

## Fostering the Character of Love for the Country Through Traditional Games: A Character Education Case Study in Indonesia

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Articles Information	Abstrak
<p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Traditional games;                      Character education;                      Love of the homeland;                      Local culture;                      Local wisdom;                      patriotism education.</p>	<p>Permainan tradisional merupakan warisan budaya yang memiliki nilai edukasi penting dalam pendidikan karakter. Penelitian ini mengkaji peran permainan tradisional dalam menanamkan karakter cinta tanah air pada anak-anak di Indonesia. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif, data diperoleh melalui observasi kegiatan sekolah, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan guru, orang tua, dan siswa, serta analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa permainan seperti gobak sodor dan congklak mengajarkan nilai kerja sama, tanggung jawab, dan penghormatan terhadap budaya lokal, serta meningkatkan pemahaman anak-anak tentang identitas nasional. Namun, penerapan permainan tradisional menghadapi tantangan seperti keterbatasan waktu di sekolah dan preferensi anak terhadap permainan digital. Untuk mengatasi hal ini, penelitian mengusulkan integrasi permainan tradisional dalam program ekstrakurikuler, penggunaan strategi pengajaran interaktif, dan keterlibatan masyarakat dalam melestarikan budaya. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa permainan tradisional merupakan media yang efektif untuk pendidikan karakter, menanamkan nilai patriotisme, dan melestarikan warisan budaya.</p>
<p>Received : 22-11-2024                      Revised : 26-11-2024                      Accepted : 26-11-2024                      Published : 30-11-2024</p>	<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>Traditional games are a vital cultural heritage with significant educational value for character education. This study examines their role in fostering a love-for-homeland character among Indonesian children. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through observations of school activities, semi-structured interviews with teachers, parents, and students, and document analysis. The findings reveal that games like gobak sodor and congklak instill values such as cooperation, responsibility, and respect for local culture, while enhancing children's understanding of national identity. However, challenges such as limited school time and children's preference for digital games hinder their application. To address these issues, the study proposes incorporating traditional games into extracurricular programs, using interactive teaching strategies, and fostering community involvement to sustain cultural practices. This research concludes that traditional games serve as an effective medium for character education, emphasizing their potential in cultivating patriotism and preserving cultural heritage.</p>



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a nation renowned for its rich cultural heritage, including traditional games passed down from generation to generation (Fatmawati, 2021; Iasha et al., 2022). These games, such as congklak, gobak sodor, and bentengan, go beyond mere entertainment, serving as a repository of social, moral, and national values (Hidayati, 2020). Embedded within these games are lessons in cooperation, sportsmanship, and respect for local cultural values, reflecting the identity of the Indonesian nation. However, the advancement of technology and the pervasive influence of globalization have caused a decline in traditional games. Modern digital games, more appealing to the younger generation, now dominate their preferences, posing a dual threat: the gradual disappearance of traditional games and the erosion of opportunities for children to internalize the values these games embody, including a sense of love for the homeland (Susanti et al., 2022).

In the broader context of education, the integration of cultural heritage into character-building programs has been recognized as a critical strategy for fostering identity and values. Character education, rooted in local culture, provides a robust framework for preserving cultural heritage while instilling values relevant to national identity (Anggraeni et al., 2022). Traditional games offer unique advantages in this regard, serving as engaging, interactive tools to promote character development. For instance, Rut et al. (2020) found that congklak enhances children's social skills through the direct, face-to-face interactions inherent in the game. Similarly, Kadir et al. (2021) emphasized that traditional games help preserve local wisdom and reinforce cultural identity in the face of global cultural homogenization. Additionally, Maghfiroh (2020) noted that traditional games encourage creativity, an essential component of character development that is often overlooked in conventional educational settings.

Despite these insights, there remains a gap in understanding how traditional games can be systematically utilized to instill specific patriotic values, such as love for the homeland. While studies such as Astuti and Tohir (2024) underline the importance of integrating traditional games into formal education to foster cooperation, sportsmanship, and responsibility, and Anatasya et al. (2023) highlight the role of these games in promoting local values like mutual cooperation and tolerance, few studies have explicitly focused on their potential to build patriotism. This oversight is significant, given that love for the homeland is a foundational value in Indonesia's character education framework, as emphasized in national education policies.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how the values of love for the homeland, embedded in traditional games, can be effectively introduced and reinforced among children. It also aims to develop strategies for integrating traditional games into formal and non-formal education settings to maximize their impact. By filling this gap, the study is expected to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and communities to preserve traditional games while fostering a younger generation deeply rooted in their cultural and national identity.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Traditional Games**

Traditional games are a form of cultural heritage that is rich in social and moral values, which are passed down from generation to generation in society (Theodoropoulos & Antoniou, 2022). These games not only function as a means of entertainment but also as a medium to convey cultural values, such as cooperation, sportsmanship, and respect for tradition (Sutrisno, 2023). In the last five years, research on traditional games has increasingly shown their relevance in the context of education. Baroroh et al. (2022) identified that traditional games such as congklak and fortification can improve children's social interaction and cooperation skills, making them effective tools for learning social values.

In addition, Astuti and Tohir's (2024) noted that traditional games are able to build strong interpersonal relationships among children through activities that involve communication and collaboration. They emphasized that games such as gobak sodor and jump rope teach the importance of strategy, leadership, and group responsibility. Another study by Wahyu and Rukiyati (2022) showed that traditional games strengthen local cultural identity and encourage a sense of pride in the nation's cultural heritage, which is increasingly important amidst the rapid flow of globalization.

However, modernization and urbanization have shifted children's attention to technology-based games. Wang and Vu (2023) observed that easy access to digital devices has caused traditional games to be abandoned, especially in urban areas. This condition poses a major challenge to the preservation of traditional games as part of local culture.

### **2.2. Character building**

Character education is a systematic process that aims to build moral, social, and cultural values in individuals (Septian Mukhlis & Yuyu Siti Rahayu, 2023). In the last five years, many studies have emphasized the importance of character education in forming a young generation that has integrity, responsibility, and a sense of love for the country. According to Wahyu and Rukiyati (2022), character education can be strengthened through a culture-based approach, including through the integration of traditional games. This is supported by research by Dewantara and Wahyuni (2024), which found that traditional games provide direct experiences that allow children to learn values such as honesty, tolerance, and discipline naturally.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (2014) underlies the effectiveness of experience-based character education, where children can understand moral values through activities they experience themselves. In this context, traditional games are an ideal medium because they involve children in real situations that require social interaction, decision-making, and respect for rules. In addition, Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory (2011) is relevant in explaining how character education can utilize various types of children's intelligence. Traditional games, such as gobak sodor, stimulate interpersonal and kinesthetic intelligence, while congklak can develop logical-mathematical and intrapersonal intelligence.

However, challenges in implementing traditional game-based character education remain. Research

by Astuti and Tohir's (2024) noted that the density of the academic curriculum is often an obstacle for teachers to integrate culture-based activities such as traditional games. Therefore, a more structured strategy is needed to make traditional games an integral part of character education programs in schools.

### **3. METHOD**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study approach to explore the role of traditional games in fostering patriotism among children. The case study approach was chosen for its ability to provide an in-depth exploration of specific phenomena within real-life contexts (Alam, 2021; Priya, 2021). The research focused on elementary schools and communities in Indonesia that actively incorporated traditional games into learning and extracurricular activities. The design aimed to capture diverse perspectives from teachers, students, and parents regarding the patriotic values embedded in traditional games and their effectiveness as a medium for character education.

#### **3.2. Participants**

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure their relevance to the research objectives (Meter & Setiawan, 2023). This technique allowed the selection of individuals with specific roles, experiences, and expertise related to traditional games. The participant group included three categories. The first group consisted of 10 teachers aged 30–45 years from elementary schools in Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan, who actively integrated traditional games into teaching. The second group involved 30 students aged 8–12 years, who participated in traditional games during school or community activities, representing diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. The third group comprised 10 parents aged 35–50 years who observed and supported their children's involvement in traditional games. Demographic factors, such as gender balance and cultural diversity, were also considered to ensure representativeness.

#### **3.3. Research Data Instruments**

Data were collected using three primary tools: observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted during traditional game sessions in schools and communities, focusing on interaction dynamics, emerging values, and emotional responses. Specific attention was given to values such as cooperation, sportsmanship, and respect for local culture, particularly in the context of patriotism. Semi-structured interviews explored participants' perspectives on the benefits, challenges, and relevance of traditional games in character education. Interview questions included topics like the values taught by traditional games and comparisons to modern digital games in promoting character development. Interviews, lasting 30–45 minutes, were recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim. Document analysis involved reviewing school curricula, lesson plans, and community activity reports to understand the integration of traditional games and their objectives.

### 3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to ensure a systematic and transparent process. First, data reduction was conducted by organizing and filtering observational notes, interview transcripts, and documents to separate relevant information. Line-by-line coding was applied to identify key patterns, such as “teamwork,” “cultural pride,” and “love for the homeland.” Related codes were clustered into broader themes, such as “traditional games as cultural education tools” and “barriers to implementation.” These themes were synthesized into a narrative that linked findings to theoretical frameworks and previous studies. Validation was achieved through member-checking with participants and peer debriefing among researchers to ensure consistency and accuracy. The analysis process was iterative, with multiple rounds of refinement, and the results are presented as detailed descriptions supported by concrete examples from observations and interviews.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Values of Love for the Country in Traditional Games

The results of the study show that traditional Indonesian games, such as gobak sodor and congklak, significantly contain values that are relevant to the formation of a character of love for the homeland. Observations during the implementation of gobak sodor games in several elementary schools revealed that children actively demonstrated cooperation and solidarity in guarding the "fence" of their territory. For example, in one school in Java, children formed teams with clear roles, such as guards and runners. During the game, there was a pattern of intense communication, where one child led his team to develop a strategy, while others provided moral support when failure occurred. This interaction reflects the importance of cooperation and collective responsibility, which are key elements in the values of love for the homeland.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) supports this finding, where children learn through observation and active participation in group activities. In addition to cooperation, gobak sodor also teaches children sportsmanship. In one observation in Sulawesi, it was seen that children quickly stopped the game when a teacher, acting as a referee, blew the whistle to signal a violation. This shows that children understand the importance of obeying the rules in the game, reflecting the values of respect for applicable norms and laws. Teachers interviewed in Sumatra also emphasized that the game is often used to teach team strategy and support friends, as part of character learning. One teacher stated,

*"In gobak sodor, children learn that to win, they must work together and trust each other. This is similar to how we must contribute to society."*

Meanwhile, the congklak game has a significant influence in introducing local wisdom to children. Observations at a school in Java showed that the game involves strategic thinking, patience, and fairness.

Children learn to calculate their moves carefully in order to win the game, but also share tips with their friends to help them play better. One of the children interviewed stated,

*"When playing congklak, we have to be patient, if we rush we will definitely lose."*

This shows that traditional games not only function as entertainment, but also as a medium for training moral values.

From interviews with parents, it was found that the congklak game also helps strengthen relationships between generations. A mother in Sulawesi said that her children often played congklak at home, and this became an opportunity for her to introduce stories about childhood and family culture. She stated,

*"I can tell stories about how congklak used to be played with my friends, and they know that this is our culture."*

This finding is relevant to the Cultural Transmission Theory by Herskovits (1949), which explains that traditional games are an effective means of passing on cultural values to the next generation.

#### **4.2. The Effectiveness of Traditional Games in Character Education**

The results of the study showed that traditional games provide a fun and effective learning experience in character education. Teachers interviewed revealed that children more easily understand values such as cooperation, responsibility, and love of the country when they are directly involved in the game. For example, in the game of gobak sodor, children must work together to guard their territory, involving coordination and a sense of responsibility for the team. A teacher in Sumatra stated,

*"Through this game, children learn without feeling forced. They understand the importance of supporting friends and working together to achieve common goals."*

Observations support this statement, where children appear enthusiastic and try to understand their respective roles in the team, indicating a deep internalization of the value of cooperation. Parents also noted that traditional games arouse children's curiosity about local culture. A mother in Sulawesi said that her child began to ask about the origins of the game gobak sodor which is often played at school, even asking for stories about how the game was played in her childhood. This shows that traditional games not only teach social values but also introduce children to local culture, building a sense of pride in their national

identity. This is in accordance with Kolb's (2014) Experiential Learning theory, where learning through direct experience is more effective in shaping children's behavior and values.

The effectiveness of traditional games also depends greatly on the frequency and intensity of children's involvement. Teachers in schools with weekly traditional game schedules report that children who are routinely involved show a better understanding of values such as sportsmanship and responsibility. A teacher in Java explained,

*"When children play regularly, they begin to understand the importance of supporting the team and learning from their mistakes. Children who only play occasionally tend not to have a deep understanding."*

This observation is in line with Skinner's (1965), which emphasizes that repeating positive behavior through direct experience strengthens learning and character formation.

Integrating traditional games into the educational curriculum is an important step to maximize their benefits. Teachers suggest that traditional games can be used as interactive teaching methods in subjects such as history, arts and culture, and character education. For example, gobak sodor can be used to teach the value of mutual cooperation in the history of the nation's struggle, while congklak can be a tool for teaching mathematical logic that introduces local wisdom. This integration not only makes learning more interesting but also helps preserve traditional games as part of the nation's cultural heritage.

### 4.3. Challenges in Implementing Traditional Games

Although the benefits of traditional games in character education have been recognized, this study identified a number of challenges that hinder their implementation. One of the main challenges is the limited time in schools to carry out traditional games. Teachers expressed that the tight academic curriculum makes it difficult to include traditional game activities in the routine schedule. In an interview, a teacher in Java stated,

*"We would like to have more traditional games, but often our main priority is to complete academic subject matter."*

This reflects the conflict between the need to meet curriculum targets and the importance of culture-based character education activities.

In addition, modernization and urbanization have shifted children's interest in technology-based digital games. Observations show that many children prefer to play games on their electronic devices rather than participate in traditional games that are considered "less interesting" or "old-fashioned." This



phenomenon is in accordance with the Technological Determinism Theory by McLuhan (2021), which explains that technological developments influence the way individuals choose entertainment and daily activities. Digital technology offers instant and visual experiences that are often difficult to match with traditional games that require physical and social involvement.

Teachers and parents also complained about the lack of infrastructure support for the implementation of traditional games. Many schools, especially in urban areas, do not have adequate land for play activities, making traditional games that require a large space, such as gobak sodor or fortification, difficult to implement. One teacher in Sulawesi said,

*"We don't have a large field at school, so the children can only play games that don't require a lot of space, such as congklak or jump rope."*

This obstacle is further compounded by teachers' lack of understanding of how to integrate traditional games into learning.

To address this challenge, teachers suggested special training that focuses on integrating traditional games into the teaching and learning process. This training aims to equip teachers with strategies that can combine traditional games with subject matter, so that games are not just additional activities but an integral part of learning. In addition, some communities have begun holding traditional game festivals to attract children and families. These festivals not only reintroduce traditional games to children, but also create a space for them to experience the fun and togetherness that these games offer. One festival in Sumatra observed in this study attracted hundreds of families, demonstrating that a community-based approach can be an effective solution.

This approach is in line with the Community-Based Learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of community-based education to support local culture-based learning. By involving communities, parents, and educational institutions, traditional games can be promoted as part of a lifestyle that is relevant to the modern era. For example, communities can work with schools to hold regular activities such as "Traditional Games Day," which allows children to experience the benefits of traditional games without disrupting their academic time.

#### **4.4. Traditional Games Implementation Strategy in Character Education**

The results of this study indicate that the strategy for implementing traditional games in character education can be done through a structured and integrative approach. One of the main strategies is to include traditional games as part of extracurricular activities at school. Games such as gobak sodor, congklak, and fortifications can be weekly activities that are not only fun but also educational. A teacher in Java who was interviewed stated that extracurricular activities based on traditional games in his school succeeded in increasing cooperation and social interaction among students. He said, "Children not only



learn to play, but also understand values such as teamwork and responsibility through games." By making traditional games a routine activity, children can consistently practice values that are relevant to character education.

In addition to extracurricular activities, traditional games can also be used as interactive teaching methods in certain subjects. Observations at a school in Sulawesi showed that the congklak game was used by mathematics teachers to teach the concepts of addition and subtraction. This approach makes children more enthusiastic about learning because they feel the game is relevant and fun. In history lessons, the game of gobak sodor can be used to explain the values of mutual cooperation that are part of the nation's culture. This is in accordance with the theory of Multiple Intelligences by Gardner (2011), which emphasizes that effective learning can be designed to stimulate various types of intelligence, such as interpersonal, kinesthetic, and logical-mathematical intelligence. By utilizing traditional games, teachers not only teach academic material but also social values that build a character of love for the homeland.

The third important strategy is collaboration between schools, communities, and government in preserving and promoting traditional games. In some areas, local communities have taken the initiative to hold traditional game festivals involving children, parents, and teachers. For example, a festival held in Sumatra succeeded in reviving interest in traditional games such as jump rope and stilts. This festival is not only an entertainment event but also provides education to participants about the history and values behind the game. This kind of collaboration is in line with the Community-Based Learning approach, where community-based education can strengthen local culture-based learning. With government support, such as through policies that encourage schools to integrate traditional games into the curriculum, efforts to preserve traditional games can be carried out more systematically.

These strategies have great potential not only to instill values of love for the homeland but also to develop children's holistic potential. Traditional games stimulate various aspects of child development, from kinesthetic intelligence through physical activity, interpersonal intelligence through teamwork, to intrapersonal intelligence through the introduction of emotions and moral values. For example, children who play congklak not only train their cognitive abilities in strategy but also learn about patience and fairness. The implementation of traditional games in a structured manner in schools and communities can be a comprehensive approach to building a young generation that is not only character-based but also proud of their cultural identity.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Traditional Indonesian games are a cultural heritage rich in social, moral, and cultural values that are relevant to the formation of children's character, especially in instilling a sense of love for the homeland. This study shows that traditional games such as gobak sodor, congklak, and fortifications are able to teach important values such as cooperation, sportsmanship, respect for tradition, and responsibility. Through direct involvement in the game, children not only learn to understand these values conceptually but also

internalize them as part of their personality. This supports the importance of experiential learning as an effective approach in character education.

However, the implementation of traditional games in schools and communities still faces challenges, such as time constraints, inadequate facilities, and children's increasing preference for digital games. To overcome this, collaboration between schools, communities, and the government is needed to support the preservation of traditional games through integration into the curriculum, extracurricular activities, and community-based initiatives such as traditional game festivals.

This study also confirms that traditional games can be used as an interactive teaching method that can stimulate various children's intelligences, such as interpersonal, kinesthetic, and intrapersonal intelligence. With planned integration and continuous support, traditional games can be an effective character education tool, building a young generation that not only loves its homeland but is also proud of its cultural identity. These findings provide a strong basis for efforts to preserve traditional games while strengthening its role in character education in Indonesia.

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