



INTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL GAMES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING AT PAUD INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Traditional games, as cultural heritage, contain noble values and have great potential to support the early childhood learning process. Early childhood education prioritizes learning through-play methods as this approach aligns with children's natural tendency to play. Through play, children acquire and process new information while honing their existing skills. This study discusses the importance of integrating traditional games for early childhood in PAUD institutions. Traditional games serve not only as entertainment but also as an effective learning method to holistically develop various aspects of child development. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study examines the implementation of traditional games in PAUD institutions and their benefits for early childhood development. The findings reveal that games such as Congklak, Engklek, and Lompat Tali are effective in stimulating integrated development across cognitive, motoric, social-emotional, and language domains. Furthermore, the study observed that these games foster cooperation, turn-taking, emotional regulation, and the cultivation of moral values like honesty and respect, while also strengthening children's cultural identity. In conclusion, this study affirms that traditional games are potent, culturally-grounded pedagogical tools. Therefore, it is recommended that PAUD institutions apply this in their teaching and learning process.

Keywords: Child Development, Early Childhood Education, Traditional Games

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a critical stage in human development characterized by rapid cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth (Santrock, 2019). During this stage, play serves as the primary means for children to explore their environment, develop life skills, and build an understanding of the world around them (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). In Indonesia, Early Childhood Education (PAUD) aims to holistically foster the development of children aged 0-6 years, preparing them for lifelong learning and formal education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). The Indonesian government, through various educational policies such as Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 137 of 2014, emphasizes the importance of a play-based learning approach in achieving child development goals. However, in practice, current PAUD teaching methods tend to shift towards an academic approach influenced by globalization, digitalization, and modern educational trends (Miller & Almon, 2009).

Traditional games such as engklek (hopscotch), congklak (a seed-based board game), gobak sodor (a team chase game), and boy-boyan (a ball game) have long been an important part of Indonesian culture. These games are not merely entertainment but are a means to instill cultural values, cooperation, problem-solving skills, and motor coordination (Sutapa et al., 2021). Unfortunately, alongside technological advances and the dominance of digital games, traditional games are beginning to lose their place in the lives of Indonesian children (Marsh et al., 2018). The loss of these traditional games reflects a broader social shift—namely, the erosion of cultural heritage and traditional knowledge systems that once formed the foundation of children's character and moral development.

In many PAUD institutions, teachers and curriculum designers are increasingly integrating digital tools and modern games adapted from Western pedagogical models. Although these innovations have benefits, this approach often sidelines local play forms that are more contextual for Indonesian children (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2013). Observations in several PAUD institutions show that many children are



more familiar with games on mobile phones and animated content than with the traditional games inherited from their ancestors (Marsh et al., 2018). This raises concerns that early childhood learning is becoming detached from cultural identity and local community values.

The integration of traditional games into the PAUD learning context is a strategic step to address this phenomenon. Traditional games can be used as contextual pedagogical tools rich in cultural values, thereby supporting children's holistic development (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2013). These games also encourage cognitive development through counting and strategic thinking activities, strengthen socio-emotional aspects through cooperation and empathy, and develop motor skills through coordinated physical activity (Sutapa et al., 2021). Therefore, the integration of traditional games aligns with the national education goal of shaping students who are characterful, creative, and rooted in the nation's culture, while also responding to the global call for culture-centered education.

This study holds significance in three major aspects: educational, cultural, and developmental. From an educational perspective, it provides empirical evidence and practical frameworks for teachers seeking to enrich their play-based learning approaches through culturally relevant materials (Gay, 2018). By embedding traditional games in daily classroom activities, educators can make learning experiences more meaningful and contextually appropriate for children in Indonesia. Culturally, it supports the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's emphasis on maintaining cultural continuity in education (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). From a developmental perspective, traditional games provide balanced stimulation across various domains—language, motor, cognitive, social, and emotional (Pellegrini, 2011). Developmentally, traditional games provide balanced stimulation across various domains—cognitive, motor, social, and emotional—fostering resilience, creativity, and empathy, qualities essential for 21st-century learners (Yogman et al., 2018).

While previous research underscores the educational value of play (Piaget, 1962) (Vygotsky, 1978) and specific benefits of traditional games in Indonesia (Nurhidayah et al., 2024) (Wulansari & Dwiyanti, 2021), empirical studies focusing on the *systematic integration* of traditional games into structured PAUD curricula remain limited. Most existing works explore traditional games as extracurricular activities rather than as integral pedagogical components. Furthermore, there is limited exploration of teachers' perceptions and implementation challenges. Addressing these gaps is essential to create practical and scalable models of culturally responsive pedagogy that balance modern learning outcomes with traditional wisdom.

The primary purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the integration of traditional games into early childhood learning activities within PAUD institutions. Specifically, the study seeks to identify how traditional games can be effectively incorporated into the learning process to enhance children's holistic development while promoting cultural preservation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Traditional children's games are indeed a genre of folklore, characterized by their oral transmission across generations, a traditional form, and often numerous variations (Wahidah et al., 2021). These games are distinct from commercialized activities due to their use of simple, often natural materials; emphasis on cooperative interaction; and orally-transmitted rules. In Indonesian, games such as engklek (hopscotch), congklak (mancala), gobak sodor (a team chase game), informal educational systems that cultivate moral reasoning, discipline, strategic thinking, and cultural identity (Prima & Lestari, 2025). They are, in essence, vessels of local wisdom (kearifan lokal) that encode societal values like teamwork, respect, and fairness.

Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini (PAUD) is the formal educational stage in Indonesia for children from birth to six years old. Governed by national standards (Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014), its primary goal is to foster holistic development. This holistic approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of the physical-motor, cognitive, social-emotional, language, and moral-spiritual domains (Kemdikbud, 2020). The mandated pedagogical approach is play-based, thematic, and integrated, positioning play not as a reward but as the central mechanism for learning.

Play-based learning is a pedagogical approach that views play as a medium for learning and development. According to Vygotsky's (Vygotsky, 1978) sociocultural theory, play facilitates learning within the *zone of proximal development* where children advance their cognitive and social skills with guidance from adults or peers. Similarly, Piaget (Piaget, 1962) emphasized play as a form of assimilation and accommodation through which children construct knowledge actively. In the PAUD context, play-



based learning is not only a method but a philosophy of teaching that values experiential, meaningful, and joyful learning.

This research is positioned to bridge the identified gaps between the theoretical potential of traditional games and their practical application in PAUD. It aims to provide an evidence-based framework for their integration, exploring pedagogical strategies and assessing holistic impact. In conclusion, this theoretical framework argues that traditional games are a potent, culturally resonant form of play-based learning that aligns perfectly with the philosophical and policy goals of Indonesian PAUD. By addressing the critical gaps between this theoretical potential and on-the-ground practice, this study aims to contribute a validated model that empowers educators and enriches the holistic development of young children in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research uses a literature study methodology, conducting a comprehensive analysis of various existing theories, regulations and research related to traditional games. The method involves a systematic search and critical analysis of data obtained from previous research and relevant literature references, guided by a theoretical foundation to align with existing facts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach through a comprehensive literature study. The method involves systematically searching for, analyzing, and synthesizing existing theories, regulations, and empirical research related to traditional games in early childhood education. Data were gathered from scholarly articles, books, and government policy documents. The analysis was guided by a theoretical foundation to ensure the research findings are aligned with established facts and contribute to a coherent understanding of the integration of traditional games in PAUD institutions.

The Multidimensional Developmental Benefits of Traditional Games

The analysis confirmed that traditional games provide holistic stimulation across key developmental domains. The benefits are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Developmental Benefits of Traditional Games in Early Childhood*

Developmental Domain	Key Benefits	Example Games
Cognitive	Enhances strategic thinking, problem-solving, numeracy, and memory.	<i>Congklak</i> (counting, strategy)
Socio-Emotional	Fosters cooperation, empathy, emotional regulation, turn-taking, and conflict resolution.	<i>Gobak Sodor</i> (teamwork), <i>Engklek</i> (fair play)
Physical-Motor	Develops gross motor skills (running, jumping, balance) and fine motor skills (hand-eye coordination).	<i>Bentengan</i> (running, agility), <i>Engklek</i> (balance)
Moral and Character	Instills values of honesty, discipline, patience, and respect for rules.	All games with clear rules, particularly <i>Gobak Sodor</i>

These findings strongly align with constructivist theories. For instance, a game like *congklak* serves as a concrete operational activity where children manipulate objects to understand quantity, supporting Piaget's ideas on active learning (Piaget, 1962). Furthermore, the social framework of games like *gobak sodor* creates a "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978), where peers can scaffold each other's learning of complex rules and social skills. The documented improvement in numeracy through games like *congklak* (Lestari & Prima, 2018) underscores the power of *contextual learning*, where children grasp academic concepts more effectively when they are embedded in meaningful, culturally-rich play.

Challenges in Integrating Traditional Games into Modern PAUD Settings

Despite the recognized benefits, several significant barriers to integration were identified in the literature. These challenges are consistent with broader trends in early childhood education but present



specific issues in the context of Indonesian traditional games.

One major barrier to the implementation of traditional games in early childhood education is teacher preparedness and mindset. Traditional games are often perceived as recreational rather than instructional activities. As noted by Pramling et al. (2019), a widespread challenge in play-based learning is that "play is often seen as an activity that children do freely without the involvement of teachers." This perception highlights a global need for professional development that equips educators with the skills and understanding necessary to use play intentionally as an effective pedagogical tool.

Another significant challenge relates to curriculum demands and time pressure. Teachers frequently report pressure to prioritize academic readiness over play-based activities. This shift toward formal academic instruction in early childhood settings, often at the expense of play, has been identified as a global phenomenon (Miller & Almon, 2009). In the Indonesian context, such pressure can marginalize traditional games, as they are often viewed as less directly connected to measurable academic outcomes.

Environmental and resource constraints also pose substantial obstacles. Urban PAUD institutions often lack safe and open spaces needed to conduct physical traditional games such as *gobak sodor*. Limited facilities restrict opportunities for movement-based learning and reduce the feasibility of integrating these games into daily classroom activities.

Finally, cultural erosion and competition from digital media further threaten the sustainability of traditional play. The displacement of traditional games by digital entertainment is a well-documented global trend (Marsh et al., 2016). This shift poses a direct risk to the intergenerational transmission of cultural practices in Indonesia, as children increasingly engage with screen-based activities rather than culturally rooted forms of play.

The marginalization of traditional games reflects a global trend of "academic trickle-down," where formal instruction is pushed into earlier childhood years (Miller & Almon, 2009). In Indonesia, this is compounded by globalization and digitalization. The challenges highlight a critical gap between national policy advocating for local culture and its practical implementation in the classroom, where academic performance is often prioritized.

Effective Strategies for Integrating Traditional Games

The literature suggests several key strategies for the effective integration of traditional games into early childhood education. One important strategy is thematic integration with lesson plans. Traditional games should not be treated as stand-alone activities but incorporated into weekly learning themes. For instance, the theme "*Plants*" can be integrated with *Cublak-Cublak Suweng*, which uses seeds as part of the game. Similarly, the theme "*Family*" can be linked to *Engklek*, as the game emphasizes social interaction and adherence to rules, while the theme "*Geometric Shapes*" can be taught through the patterns used in *Engklek*.

Another essential strategy is game modification and adaptation. To maintain relevance while preserving their cultural essence, traditional games can be adjusted to suit contemporary classroom contexts. This includes simplifying rules for young children, modifying equipment to ensure safety and accessibility, adjusting the duration of play to match children's attention spans, and combining traditional games with modern media, such as using digital audio for traditional game songs.

The literature also highlights the effectiveness of a guided play approach. In this approach, the teacher plays an active role by clearly introducing the game rules, acting as a facilitator during play, and providing scaffolding when children encounter difficulties. Teachers also ask guiding questions to stimulate children's critical thinking, ensuring that play remains both engaging and educational.

Finally, successful integration of traditional games requires collaboration with the community and parents to create a supportive learning ecosystem. This collaboration can involve inviting parents and grandparents to share their knowledge of traditional games, forming traditional playgroups that actively involve the community, and organizing traditional game festivals as part of the school program. Such collective efforts help sustain cultural heritage while enriching children's learning experiences.

These strategies emphasize a flexible and contextual approach. Thematic integration ensures traditional games are not an add-on but a core part of the learning process, aligning with the principles of 'merdeka belajar' (independent learning), which grants educators autonomy to develop locally relevant content.

Modifying games is a form of cultural dynamism, where tradition is not only preserved but also evolved to remain a living, relevant practice. Collaboration with the community creates continuity of learning between school and home, which is crucial for child development. Programs involving parents



in traditional games have been shown to strengthen family bonds and enhance children's understanding of cultural values (Alfayed & Septiarti, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that traditional games are a powerful, culturally-rich pedagogical tool capable of supporting the holistic development of children in PAUD institutions. They offer a unique blend of cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and moral benefits perfectly aligned with the needs of young learners. However, their potential remains underutilized due to significant challenges, including teacher preparedness, curriculum constraints, and the dominance of digital entertainment.

A successful integration requires a systematic yet creative approach. Strategies such as thematic integration, thoughtful game modification, a guided play pedagogy, and active collaboration with the community are essential to overcome implementation barriers and optimize the benefits of traditional games.

For PAUD practitioners, it is recommended to develop lesson plans that explicitly integrate traditional games and to build partnerships with parents. For policymakers and teacher educators, this study underscores the need to provide training and resources that support culturally responsive, play-based pedagogy. Future research should move beyond theoretical studies to conduct empirical intervention research. This would involve designing structured programs, using quasi-experimental methods, and measuring specific developmental outcomes to validate the impact of traditional game integration.

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