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Research Article

Uhud Darmawan Natsir*

The Role of Outdoor Leadership Learning in Developing Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy in Mid-Level Managers

***Corresponding Author:** Uhud Darmawan Natsir; State University of Makassar, Indonesia; uhud.darmawan@unm.ac.id

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Abstract: *Changes in the business environment require mid-level managers to be able to take initiative, manage uncertainty, and develop innovative solutions. One competency development approach that has the potential to support these demands is outdoor leadership learning through real challenges, teamwork, situational decision-making, and structured reflection. This study aims to design a test of the influence of outdoor leadership learning on entrepreneurial self-efficacy in mid-level managers in Indonesian business organizations, by examining the role of task success experiences and learning reflection as possible mechanisms to bridge these relationships. The proposed approach is a quasi-experiment with measurement before, after, and follow-up of the program, accompanied by reflective journals and facilitator observations. Participants are targeted to be middle-level managers participating in leadership development programs; the final number of participants will be determined through statistical power analysis and actual recruitment. The literature shows that outdoor learning can support leadership competence, but overly challenging training can also lower self-efficacy. Therefore, this study proposes a learning mechanism that combines gradual challenges, feedback, psychological safety, and task transfer to work contexts. The expected contribution is a training evaluation model to develop managers' confidence in recognizing opportunities, mobilizing resources, and attempting entrepreneurial actions within the organization.*

Keywords: *outdoor leadership; entrepreneurial self-efficacy; mid-level managers; experiential learning, management development.*

Introduction

Changes in markets, technology, and customer demands are expanding the responsibilities of mid-level managers from simply translating strategies to executing activities, to roles that demand the identification of opportunities and decision-making in uncertain situations. Managers are at the crossroads between top management direction and day-to-day operational issues. This position makes self-confidence to initiate change as important as managerial knowledge. Research on mid-level managers shows the relevance of entrepreneurial knowledge to entrepreneurial intentions, although intention and self-confidence are different constructs (Karadağ, 2021; Idrus & Setiyadi, 2021). Therefore, leadership development needs to pay attention to the individual's ability to act in uncertainty, not just the mastery of procedures.

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE) refers to a person's belief that he or she is able to carry out tasks related to entrepreneurial activities. In established organizations, this belief is important for managers who must propose, test, and fight for updates without always establishing their own business. ESE differs from an organization's entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial motivation, and innovation performance which is the result of behavior and organization. Taneja et al. (2023) link experiential learning components to ESE, while Bohlayer and Gielnik (2023) remind that action-oriented training experiences do not necessarily improve ESE. This contrast suggests that the quality of learning experiences needs to be researched, not assumed to be automatically successful.

Outdoor leadership learning offers a different learning situation than classroom training. Navigation challenges, group problem-solving, limited resource management, and rotating leadership assignments

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allow participants to try decisions whose consequences are immediately apparent. In a study on Greek business managers, Kourtesopoulou and Kriemadis (2021) reported changes in the perception of leadership competencies and teamwork after outdoor management development programs. Studies of outdoor education leaders also identified experiences, self-awareness, and social relationships as prominent learning outputs (Experiential learning from the perspective of outdoor education leaders, 2022). However, both findings did not directly measure managers' ESE, so transfer to the entrepreneurial domain is still a question.

The power of the natural environment is not solely in the physical or adventurous elements. Learning takes place through concrete experiences, reflective observations, the preparation of new understandings, and subsequent action experiments. The study by Hutson et al. (2024) outlines that outdoor adventure education programs present a variety of learning mechanisms, including instructor orientation, environment, and participant independence. Holland et al. (2022) also examined nature-based professional development and participants' confidence in the ability to apply experiential learning methods. These findings suggest the need to design a process of reflection and reapplication so that outdoor experiences do not stop as recreational activities.

The mechanism of task success experience has the potential to strengthen individual confidence in certain abilities, especially when participants encounter manageable difficulties, find alternative strategies, and receive relevant feedback. However, the level of difficulty must be calibrated against the participant's abilities. Bohlayer and Gielnik (2023) document a possible decrease in ESE during action-oriented entrepreneurship training when participants encounter problems that are difficult to overcome. Meanwhile, Froehly et al. (2023) show that program quality indicators, including reflection, empowerment, and group security, are related to leadership learning in outdoor adventure programs. Thus, the success of the program is likely to depend on the quality of facilitation and experience of overcoming challenges, not the level of task extremity.

In the context of management, the most important challenge is the transfer of learning to the workplace. Participants may successfully lead a climbing group or complete a logistics simulation but may not feel capable of mobilizing the work unit to experiment with a new product or process. Hutson et al. (2024) highlight the importance of linking program experience with action in a broader context, while Ewert and Davidson (2021) call attention to the variety of outcomes of adventure education including self-efficacy and resilience. Thus, training evaluation needs to include real follow-up tasks in the organization in order for ESE development claims to be tested more meaningfully.

Some outdoor studies focus on leadership skills, cooperation, and general learning experiences, while ESE research often focuses on entrepreneurial students or trainees. Taneja et al. (2023) examined experiential learning and ESE in higher education, while Karadağ (2021) examined entrepreneurial intentions in mid-level managers. The intersection between managerial goals, outdoor interventions, and measurable ESE changes has not been addressed by the two research tracks. Therefore, there is a need for studies that distinguish program-induced changes in self-confidence from changes that may be due to time factors or daily work experience.

A design that combines comparison groups and repeated measurements is important to reinforce interpretation. Pre-program assessments record initial positions, immediate post-program assessments capture short-term changes, and follow-up assessments test the sustainability of self-confidence when participants return to work. Facilitators' reflection notes and observations can shed light on processes that are not captured by questionnaire scores. Kourtesopoulou and Kriemadis' (2021) quasi-experimental studies provide a precedent for before-after evaluation in managers, while Bohlayer and Gielnik's (2023)

longitudinal designs demonstrate the importance of exploring the dynamics of self-efficacy during the learning process.

Based on this description, this study proposes testing outdoor leadership learning as an intervention to develop entrepreneurial self-efficacy of mid-level managers in Indonesia. The emphasis of the research is placed on measurable change, the mechanism of task success and reflection, and the sustainability of results when returning to the work unit. This focus distinguishes this research from the study of digital marketing and consumer behavior by making the human resource development process the main object. The results are expected to provide a basis for organizations in deciding when and how outdoor training is relevant for intrapreneurial competency development.

Literature Review

Outdoor Leadership Learning

Outdoor leadership learning in this study is defined as a structured program that utilizes group assignments in an outdoor environment to practice planning, communication, decision-making, adaptation, and reflection. Assignments are structured in stages, guided by facilitators, and concluded with an experience-based debrief. This definition emphasizes the learning process, not adventure tourism activities. The research of Kourtesopoulou and Kriemadis (2021) and Hutson et al. (2024) is the basis for the development of facilitation design and learning objectives.

Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy in Managers

Entrepreneurial self-efficacy is defined as the belief that a person is able to identify opportunities, design alternatives, allocate resources, face uncertainty, and initiate value-added initiatives. For mid-level managers, the behavioral indicators are directed at intrapreneurship: process development, service innovation, and the drive of cross-functional collaboration. Self-confidence should not be mixed with the actual results of innovation. The findings of Taneja et al. (2023) and Bohlayer and Gielnik (2023) provide reasons to measure ESE changes specifically and be cautious about the experience of failure.

Intervariable Relationships and Hypotheses

Outdoor leadership programs designed with competency-based challenges, gradual task mastery, and constructive feedback are expected to improve ESE. The experience of solving problems together and making decisions in ambiguous situations can be analogous to entrepreneurial experiences, but this transfer requires explicit reflection.

H1: The increase in entrepreneurial self-efficacy from before to after the program was higher in the outdoor leadership learning group than in the comparison group.

H2: The experience of task success that participants felt was positively related to the increase of entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

H3: The quality of structured reflection is positively associated with increased entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

H4: Improvements in entrepreneurial self-efficacy in the intervention group were observed on follow-up measurements, compared to pre-program scores.

Method

The study was planned as a quasi-experiment with the intervention group and the comparison group, using three measurements: T0 before training, T1 immediately after training, and T2 approximately 6–8

weeks after training. Loci were planned at a business organization in Indonesia that organized manager development. The exact name of the organization and location has not been determined; therefore it is not listed as a research site. If individual randomization allows, the design can be upgraded to a random experiment.

The target population is a mid-level manager who is responsible for a team or operational function, carries out coordination responsibilities, and has the opportunity to propose improvements or new initiatives. Inclusion criteria: actively occupying the position of mid-level manager, having at least one year of managerial work experience, and willing to take all measurements. The final sample number is not fixed fictitiously; the researcher needs to conduct a power analysis based on realistic differences in changes between groups and the possibility of losing respondents at follow-up.

Table 1. Intervention

Stages	Activities	Learning targets
Preparation	Fitness and safety checks, onboarding, explanation of purpose	A sense of security, readiness, realistic expectations
Challenge I	Group navigation and time-limited troubleshooting	Coordination, choice of action, communication
Challenge II	Simulation of resource constraints and rotating leadership	Prioritization, adaptation, experimentation
Debrief	Reflection on experience, peer feedback and facilitator	Identify success and failure strategies
Transfer	Plans for small innovation experiments in the workplace	Application of learning to managerial tasks

Source: *Proceed Data, 2026*

The program is recommended to be two days long, with the difficulty level adjusted based on the risk assessment. There is no obligation to use extreme activities, altitude, or exposure to physical hazards. Comparison groups can take leadership training in a space with equivalent learning time, so differences in outcomes are more likely to have to do with the format of the experience and not just the trainer's attention.

ESE was measured on a scale carefully adapted from the ESE literature and adjusted to the manager's intrapreneurial task. Examples of early indicators include confidence identifying opportunities for improvement, obtaining cross-functional support, testing new solutions, and making decisions in uncertainty. Success experiences were measured as perceptions of being able to solve meaningful challenges; the quality of reflection was assessed based on lesson clarity, introduction of alternatives, and transfer plans. All indicators needed to be expertly evaluated, tested, and examined for factor structure and reliability. Reflection journals and facilitator observations were used as supporting data, not as a substitute for questionnaire scores.

Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, group equivalence checks at T0, and mixed-effects models that included time, groups, and time interactions × groups. The effect of interactions was a key indicator of the relative effectiveness of the program. Advanced analysis could evaluate the relationship between ESE changes and success experiences and reflection quality, by controlling for ESE's initial scores as well as previous training experiences. Results needed to report effect size, 95% confidence interval,

estimation uncertainty, data loss, and sensitivity analysis. Because quasi-experimental designs are susceptible to participant selection, causal inference language should be limited according to design quality.

Participation is voluntary and requires written consent. Outdoor activities must be preceded by a risk assessment, first aid facilities, a stop option without penalty, and supervision by a competent facilitator. Participant health information related to safety is not used as publication data. Research must obtain ethical approval in accordance with the provisions of the implementing agency.

Results and Discussion

Primary research data are not yet available. Therefore, this section is presented as a draft results table that must be filled in after the program is implemented; no significance value, number of respondents, or changes in scores are claimed as findings.

Indicator	Intervention	Comparator	Status
Number of respondents T0/T1/T2	Not yet available	Not yet available	Not yet analyzed
Rat THAT T0	Not yet available	Not yet available	Not yet analyzed
Rat THAT T1	Not yet available	Not yet available	Not yet analyzed
Rat THAT TIER 2	Not yet available	Not yet available	Not yet analyzed
Time interaction × group	Not yet available	Not yet available	Not tested
Effect size and CI 95%	Not yet available	Not yet available	Not tested

Source: *Proceed Data, 2026*

In addition to the table, the results report needs to present the recruitment flow, the number of participants who did not complete the measurement, the suitability of the implementation of the intervention with the protocol, safety events if any, and the main theme of the reflection journal. Qualitative data is used to clarify the learning process, not to claim statistical effectiveness without appropriate comparison.

The Potential of Outdoor Learning for ESE

The design of the relationship between outdoor leadership learning and ESE rests on the possibility of transferring the experience of task mastery to the belief in taking entrepreneurial initiatives in the workplace. Studies on managers show that outdoor management development activities may be related to the renewal of leadership perceptions and teamwork (Kourtesopoulou & Kriemadis, 2021). In different learning contexts, Taneja et al. (2023) provide the basis that learning experiences are relevant to ESE. However, the combination of these two paths of literature remains hypothetical and requires special testing in mid-level managers.

Why Reflection and Psychological Safety Are Important

The success of a task needs to be interpreted by participants as an ability that can be transferred to an organizational task. Reflection allows participants to recognize decisions that help the group, decisions that are not appropriate, and how to improve the process at the next opportunity. Froehly et al. (2023) emphasize the relationship between program quality aspects such as reflection and group security and leadership

learning. In contrast, Bohlayer and Gielnik (2023) show that problems that are difficult to address in action-oriented training can weaken ESE. Therefore, facilitators need to manage gradual difficulties and avoid a culture of shaming failed participants.

Mid-Level and Transfer Manager Roles

Mid-level managers have the space to translate learning into small projects of process improvement, service development, or cross-unit collaboration. It is not the same as the intention to set up a new venture, so ESE instruments should reflect the tasks of corporate entrepreneurship. Karadağ (2021) shows that entrepreneurial characteristics are relevant in mid-level managers groups, while Hutson et al. (2024) emphasize the need to link outdoor learning to influence in a broader context. Organizational transfer tasks and follow-up measurements determine whether the impact of training goes beyond the program atmosphere.

Practical Implications and Limitations

For organizations, this design provides the principles of program evaluation: clear behavioral goals, safe but challenging experiences, deep reflection, and repetitive measurements. Training investment decisions should be based on demonstrable changes, not mere impressions of participant enthusiasm. Key limitations include participant selection, reliance on perception measures, organizational cultural differences, and possible facilitator effects. Future studies may add to peer evaluation of behavioral innovation, as well as examine effects on different sectors and groups of managers.

Conclusion

Outdoor leadership learning offers a testable mechanism for developing mid-level managers' entrepreneurial self-efficacy through success experiences, decisions in uncertainty, collaboration, and structured reflection. The literature supports the relevance of outdoor learning to leadership as well as the relevance of experiential learning to ESEs, but does not justify the conclusion that the program is definitely effective for the target population of this study. A quasi-experimental design with a comparator group and follow-up measurements were proposed to evaluate the effectiveness, process, and sustainability of the change. Conclusions regarding the magnitude of the influence, significance, and success of the new hypothesis can be established after empirical data have been analyzed. Practically, training must balance challenges, safety, feedback, and real implementation within the organization.

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