



**OUTWARD BOUND<sup>®</sup>**  
INTERNATIONAL

# KEY OUTCOMES AND MECHANISMS DRIVING IMPACT



# A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Outward Bound International (OBI), working with researchers and data from 14 Outward Bound (OB) Schools across the network, undertook a global study to better understand what young people value most from their OB experience, and what elements of OB programs drive that learning.

For decades, research has demonstrated Outward Bound's impact on character, resilience, teamwork, and practical outdoor skills. This new study expands that understanding with a far more globally representative dataset, reflecting student perspectives across cultures, environments, and program models.

## WHY WE CONDUCTED THIS STUDY

Past research in outdoor and adventure education has often been limited by small samples and Western, English-speaking participant groups. As Outward Bound's global footprint has grown, so has the need for evidence that reflects the diversity of our Schools and the lived experiences of young people worldwide.

**Using two open-ended questions from the Outward Bound Outcomes Survey (OBOS), we analyzed students' own descriptions of:**

1. **Their most important learning, and**
2. **What part of the course they believe created that learning**

This approach offers an authentic window into how young people articulate impact in their own words.

## METHODS AT A GLANCE

**To ensure stronger cross-cultural comparison and avoid overrepresentation by larger Schools, the dataset was carefully curated:**



**Participating Schools:** 14 (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, Germany and Austria, Hong Kong, Malaysia-Lumut, Netherlands, Romania, Singapore, South Africa, Taiwan, U.K., Vietnam)



**Sample:** 1,260 responses (90 per School), stratified by age (12–18) and course length (5–10 days)



**Coding:** Translated and analyzed using Microsoft CoPilot AI, verified by human coders



**Framework:** Six outcomes and twelve mechanisms developed from existing OB research and OBI materials

This structured approach ensured both rigor and global representation.

# INTEGRATED GLOBAL SUMMARY

Across all Schools, students consistently highlighted three core areas of growth as the most meaningful outcomes of their Outward Bound experience:

**43%** Strengthening relationships and social skills

**31%** Building inner resilience and confidence

**13%** Developing practical outdoor and expedition skills

These findings reaffirm Outward Bound's long-standing educational promise: *young people leave our programs having established greater connections to self, to others and to the natural world, and having developed fundamental life skills that prepare them for life.*

At the same time, across diverse cultures and contexts, a set of three mechanisms emerged as the most influential contributors to learning:

**27%** **Immersive course design and expedition structures**  
Multi-day expeditions, camping, navigation, cooking outdoors, and adventure activities create experiences where learning is lived, not lectured.

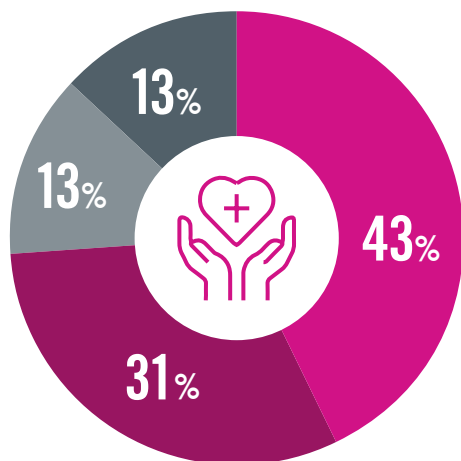
**16%** **Challenging experiences**  
Moments of challenge—physical, emotional, or social—are consistently linked to the development of resilience and confidence.

**15.5%** **Supportive and inclusive group culture**  
Trust, teamwork, encouragement, and listening form the social foundation through which interpersonal and compassionate behaviors develop.

Together, these mechanisms illustrate how Outward Bound programs combine authentic adventure, intentional design, and powerful social environments to shape meaningful growth.



# KEY FINDINGS IN DETAIL



## Most Valued Outcomes

Students described growth in three broad domains:

### 1. Interpersonal Development (43%)

Communication, teamwork, empathy, leadership, conflict resolution.

### 2. Intrapersonal Development (31%)

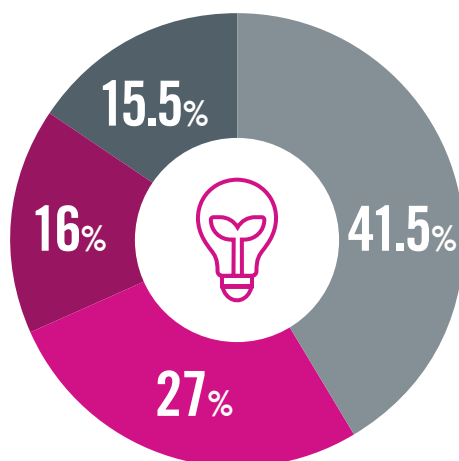
Confidence, resilience, self-belief, perseverance, independence.

### 3. Technical and Practical Skills (13%)

Navigation, campcraft, outdoor competence, problem solving.

### 4. Other category (13%)

These findings mirror decades of Outward Bound research, now validated through a truly global lens.



## Mechanisms that Drive Learning

Students consistently identified three program features as the most influential:

### Course Activities and Structures (27%)

### Challenging Experiences (16%)

### Supportive Group Culture (15.5%)

### 4. Other category (41.5%)

Additional mechanisms, including reflection, instructors, the natural environment, service, and separation from everyday life, also contributed meaningfully.



## Strongest Mechanism–Outcome Relationships

Clear, consistent patterns appeared across Schools:

**Challenging experiences → Resilience**

**Supportive group culture → Social competence**

These relationships highlight how OB's core structures translate directly into character development.

# WHY THIS MATTERS

This study strengthens Outward Bound's global evidence base in three important ways:

## 1. Global Evidence

It demonstrates that Outward Bound's approach reliably fosters meaningful personal and social development in cultures across the world.

## 2. Shared Understanding Across Schools

The findings highlight common mechanisms that drive learning consistently—powerful insight for program design, instructor training, and assessment.

## 3. Clearer Communication of Impact

The results offer Schools a compelling, evidence-aligned narrative to share with funders, partners, and communities.



# CONCLUSION

This study affirms that Outward Bound's educational model, rooted in challenge, community, and connection to nature, continues to support young people worldwide to build resilience, confidence, social competence, compassion, and environmental responsibility. It also provides one of the most globally representative perspectives to date on what truly matters to students, and why Outward Bound experiences create lasting impact across cultures and contexts.