

## Character Education Through Traditional Games: A Literature Review on Value Formation in Early Childhood

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**ABSTRACT:** Character education in early childhood is an important foundation in building a generation that is honest, ethical, and able to adapt to the ever-changing social dynamics. However, the rapid pace of globalization and the dominance of digital games have shifted children's interests away from traditional games, which are inherently rich in noble values. The purpose of this study is to critically examine the role of traditional games in shaping the character values of early childhood, identify challenges in their implementation, and provide recommendations for strengthening character education based on local wisdom. This research uses a systematic observation method following the PRISMA guidelines through literature search on Google Scholar and Scopus. Out of 1,027 articles identified, only 9 met the inclusion criteria. The analysis revealed that traditional games such as Engklek, Cublak-Cublak Suweng, Congklak, Gobak Sodor, and Sesiku consistently instill values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, empathy, and religiosity. Additionally, the study demonstrated that traditional games contribute to cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and social development, as well as strengthening children's cultural identity. However, the main challenges include limited teacher understanding, insufficient resources, the dominance of digital games, and a lack of policy support. This study concludes that traditional games are not merely a form of entertainment but an educational tool capable of integrating moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions in a holistic manner. The revitalization of traditional games through curriculum integration, teacher training, and cross-sectoral collaboration is essential to achieve sustainable character education.

**KEYWORDS:** character education, traditional games, early childhood

### I. INTRODUCTION

Character education in early childhood is an essential foundation in shaping a generation that is honest, ethical, and adaptable to ever-changing social dynamics [1] [2]. At this stage, children are in their golden age of development, when basic values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and cooperation can be instilled effectively [3]. Efforts to build character from an early age are becoming increasingly important amid the rapid pace of globalization and technological advances that influence children's interaction patterns and behavior [4].

One of the emerging phenomena is the shift in children's play patterns from traditional games to digital games [5]. This shift raises concerns about the diminishing role of local culture in instilling noble values that have been passed down from generation to generation [6]. In fact, traditional games are not merely a means of entertainment, but also a vehicle for internalizing values, forming social skills, and strengthening cultural identity [7]. Through games such as sesiku, kaulinan barudak, or cublak-cublak suweng, children can learn sportsmanship, cooperation, religiousness, and respect for rules and social norms [8].

Previous studies have shown that integrating traditional games into early childhood education is effective in instilling character values while developing creativity, imagination, and communication skills [9]. Teachers who are able to adapt traditional games into learning activities can create a fun, interactive, and meaningful learning atmosphere. This allows character values to be internalized naturally without reducing the essence of children's joy in playing [10].

However, the implementation of traditional games in formal education still faces a number of obstacles. Some of the obstacles often encountered include limited educational policy support, lack of special training for educators, limited facilities and open spaces, and minimal systematic efforts to integrate the philosophical values of traditional games into the curriculum [11]. In addition, academic studies tend to focus on cognitive and social aspects, while the strategic dimensions of cultural preservation and character education based on local wisdom are still relatively unexplored.

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Therefore, the urgency of this study lies in the effort to develop a contextual character education model that is relevant to local culture and oriented towards welfare. Traditional games can be a holistic approach that not only serves as a medium for learning values but also strengthens cultural identity and fosters pride in national heritage from an early age.

In line with this, the main objective of this study is to critically examine the role of traditional games in shaping character values in early childhood, identify challenges in their implementation, and provide strategic recommendations for educators and policymakers in integrating traditional games into early childhood education curricula. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the conceptualization and practical development of more contextual and sustainable character education strategies.

## II. MATERIALS AND MERHODS

### Search Strategy

A systematic search strategy was conducted by adopting the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure the quality and transparency of the literature search process [8], [12]. The search was conducted on two main databases, Google Scholar and Scopus, which were selected due to their comprehensive coverage of literature and relevance to the fields of education and early childhood psychology.

The article search strategy in this study involved the use of keyword variations such as ("character education" OR "moral education" OR "values education") AND ("traditional games" OR "folk games") AND ("early childhood" OR 'preschool' OR "kindergarten"). Article searches were conducted in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). PRISMA is a reporting method designed to prevent fundamental errors in systematic review and meta-analysis reports. [13].

### Study Selection

The study selection process was conducted in three stages in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 protocol: search, verification, and assessment of correspondence. Inclusion criteria: Published scientific journal articles, articles published between 2020 and 2025, publications in English, focus on early childhood aged 3-6 years or early childhood education, studies discussing the relationship between traditional games and character/moral value formation, research design types (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods). Exclusion criteria: Articles appearing in both databases, studies focusing solely on modern games without addressing traditional game components, research targeting age groups outside the early childhood range, publications without a clear peer-review process, books, theses, and proceedings. This rigorous selection process ensures that only studies directly relevant to the research question are included in the systematic review.

### Procedure

In the search process, the author used Google Scholar and Scopus databases. The author found 1,027 articles from Google Scholar and Scopus databases. These articles were then processed and analyzed through several stages of screening based on inclusion and exclusion criteria.

After applying these criteria, only 9 articles were deemed suitable. Most articles were excluded because they were not published between 2020 and 2025 and did not discuss the relationship between traditional games and character development in young children. All selected articles were extracted from their original sources and analyzed using Mendeley to remove duplicate articles.

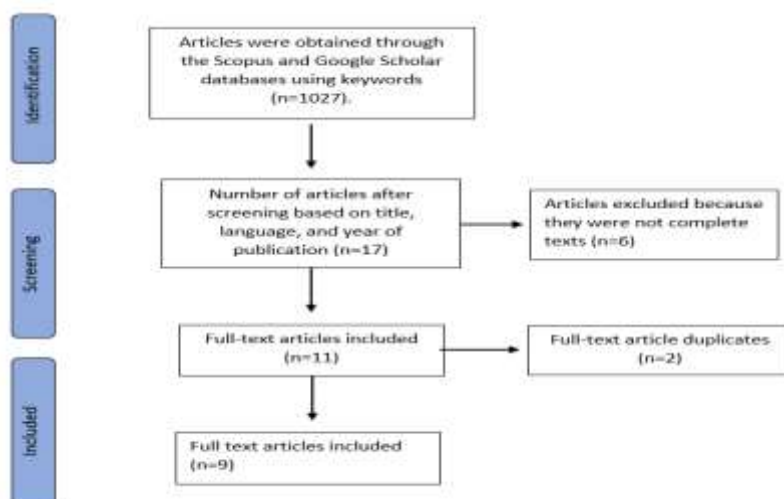


Figure 1. PRISMA research flow diagram [14]

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**Table 1. Summary of Research on Traditional Games in Early Childhood Character Education**

| Author and Year | Research Methods and Types                                                   | Research Objectives                                                                                                                                  | Research Results                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| [15]            | Quantitative with a descriptive approach                                     | Seeing the use of Engklek in instilling character education in early childhood                                                                       | Engklek has been proven to instill character education with higher average scores for tolerance (3.04), discipline (3.01), self-control (2.07), and empathy (2.07) than the median (2.00).                                                                                  |
| [16]            | Descriptive qualitative                                                      | Describing the implementation of traditional Javanese games in shaping the social character of children at Perwanis Kindergarten in Medan            | The implementation of social character building through traditional games has been successful, as indicated by moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The characters that have been formed include honesty, tolerance, discipline, creativity, and responsibility. |
| [17]            | Descriptive qualitative with an inductive approach                           | Developing religious and moral values through the traditional game of Cublak-Cublak Suweng to build children's character                             | The Cublak-Cublak Suweng game can help train and develop religious and moral values in children aged 4-6 years by teaching them to behave well, be honest, polite, tolerant, cooperative, and creative.                                                                     |
| [18]            | Descriptive qualitative (case study)                                         | Exploring the role of traditional games based on Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy in developing social skills in early childhood                     | Traditional games such as Dakon, Cublak-Cublak Suweng, and Gobag Sodor help develop social skills such as cooperation, sharing, conflict resolution, communication, and empathy.                                                                                            |
| [19]            | Descriptive qualitative with a case study approach                           | Dentifying how the integration of traditional games in learning at RA Al Anbiya can help revive children's morals.                                   | Traditional games such as hopscotch, congklak, and gobak sodor can promote moral values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and respect.                                                                                                                          |
| [20]            | Qualitative and quantitative                                                 | Analyzing the effectiveness of regional songs and traditional games in developing the character of early childhood.                                  | The use of regional songs significantly fosters values of politeness, love for the country, and appreciation for cultural diversity. This approach is effective in shaping children's character holistically.                                                               |
| [21]            | Descriptive qualitative with classroom action research                       | Understanding traditional games as an alternative learning model in shaping children's character at SD Negeri 2 Sendangasih                          | Character education is implemented by balancing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The impact of character education through traditional games makes children more creative, confident, and have positive outcomes.                                            |
| [22]            | Experimental (pre-experimental design with one group pre-test and post-test) | Analyzing lesson plans, learning activities, and learning outcomes using traditional games in character building at a kindergarten in Bengkulu City. | The average score for the pretest character observation sheet was 3.20 and the posttest was 3.64, with an average increase of 0.43. The game Sesiku developed the character values of honesty, discipline, sportsmanship, cooperation, and mutual assistance.               |
| [23]            | Qualitative                                                                  | Absorb character education based on traditional games so that the game program can be implemented as a character education model in kindergarten.    | Traditional game-based character education is one of the efforts to address the nation's moral crisis. Traditional games can train students' motor skills, attitudes, and skills as well as develop noble character.                                                        |

### III. DISCUSSION

#### Fundamental Values in Traditional Games

The results of the research synthesis show that traditional Indonesian games contain comprehensive and integrated character values. This study identified that Engklek significantly develops tolerance, discipline, self-control, and empathy with consistent average scores above the median [15]. This finding is reinforced by research [16] which found that the implementation of social character building through traditional Javanese games successfully integrated moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

The game Cublak-Cublak Suweng, as analyzed by [17], not only develops religious and moral values but also trains honest, polite, tolerant, cooperative, and creative behavior. This is in line with Vygotsky's conceptualization of social-constructivist learning, where children build moral understanding through social interaction in the context of play [15].

#### Social and Cultural Context and Preservation of Identity

The implementation of traditional games in character education cannot be separated from efforts to preserve national cultural identity. [18] Emphasizing that traditional games such as Dakon, Cublak-Cublak Suweng, and Gobag Sodor not only develop social skills but also strengthen local cultural roots. This study uses Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy with the principles of Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha, Ing Madya Mangun Karsa, and Tut Wuri Handayani as a holistic implementation framework. The importance of this socio-cultural context is also highlighted by [20], who integrates regional songs and traditional games to foster values of politeness, love for the country, and appreciation for cultural diversity. This approach reflects an educational paradigm that focuses not only on the transfer of knowledge, but also on the formation of a strong cultural identity.

#### Holistic Benefits for Child Development

A comprehensive analysis of various studies shows that traditional games provide holistic benefits that encompass cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and social dimensions. Research [22] has empirically proven that Sesiku games significantly improve character values from a pretest score of 3.20 to a posttest score of 3.64, with an average increase of 0.43. Research [21] reinforces these findings by showing that character education through traditional games successfully balances moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which leads to increased creativity, self-confidence, and positive behavioral outcomes. The integration of these three moral aspects reflects a comprehensive approach to character education as conceptualized by [23].

#### Implementation Challenges in a Modern Context

Despite its great potential, the implementation of traditional games in character education faces significant challenges. [23] Identified the main obstacles as limited teacher experience, poor memory of traditional game rules, children's reluctance to participate, and limited supporting facilities. These findings are in line with recent research showing that teachers generally do not practice and implement traditional games due to the unavailability of manuals as reference materials [23]. In addition, the dominance of digital technology and modern games has shifted children's interests away from traditional games, requiring creative and innovative adaptation strategies.

#### Effective Implementation Strategies

Based on a synthesis of various studies, effective strategies for implementing traditional games require a multidimensional approach. [19] Shows that the integration of traditional games such as engklek, congklak, and gobak sodor in learning at RA Al Anbiya successfully encouraged moral value development through systematic planning that linked games with learning themes. Research [18] emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach that integrates Montessori and Froebel methods with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy. This approach creates a learning environment that allows children to explore and develop social skills through structured yet enjoyable traditional games.

Based on the findings in this literature review, several strategic recommendations need to be considered for the sustainable implementation of traditional games in character education: First, there is a need to develop an integrated curriculum that explicitly includes traditional games as a medium for character learning with measurable achievement indicators. This is in line with findings [22] which show the effectiveness of experimental approaches in measuring character value improvement. Second, comprehensive training on the philosophy, techniques, and implementation strategies of traditional games is needed for educators. [23] emphasizes that teachers' limited knowledge is a major obstacle that must be overcome through continuous professional development programs. Third, adequate infrastructure and supporting facilities must be developed, including open spaces, traditional game equipment, and documentation media for continuous evaluation. [20] highlights the importance of facility support in the successful implementation of local culture-based learning. Fourth, synergistic collaboration between schools, families, and communities is needed to preserve and implement traditional games. [21] emphasizes that the success of character education through traditional games requires holistic support from various stakeholders. Fifth, a comprehensive evaluation and monitoring system needs to be developed to measure the effectiveness of traditional games in shaping children's

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character. This can be done through the development of valid and reliable observation instruments, as demonstrated by [22] in their research.

The implementation of these recommendations is expected to create a sustainable character education ecosystem, where traditional games not only serve as a medium for learning, but also as a vehicle for cultural preservation and the formation of a generation with strong character and a solid cultural identity..

### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This literature review confirms that traditional games have strategic potential as a medium for character education for early childhood with holistic benefits, including the development of cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and social aspects, as well as the strengthening of cultural identity. The synthesis of various studies shows that traditional games such as Engklek, Cublak-Cublak Suweng, Congklak, Gobak Sodor, and Sesiku consistently instill fundamental values such as honesty, discipline, tolerance, cooperation, empathy, religiosity, and responsibility, while also training children's social skills, communication, and creativity. Thus, traditional games are not merely a form of entertainment but an educational tool that integrates moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral actions into the practical aspects of children's daily lives. However, their implementation in educational institutions still faces challenges such as limited understanding and skills among teachers, insufficient supporting facilities, decreasing open spaces, and the dominance of digital games that shift children's interests. Therefore, a strategy is needed that includes the integration of traditional games into the curriculum, the development of valid evaluation instruments, the provision of intensive training for educators, the strengthening of infrastructure support, and synergistic collaboration between schools, families, and communities. With these steps, traditional games can be revitalized not only as cultural heritage but also as an important tool in shaping a generation with noble character, competitiveness, and a strong cultural identity amid the globalizing world.

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