previous research is that this research focuses on students' English subjects, by increasing their ability to speak English using outdoor learning.

## 2. METHOD

This study employed qualitative research methods to explore deeper issues (Hardisman & Yulistini, 2013; Ulfatin, 2015). this research discussed the effectiveness of outdoor learning methods in improving English skills. The researchers used data collection techniques by observing and interviewing the Aceh Islamic Nature School (AINS) English teachers. In collecting data through observation, researchers used non-participatory observation techniques by observing daily activities and interactions in their daily lives at school. Then, the collection was continued by conducting in-depth interviews with the school, especially the English teacher, to get answers from informants in the form of verbal data as primary data.

As additional support in achieving data validity in this study, researchers also conducted a literature study comparing data with written sources in administrative documents. Administrative documents used in this research include school curriculum documents that contain subjects given to

students and student learning outcomes/worksheets. In addition to curriculum documents, learning implementation design documents are also collected to describe the material given to the room by the teacher in the classroom. In the process of data analysis, descriptive qualitative data analysis was used.

Descriptive analysis is used to write down the results obtained by researchers in the field through in-depth interviews and observation data collection techniques. Then, the data is classified according to the researcher's categories. This stage is needed so that researchers can quickly conclude. Data with the same pattern and purpose will be grouped into the same group as other data. Furthermore, the research process data is verified, namely, to find out the proof of its truth. Data validation was carried out using data triangulation techniques to test the correctness of the data that had been obtained. The data triangulation technique used is the source, method, and time triangulation technique. This source triangulation technique examines research data by comparing it with other sources. In this case, the data obtained by the researchers through in-depth interviews will be compared with the data obtained through observation by the researchers. From this process, the pattern of writing accurate data results from research.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### *The concept of the Islamic Nature School*

Natural school is an educational idea that combines learning with the natural surroundings. Private school learning systems are starting to be integrated with various concepts, such as international-based, Islamic-based, and nature-based schools. Some schools combine two concepts: Islam and nature. There is a combination of these two concepts as an understanding of the world and its creation. The dominant approach used in the natural school concept is that students are invited to go through a series of activities (practice and experience), after which they are structured. Then, by strengthening religious values, it becomes an answer to what they want to be grateful for based on the creation of nature. This learning becomes a unique learning because of the active involvement of students in exploring their surroundings to fulfill their curiosity.

Currently, only a handful of private schools in Aceh dare to offer this kind of educational concept; in general, private schools in Aceh only stick to the concept of integrated Islam. There are several responses to schools' shortcomings that only focus on integrated Islamic concepts, namely relatively expensive costs, busy school schedules, and less extensive student associations. The concept of nature combined with Islamic values can be an educational alternative worth considering. One of the schools that is starting to try using a combination of these two concepts is the Aceh Islamic Nature School.

Aceh Islamic Nature School (AINS) is a nature-themed elementary school located on Dagang Street, Pango deah village, Ulee Kareng sub-district, Banda Aceh City, Aceh Province. This school is a private school that was fostered by the Haji Abdullah Amin Foundation (YHAA). This school was founded in 2016. At that time, it can be said that AINS was the first nature school in Aceh to offer fun and unique learning so that each of its students could be creative, innovative, and active. Based on the results of an analysis of observations and school documents, this school has 56 students divided into six grades and has 12 teachers and one principal. The Chairperson of the Haji Abdullah Amin Foundation, which oversees AINS, Zainal Abidin Alawi, said that AINS is present in several educational programs; Kindergartens and Elementary Schools. The concept of education in AINS is more to reading nature.

The school principal claims that there is an educational concept with learning methods with nature as a form of understanding the universe, like a book with infinite thickness and unlimited learning resources. AINS teaches how to read it and apply it in the teaching process. The curriculum developed by AINS is very flexible; as the teacher stated, it adapts psychological development to provoke the uniqueness and talents of each child, such as the curriculum for moral development, logic development, leadership development, and business development. This Islamic Nature School is an alternative means

of education that parents can provide for children.

The vision of AINS is to assist every human child to become a caliph on earth who is the *rahmatan of Lil 'Alamin*. School principals do various things in realizing the vision that has been formulated to give birth to the mission, namely; 1) Making schools that show a love of learning, being critical and innovative, 2) Optimizing and restoring the surrounding environment as a learning medium, 3) Effective management with efficient management of resources, 4) Always improve *akhlakul karimah* and role models for all people the academic community in terms of cleanliness, honesty, and benefit, 5) Forming a professional business climate throughout the school community, and 6) Providing excellent service for children and parents. After formulating the vision and mission in such a way, this school also has goals that each student must own: 1) leading the arts, 2) leading science, 3) leading business, and 4) leading the nation.

By understanding the school's background, it can be said that the school is still relatively new; students are still small, and the educational program is limited to the level of kindergarten and elementary school. Apart from that, this private school has a concept that aligns with the life of the Acehese people, prioritizing Islamic values as seen in Islamic schools' principles, vision, and mission. Apart from this, this is a differentiator among other private schools focusing on integrated Islam with an outdoor-based nature learning approach. With what has been attempted by the school with the concept they offer, in line with what was stated by Vera (2012), outdoor learning carried out by the school is a learning activity outside the classroom experienced by students with an orientation towards the surrounding nature has pleasant characteristics and can realize students' spiritual values regarding the beauty of Allah creation by observing, investigating, discovering everything created by Allah SWT. Thus, teaching outside the classroom can be understood as delivering lessons outside the classroom so that teaching and learning activities occur outside the classroom or in nature with gratitude and devotion to the religious values they adhere to.

#### ***Outdoor Learning at Aceh Islamic Nature School (AINS)***

In carrying out outdoor learning, AINS made several adjustments to the learning devices used; the AINS teacher said that the school uses several curricula that combine the nature curriculum with the 2013 Curriculum (K13), which also has some adjustments as differences from the learning process of public schools and nature schools. The learning applied in AINS and public schools has significant differences, as one of the teachers at this school said that AINS students are not only taught theories about a lesson, but every theory will be directly given examples of the field by direct practice. For example, when learning about the weather, the teacher immediately brings the children to the Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency (BMKG) to see and hear first-hand how it works and theories related to weather and those related to it. Considering the learning model, nature schools offer happy learning, and students enjoy participating. This activity is a form of learning "Intensive Reading of Visit Reports" in English Subjects. In practice, the homeroom teacher guides the learning, monitors everything at the location of their visit, collects as much information as possible, and compiles it into a story of their creation. The purpose of this lesson is that students can expand their knowledge about the weather and its effects on everyday life and can make Visit Reports using their own words.

This statement is in line with what was conveyed by Husamah (2013). According to him, outdoor learning offered by AINS is not just moving students to a place of learning where the class was originally moved outside the classroom, but outdoor learning brings students to learn and become one with nature, which is expected to change their behavior; by carrying out several activities in stages, whether carried out by reliance, responsibility, observation, and behavior.

Moreover, At AINS, students do not wear school uniforms like in schools in general. As said by the school principal, students are free to wear whatever clothes they want, as long as they are polite and comfortable. The headmaster of AINS said that the school did not have a special uniform, except for extracurriculars, where they wore sports uniforms. However, when at school, there is no particular

uniform used by these students. He also added that every child has their own style, and at AINS, they are free to wear clothes according to their taste as long as they can be used while playing on the field. In one activity, for example, students were given a cooperative pressing game, such as moving a small piece of bamboo with their two forefingers. They are so compact that the bamboo can be moved from place to place. This game is to train cohesiveness, teamwork, and patience. In addition, students are more active outside than in the room. Every activity they do has to learn in it. Not only that but every child is also directed according to their potential. What has been done by the school agrees with what was stated by Wideasworo (2017) that outdoor learning carried out by AINS is a learning activity outside the classroom that aims to make children feel happy and enjoyable for their students, like children playing in the classroom. Nature learning carried out outside the classroom is not just to relieve students' boredom, but so that students can learn through life experiences they see for themselves in the field or the environment they find.

There is no coercion for every child to be proficient in all subjects because when a student does not master one subject, he will excel in other subjects. There is also no ranking in AINS because all children are ranked one. The school makes a star child for itself. All the rules and requirements at this school have been approved by the parents of the students when they entered their children at the AINS. It is not even the children being tested at this school but the parents who will be interviewed. At that school, there is a very close relationship between parents and teachers; the facilitating teacher will fill out a student communication book about what activities and activities they are doing at school. The most important thing that the school hopes for is that all students are enthusiastic about going to school; in fact, many want to avoid going home and linger at school. Students who are allowed to mingle with nature are seen as an effort to gain more experience from the real environment so that they can avoid the worries of their parents amidst the rise of children who are addicted to gadgets because nowadays it is easy for parents to provide various sophisticated gadgets which can make children become individualists and not care about the people around them. In addition, parents have a great responsibility; they must be able to control so that children can use technology properly without leaving the environment as social creatures. In addition, the concept of education offered by AINS is like the concept of education in Aceh today, which is an important and priority part of realizing a civilized future development. Moreover, Banda Aceh also carries the concept of Islamic Smart City as part of the embodiment of the Civil City Model. Therefore, all parties must participate in the success of this agenda, including the efforts made by AINS.

The output is that intelligent children will become valuable capital for the progress of the nation and religion. The teachers believe that this effort can be translated into meaning that intelligent children must also have a strong foundation of faith. In this way, every child will become more sensitive to the surrounding environment and have stronger self-control against all temptations that can harm their physical and mental health. From the interview results, the teacher admitted that students were taught to be intelligent so they could face all kinds of challenges in the future. Therefore, various issues that can become life problems in the future must be considered in determining current education. One of which needs to be anticipated is the earth's condition. Apart from that, the focus is not only on learning materials; teachers at the school also convey how important it is for children to be directly involved and get to know their nature more closely. Students must be taught to respect and understand Allah's creation given to humankind from an early age. They also need to be taught the responsibility to look after and protect this earth. Thus, they will become wiser individuals and live with respect for all of Allah's creation.

#### ***Application of Outdoor Learning in Improving English Skills at AINS***

English, the official international language that is familiar, is used by everyone who visits a country to facilitate communication between the two. English is also used in every administration that deals internationally. Based on what is stated above, it can be interpreted that English is needed in all lines to facilitate communication in dealing with current global developments. Therefore, daily English

education should be maximized to improve every child's English skills. Learning English has various methods in the learning process; the researchers examined the outdoor learning method carried out by AINS. The following are the findings that the researchers found in the location.

**Table 1.** Application of Outdoor Learning in English Learning at AINS

Source	Result	Code
Respondent 1 (R1)	The teacher makes a habituation for students to know vocabulary without translating it into Indonesian first.	habituation
Respondent 2 (R2)	To make it easy for students to remember the lessons that have been done, the teachers make songs to sing with the students.	Material song
Respondent 3 (R3)	In addition to having fun learning, students also discover new things not found in the classroom (indoor learning).	New experience

In its application, the three respondents had various answers. Respondent 1 stated that outdoor learning was applied by habituating students to understand English by not translating first into Indonesian, which was considered to slow down students' understanding of English. For example, when learning about gardens, students must understand their vocabulary directly in sentences such as "this is a flower" uttered by the teacher while pointing to a flower. The students repeat it together so they recognize that it is the word "flower" without having to remember what it means flower before it is spoken.

Apart from using the habituation method, the teachers also gave songs related to the theme of the lesson that was carried out that day; the teacher and students sang together so that the students strengthened their memory of their learning. This singing method can also be used as an evaluation of the learning that students have learned. That way, the teacher can see the extent of understanding and memory of his students. Meanwhile, according to respondent 3, besides being happy studying outside, students can also feel and find new findings that may not all be mentioned in the textbooks. This statement aligns with what Vera (2012) said: learning outside the classroom is not only done to eliminate boredom because learning is in a closed room but far from it. Outdoor learning is also carried out to increase student creativity, shape attitudes and mentality so students do not feel nervous when facing the reality they face, and give students as much time as possible to learn from experiences found outside the classroom.

**Table 2.** Supporting Factors in Outdoor Learning at AINS

Source	Result	Code
Respondent 1 (R1)	Every type of infrastructure at school is written in English, such as class picket schedules, vocabulary posted on classroom walls, and so on.	Infrastructure/ Facilities
Respondent 2 (R2)	Human Resources that support the implementation of learning; teachers speak English with students even though it will be translated into Indonesian.	HR supports
Respondent 3 (R3)	The teachers invite students to speak in English to get used to students.	habituation

Learning English at AINS, besides using outdoor learning, also has supporting factors that can enhance and support English learning. As the results table above mentions, a supportive infrastructure can hone students' English skills, like sticking vocabulary on school walls. There is vocabulary and sentences in English that are posted in the bathroom and handwashing stations and even in the canteen, and the cakes are labeled in English. The pictures below are one of the many pictures available at AINS to be a means of infrastructure in improving English. This picture shows that in improving students' English, teachers at AINS use various methods to achieve the desired target.



**Figure 1.** English Vocabulary Patches in the AINS Area

Apart from the infrastructure, there are other supporting factors, such as human resources, in which the teachers use English to explain the material even though they do not explain it in full English. However, by hearing English in the teacher's explanation, students indirectly are being honed their English listening skills. The teacher also invites students to practice English together; many children understand the teacher's words but sometimes have difficulty replying.

**Table 3.** Implications of Outdoor Learning on English Learning at AINS

Source	Result	Code
R1	Students' understanding of English is considered to have increased.	Increased
R2	Students can speak English even though they are less active.	Able to speak
R3	Knowledge of students becomes broad, not limited to knowledge in books and classrooms.	Extensive knowledge

From the results that the researchers found, it can be concluded that AINS's effective use of outdoor learning improves students' English skills. From the results of interviews and student assessment sheets, researchers found that the dominant students could understand all the material provided. From what was conveyed by the English teacher, around 70% of the 56 students were able to grasp the material provided without repetition; the rest were some students who did not understand or did not remember the material from the previous meeting, so the teacher repeated the material, so students began to know and remember the material. In addition, the effectiveness of outdoor learning is proven by the fact that, on average, students can speak English even though they are still relatively passive. However, for elementary school children, this is considered very good, considering that English is not the language of their ancestors. Other evidence can be seen when the teacher speaks in full English; the average student understands it even though they cannot respond properly, but this is also a positive development from the application of outdoor learning.

With these findings, the school's efforts have succeeded in using the concept of nature-based learning by utilizing students' curiosity. It is believed that outdoor learning can also expand students' knowledge; they do not only know what is in the book or the classroom, but they can feel, see, and experience what is outside the classroom because learning outside the classroom requires students to be creative in both acting and thinking. In the case of learning English, their vocabulary mastery increased somewhat because they understood learning with examples that were shown directly from their surroundings, which were easy to reach. In various other examples of the learning phenomenon, they are invited to look directly into the field to be able to interact with a process, function, and task from today's learning theme, for example, how to see the work of a profession and an institution that they can only see from books or from television which they do not see, but can be answered by those who are experts in their field with the information needed. Although outdoor learning is considered successful in improving students' English in its implementation, there are obstacles in its application, both from the students themselves and other sources from schools, teachers, and others. In this case, the



researchers hope that there will be further research that further researchers can carry out by completing, perfecting this research, or examining matters relating to constraints in its application.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Outdoor learning is learning that is carried out to make students learn happily and discover new things that are not found in the classroom by utilizing the environment, especially the natural surroundings. The Aceh Islamic Nature School (AINS) is the first nature school in Aceh. It offers learning that is considered fun and unique so that each student can be creative, innovative, and active. AINS, to succeed in nature-based outdoor learning, also remembers the Islamic values the surrounding community possesses. AINS in optimizing learning using several adapted curricula by combining the nature curriculum with the 2013 Curriculum (K13), which also has several different adjustments to the learning process in state and nature schools. The learning applied at AINS and state schools has quite significant differences; AINS does not only teach its students limited to theory in a lesson but each theory will be directly given field examples with direct practice with the spiritual nature of the religion they have.

In the learning context, in the case of English learning carried out using outdoor learning, it is considered very effective in improving students' English language skills. Students experience an increase in English vocabulary. Apart from that, they are also considered dominant during the learning process and find it easy to understand all the material provided by the teacher. In practice, outdoor learning in English subjects has various methods, including inviting students to learn something directly in English without having to translate it first into Indonesian. As reinforcement, each learning material is made into a song to be sung together so students can remember the lesson. Outdoor learning at AINS is also inseparable from supporting factors such as adequate facilities and infrastructure to improve English language learning, for example, lots of vocabulary stickers on the classroom walls. It is also supported by adequate human resources, such as teachers who must be fluent in English so that students can get used to listening to spoken English vocabulary correctly. The results shown are the basis that outdoor learning by utilizing nature is an alternative learning that can be studied based on the challenges of children's increasing curiosity.

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