

Internalization of Character and Critical Thinking in Elementary School Students through Traditional Games

Susanto

Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah Tulungagung

E-mail: susanto.susan@gmail.com

Received 07/11/2025 ; Revised 23/11/2025 ; Accepted 28/11/2025 ; Published 29/11/2025

Abstract

The development of character values and critical thinking skills in elementary school students is a key focus of 21st-century learning. One contextual approach is the use of traditional games, which are rich in educational, collaborative, and social elements. This study aims to review various pieces of literature that discuss the role of traditional games in the internalization of character values and the development of critical thinking skills in elementary school students. The research method is a systematic review of relevant local and international articles from the last 10 years. The results indicate that traditional games have a positive impact on the development of values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and sportsmanship. Furthermore, activities within the games that involve decision-making, problem-solving, and team strategies can stimulate children's critical thinking from an early age. The study shows that traditional games are an effective culture-based learning tool that simultaneously develops students' resilience and cognitive abilities, and recommends that traditional games be integrated into the elementary school curriculum.

Keywords: traditional games, character, critical thinking, elementary school, literature review

INTRODUCTION

Character education and the development of critical thinking skills are two important aspects in 21st-century education. The Merdeka Curriculum and various national education policies have emphasized the importance of learning that is not only knowledge-oriented but also focuses on strengthening moral and social values and higher-order thinking skills in students from the elementary level onwards (Kemendikbud, 2022). In this context, elementary schools play a strategic role as the primary foundation in shaping students' personalities and ways of thinking. However, the implementation of character education and critical thinking learning often remains normative and not contextually integrated into students' daily activities. Learning tends to focus on the cognitive domain using conventional approaches, thereby limiting opportunities for students to develop character values through direct experiences and social activities (Lickona, 1991; Hosnan, 2014). Therefore, innovative approaches are needed that can holistically integrate affective, cognitive, and psychomotor aspects.

Traditional games, as part of local culture passed down from generation to generation, hold great potential as an educational and meaningful learning medium. Games such as gobak sodor, hide and seek, bentengan, engklek, and congklak are not merely recreational activities but also incorporate elements of cooperation, communication, decision-making, honesty, and sportsmanship (Sedyadi & Purnomo, 2021). Activities in traditional games can stimulate social interaction, train problem-solving skills, and instill noble values in a natural and enjoyable way. Additionally, in the context of critical thinking development, traditional games encourage students to think tactically, formulate strategies, and make quick decisions in dynamic situations. This aligns with the definition of critical thinking as the ability to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and formulate responses

logically and rationally (Ennis, 2011). Thus, traditional games have the potential as a contextual learning medium that is not only enjoyable but also shapes children's character and way of thinking.

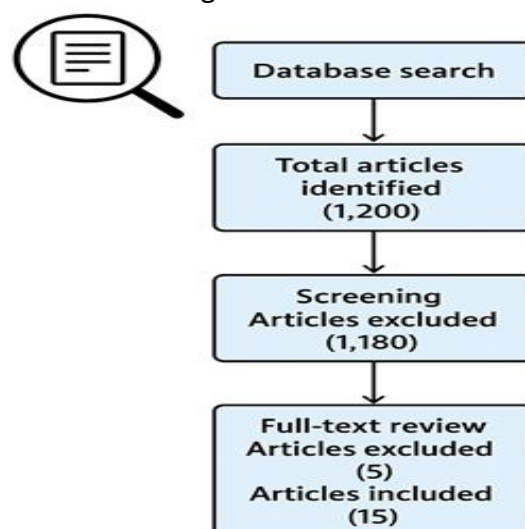
Through this literature review, the author aims to examine various research results and theoretical perspectives on the effectiveness of traditional games in internalizing character and developing critical thinking skills in elementary school students. This review is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to educators and policymakers in designing learning that is rooted in local wisdom but relevant to the demands of today's education.

METHOD

This study uses a literature review approach with a qualitative descriptive design. This review aims to explore and analyze the results of previous studies related to the use of traditional games in character building and critical thinking development in elementary school students.

1. Data Sources The data sources for this study were obtained from various scientific publications, both national and international, published in the last 10 years. This study used a systematic review method with article searches in five databases: Google Scholar, Scopus, ScienceDirect, ERIC, and Sinta or Garuda, using keywords related to traditional games, character values, and critical thinking in elementary school students. The search was limited to articles from the last 10 years (2014–2024). The search process yielded 1,200 articles. After screening the titles and abstracts, 1,180 articles were eliminated because they were irrelevant, leaving 20 articles. The next stage was a full-text review, and from the 20 articles, 5 articles were excluded because they did not meet the inclusion criteria (e.g., not traditional games, subjects were not elementary school students, or did not examine character/critical values). Finally, 15 articles that met all the criteria were obtained and used for analysis in the study. Figure 1 below explains the Prima image search process.

Figure 1. Prima



2. Data Collection Procedure The data collection procedure was carried out through the following stages: Identification of keywords: "traditional games," "character education," "critical thinking," "elementary school students," "elementary students," "traditional games," "character education," "critical thinking." Selection of articles based on abstracts

and topic relevance. Content analysis of the articles using a thematic synthesis approach to identify patterns, main concepts, and contributions of each study.

3. Data Analysis Techniques Data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic synthesis, with the following steps: Reading the entire article thoroughly. Categorizing the main themes related to the role of traditional games in character internalization and critical thinking. Compiling a review table containing: author name, publication year, research method, subject, type of traditional game, and main findings. Drawing conclusions from the synthesis results. This process follows the principles of transparency and repeatability in good literature reviews as suggested by (Booth et al., 2016).

RESULTH

Based on the analysis of 15 national and international scientific articles that met the inclusion criteria, it was found that traditional games play a significant role in helping the process of internalizing character values and developing critical thinking in elementary school students. The findings of this study can be grouped into two main themes, namely: (1) Traditional games as a means of character education, and (2) Traditional games as a stimulus for critical thinking.

1. Traditional Games as a Means of Character Education

Most articles state that traditional games indirectly instill character values through social interaction, game rules, and responsibility in the game. Values such as cooperation, honesty, sportsmanship, discipline, and responsibility are prevalent in traditional games like gobak sodor, bentengan, engklek, and galah asin (Sedyadi & Purnomo, 2021). For example, in the game of bentengan, students are required to help their teammates and follow the rules of the game fairly, thereby fostering an attitude of respect and honesty.

2. Traditional Games as a Stimulus for Critical Thinking

Several studies highlight that traditional games require students to devise strategies, anticipate opponents, and make quick decisions. This encourages higher-order thinking skills, such as logical, analytical, and reflective thinking (Susanti & Yuliana, 2020; Hadiyanto et al., 2021). In games such as congklak or engklek, students must think about the best moves to win, which involves the ability to evaluate and predict the consequences of their actions.

3. Synthesis Table of Selected Articles

No	Author (Year)	Traditional Game	Character Formed	Values	Critical Thinking Aspects
1	(Sedyadi & Purnomo, 2021)	Gobak Sodor	Discipline, cooperation, sportsmanship		Strategy, anticipating opponents
2	(Helvana & Hidayat, 2020)	Bentengan	Responsibility, honesty		Problem solving
3	(Hadiyanto et al., 2021)	Congklak	Patience, systematic thinking		Planning steps, evaluating results
4	(Susanti & Yuliana, 2020)	Engklek	Perseverance, togetherness		Focus, decision making
5	(Kusumawati et al., 2021) (Kusuma, 2019)	Petak Umpet	Compliance, solidarity		Situation analysis, reflection on actions

No	Author (Year)	Traditional Game	Character Formed	Values	Critical Thinking Aspects
6	(Kusumawati et al., 2021)	et Boy Boyan	Self-confidence, decision-making		Able to analyze arm position and strength when throwing
7	(Permana & Syafrida, 2019)	& Kucing dan Tikus	Decision-making, tolerance,		Implementing avoidance and catching strategies
8	(Rizkiana & Rifiyati, 2024)	& Jamuran	Cooperation, creativity, strategic planning		Able to express ideas and catching strategies
9	(Savriliana et al., 2020)	Dakon	Honesty, accuracy		Implementing strategies in determining steps
10	(Sholikin et al., 2022)	Egrang	Self-confidence		Implementing balance and endurance
11	(Zulfa, 2023)	Lompat tali	Discipline, honesty, cooperation, socializing		Performing balance movements and tactics to avoid fatigue
12	(Ni'mah et al., 2023)	Ular naga	Cooperation, honesty, self-confidence		Tactics to perform movements to avoid being easily caught
13	(Shofia & Saridewi, 2019)	& Kotak pos	Decision-making, cooperation		Strategies to prevent opponents from answering questions
14	(Kurnia & Arifin, 2022)	Lari balok	Discipline, self-confidence		Analyzing foot movements to ensure proper foot placement to overcome obstacles
15	(Pranowo & Hakim, 2021)	& Bentik/patel lele	Decision-making, precision		Analyzing the amount of force required to strike wood to make it easier to hit

Overall, the results show that traditional games not only serve as entertainment, but also as an effective learning medium in shaping character and critical thinking skills. These studies support the idea that a local culture-based learning approach can enrich learning and increase the relevance of education to students' real lives.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that traditional games have a significant contribution in supporting character building and the development of critical thinking skills in elementary school students. These findings reinforce various educational theories that state that contextual, enjoyable, and locally-based learning can increase student engagement in the learning process while simultaneously developing cognitive and affective aspects (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1964). Traditional Games as a Means of Internalizing Character Values Traditional games played in groups encourage intense social interaction. In this process, students learn various values such as cooperation, responsibility, sportsmanship, and honesty. As explained by Lickona (1991), character education should be instilled through meaningful direct experiences in a social environment. Traditional games create real-life situations that require students to behave in accordance with certain moral and social values.

A study conducted by [Sedyadi & Purnomo](#), (2021) found that games such as gobak sodor can improve discipline and teamwork because students must follow the rules of the game and coordinate with group members. In addition, sportsmanship and honesty are honed when students voluntarily accept defeat and admit violations without coercion. Traditional Games and Critical Thinking Development Traditional games require children to think logically, solve problems, and make decisions within a limited time. According to [Facione](#), (2015), critical thinking involves the ability to reason, analyze situations, and make decisions based on logic. This is found in games such as congklak or engklek, where students must consider the steps they will take and evaluate their impact on the outcome of the game.

[Susanti & Yuliana](#), (2020) show that traditional games can stimulate reflective and strategic thinking in children. Through games, students become accustomed to devising strategies, considering risks, and learning from mistakes, which are important parts of critical thinking. Integration into the Curriculum Based on the findings of the study, traditional games have great potential to be integrated into learning activities in elementary schools, particularly in physical education, local content, and thematic learning. The use of traditional games as a learning medium can serve as an alternative constructivist approach that positions students as active participants in the learning process ([Widodo](#), 2018).

However, it is important for teachers to select games that are appropriate for the learning objectives and to consider safety and inclusivity in their implementation. In this way, character values and critical thinking skills can be developed optimally in a fun and contextual environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review conducted, it can be concluded that traditional games have a significant contribution to the process of internalizing character values and developing critical thinking skills in elementary school students. Traditional games provide a natural, enjoyable, and challenging learning environment that facilitates students to learn through direct experience. Character values such as cooperation, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and sportsmanship are implicitly embedded in social interactions during the game. In addition, traditional games also stimulate students' cognitive aspects, particularly critical thinking skills. Students are required to make decisions, develop strategies, solve problems, and reflectively evaluate their actions. This makes traditional games a contextual and relevant pedagogical approach in 21st-century education. Therefore, integrating traditional games into elementary school learning is highly recommended as an alternative learning medium that not only preserves local wisdom but also supports the achievement of national educational goals, namely character development and the enhancement of students' thinking skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For Teachers and Education Practitioners Elementary school teachers are encouraged to integrate traditional games into the learning process, both in intracurricular and extracurricular activities. Traditional games can be used as a contextual learning medium to instill character values and train students' critical thinking skills. The selection of game types should be tailored to learning objectives and the developmental level of students.
2. For Schools and Policy Makers Schools should provide space and support for the preservation of traditional games within the formal education environment. This can be

achieved through the development of local curriculum content or school-based cultural activities. Education departments and related parties also need to create guidelines or learning modules based on traditional games so that they can be implemented systematically by teachers.

3. For Researchers Further research is needed to develop a standardized traditional game-based learning model and to examine its impact on various aspects of student development, including affective, cognitive, and psychomotor aspects. Experimental research can also be conducted to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of traditional games in improving students' character and critical thinking skills.

4. For Parents Parents are expected to encourage their children to learn about and play traditional games at home or in the community. These activities not only strengthen children's social interactions but also serve as a form of preserving local culture, which is increasingly being eroded by modern digital games.

REFERENCE

- Booth, A., Sutton, A., & Papaioannou, D. (2016). *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ennis, R. H. (2011). *The Nature of Critical Thinking: An Outline of Critical Thinking Dispositions and Abilities*. University of Illinois. <http://faculty.education.illinois.edu/rhennis>
- Facione, P. A. (2015). *Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts (2015 update)*. Insight Assessment. <https://www.insightassessment.com>
- Hadiyanto, H., Failasofah, F., Armiwati, A., Abrar, M., & Thabran, Y. (2021). Students' Practices of 21st Century Skills between Conventional learning and Blended Learning. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 18(3). <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.18.3.7>
- Helvana, N., & Hidayat, S. (2020). Permainan Tradisional untuk Menumbuhkan Karakter Anak. *PEDADIDAKTIKA: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar*, 7(2), 253–260. <https://doi.org/10.17509/pedadidaktika.v7i2.25623>
- Hosnan, M. (2014). *Pendekatan Saintifik dan Kontekstual dalam Pembelajaran Abad 21*. Ghalia Indonesia.
- Kemendikbud. (2022). *Kurikulum Merdeka: Panduan Implementasi untuk Satuan Pendidikan Dasar*. Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi.
- Kurnia, D., & Arifin, B. N. (2022). Pengaruh penerapan permainan tradisional bebentengan dan lari balok terhadap percaya diri siswa SMK Kiansantang kota bandung. *Journal of Physical and Outdoor Education*, 4(1), 24–33.
- Kusumawati, N. C., Muhsinin, M., & Masruroh, U. (2021). *Permainan Tradisional Boy Boyan (Lempar Kereweng) Membentuk Karakter Keberanian Anak*. 5(1), 17–28.
- Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*. Bantam Books.

- Ni'mah, R., Saputri, S. W., & Atika, A. N. (2023). Pengaruh Permainan Tradisional Ular Naga Panjang Terhadap Kemampuan Interaksi Sosial Anak Di KB Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah Jember Tahun Ajaran 2022/2023. *Yaa Bunayya: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 7(1), 53–60.
- Permana, H., & Syafrida, R. (2019). Peningkatan Kepercayaan Diri Anak Melalui Permainan Kucing Dan Tikus Di Tk Sayang Ibu Tahun 2019. *Journal of Early Childhood Education (JECE)*, 1(2), 9–15.
- Piaget, J. (1964). Development and learning. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 2(3), 176–186. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.3660020306>
- Pranowo, A. A., & Hakim, L. (2021). Pengembangan Model Permainan Kaspale sebagai Alternatif Variasi Permainan Bola Kecil dalam Pembelajaran PJOK di Kelas V Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Kejaora*, 6(1), 121–128.
- Rizkiana, Y., & Rifiyati, D. (2024). Permainan tradisional jamuran dalam membentuk karakter profil pelajar pancasila di sekolah dasar. *Pedagogik Journal of Islamic Elementary School*, 40–52.
- Savriliana, V., Sundari, K., & Budianti, Y. (2020). Media Dakota (Dakon Matematika) sebagai solusi untuk meningkatkan hasil belajar matematika siswa Sekolah Dasar. *Jurnal Basicedu*, 4(4), 1160–1166.
- Sedyadi, R., & Purnomo, D. (2021). Permainan tradisional sebagai sarana pembentukan karakter siswa sekolah dasar. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, 11(1), 45–58.
- Shofia, Q. N., & Saridewi, S. (2019). Pengaruh Permainan Tradisional Kotak Pos terhadap Perbendaharaan Kata Anak di Taman Kanak-kanak Kartika 1-63 Padang. *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Early Childhood Education*, 4(2), 117–126.
- Sholikin, M., Fajrie, N., & Ismaya, E. A. (2022). Nilai karakter anak pada permainan tradisional gobak sodor dan egrang. *Jurnal Educatio Fkip Unma*, 8(3), 1111–1121.
- Susanti, R., & Yuliana, I. (2020). Pengembangan berpikir kritis siswa melalui permainan tradisional. *Jurnal Pendidikan Anak*, 8(2), 115–124.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Widodo, J. (2018). Pendekatan pembelajaran konstruktivistik dalam pendidikan dasar. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 24(3), 201–210.
- Zulfa, E. S. (2023). Pengaruh Permainan Tradisional Lompat Tali Terhadap Motorik Kasar Anak Usia 5-6 Tahun. *ATTAQWA: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Anak Usia Dini*, 2(1), 15–26.