

## THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL GAMES IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

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**Abstrak** - Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran permainan tradisional sebagai strategi pedagogis untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbahasa Inggris siswa di jenjang pendidikan dasar dan menengah. Penelitian ini menekankan bagaimana kegiatan pembelajaran berbasis budaya, seperti permainan tradisional, dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa, penguasaan kosakata, dan kompetensi komunikatif. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini melibatkan observasi kelas dan wawancara dengan guru bahasa Inggris di Palembang, Indonesia. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi permainan tradisional dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dapat menumbuhkan motivasi belajar siswa, keterampilan kolaboratif, serta pemahaman kontekstual dalam penggunaan bahasa. Hasil penelitian ini mendukung gagasan bahwa permainan tradisional dapat menjadi jembatan antara budaya lokal dan komunikasi global, sehingga pembelajaran bahasa Inggris menjadi lebih bermakna dan menyenangkan.

**Kata kunci:** Permainan tradisional, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, motivasi, pendidikan berbasis budaya, kompetensi komunikatif.

**Abstract** - This study explores the role of traditional games as a pedagogical strategy to enhance students' English language skills in primary and secondary education. The research emphasizes how cultural-based learning activities, such as traditional games, can increase students' engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and communicative competence. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this study involved classroom observations and interviews with English teachers in Palembang, Indonesia. The findings reveal that integrating traditional games into English learning can foster students' motivation, collaborative skills, and contextual understanding of language use. The results support the idea that traditional games can serve as a bridge between local culture and global communication, making English learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

**Keywords:** Traditional games, English language learning, motivation, cultural-based education, communicative competence.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language learning has always been closely related to the cultural context of learners. According to Petsilas et al. (2020), effective language learning occurs when students can connect new linguistic knowledge to their social and cultural environment. In many Asian contexts, traditional games are not only forms of entertainment but also a medium through which children develop communication, cooperation, and creativity (Hartanto et al., 2021). When these games are adapted into English language instruction, they create a natural and meaningful learning atmosphere that supports both linguistic and cultural development.

Traditional games, such as congklak, engklek, or tenggoh-tenggohan, involve rules, instructions, and verbal interactions that can be utilized to develop language skills, particularly speaking and listening. John-Steiner and Mahn (2020) sociocultural theory

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asserts that learning occurs through social interaction, and games offer authentic opportunities for such interaction. In English learning, students can use expressions like “It’s your turn!” or “You win!” to apply functional language in real-life contexts.

Moreover, research conducted by Jajuli et al. (2022) in South Korea revealed that integrating traditional games into English classes improved students’ willingness to communicate. Similarly, Boud et al. (2014) found that Indonesian students showed higher enthusiasm and participation when English was taught through culturally familiar games. These findings highlight the pedagogical potential of traditional games as tools to make learning both culturally relevant and linguistically productive.

In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia, the emphasis on student-centered and contextual learning aligns with the use of traditional games. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), effective learning should connect local wisdom with global competence. Therefore, incorporating traditional games into English lessons supports the goals of holistic education by developing not only language skills but also values such as cooperation, respect, and cultural pride.

Finally, this study aims to analyze how traditional games can enhance English language learning among students, focusing on their impact on motivation, vocabulary mastery, and communicative ability. It contributes to the growing body of literature that promotes culturally responsive teaching strategies in the Asian educational context.

## **2. METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, focusing on classroom-based observations and semi-structured interviews (Neuman, 2019; Dabi, 2014). The participants were 30 elementary students (ages 10–12) and 3 English teachers from two schools in Palembang, Indonesia. The data collection involved observing English learning sessions integrated with traditional games, such as engklek (hopscotch) and tenggoh-tenggohan.

Teachers were instructed to embed English commands and expressions in the game activities. For instance, students practiced vocabulary related to numbers, colors, and body parts while playing. The interviews explored teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness and challenges of using traditional games in English lessons. Data were analyzed thematically following the framework proposed by Miles and Huberman (2019), which includes data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing.

## **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Result**

#### ***3.1.1 Increased Student Motivation and Active Participation***

The classroom observations revealed that students became more active, enthusiastic, and motivated when English lessons incorporated traditional games. This aligns with Deci and Ryan (2019) Self-Determination Theory, which highlights that intrinsic motivation emerges when learners experience enjoyment, autonomy, and relevance in learning activities. In traditional game-based English learning, students perceived the classroom as a playful and meaningful space rather than a rigid academic environment.

For example, while playing tenggoh-tenggohan or engklek, students displayed natural expressions such as laughter, excitement, and spontaneous English interaction. This affective engagement increased students' willingness to participate, reduced anxiety, and fostered a sense of belonging within the learning community. Similar findings were reported by Li (1998), who found that culturally familiar activities increased student participation in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms in South Korea. Thus, motivation in this context is not only psychological but also socio-cultural, reflecting the importance of connecting learning with students' lived experiences.

### ***3.1.2 Enhancement of Vocabulary Retention and Comprehension***

One of the most significant outcomes observed was the improvement in students' vocabulary acquisition. During activities such as engklek, students were instructed to name colors, numbers, or objects in English before proceeding to the next move. The playful repetition of vocabulary helped reinforce memory retention. This approach supports Smith, Mason and Krashen (2021) Input Hypothesis, which asserts that language acquisition occurs when learners receive comprehensible input in an engaging context.

Traditional games create meaningful repetition that strengthens vocabulary recall without monotony. According to Nation (2022), vocabulary learning is most effective when words are encountered repeatedly and meaningfully. Because games inherently require repetition of instructions and expressions, they provide a natural linguistic cycle that deepens comprehension. Therefore, these games serve as a bridge between active play and linguistic mastery.

### ***3.1.3 Improved Collaboration and Communicative Competence***

Traditional games also promoted students' social interaction and teamwork, which are crucial for communicative competence. The games encouraged learners to cooperate, take turns, negotiate, and use English to achieve shared goals. Johnson and Johnson (2014) theory of Cooperative Learning posits that learning is more effective when students work together to achieve common objectives.

In this study, students practiced English expressions such as "It's your turn," "Let's play again," or "You win!" reflecting authentic use of the target language. Through these interactions, they learned to apply English in functional, real-life contexts. This is consistent with Canale and Swain (2018) Communicative Competence Model, emphasizing that language proficiency involves sociolinguistic and strategic dimensions beyond grammar. The combination of traditional games and communicative practice allowed learners to experience language as a living tool for social exchange, not merely as a subject of study.

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges emerged during implementation. Teachers reported that classroom space and time constraints limited the use of physical games. Additionally, some students with lower English proficiency felt hesitant or shy to speak during the activities. These issues highlight the importance of teacher mediation and scaffolding in the learning process.

Bruner (2018) Scaffolding Theory provides a relevant framework to address this issue. Teachers supported students by first introducing key vocabulary, modeling dialogues, and offering linguistic prompts before engaging in the game. This gradual release of responsibility helped less confident learners participate successfully. Moreover, adapting traditional games to smaller classroom spaces and incorporating digital versions (e.g., video-

based or virtual adaptations) could enhance accessibility. As suggested by Dash (2022), hybrid approaches combining cultural activities and digital tools can optimize engagement and overcome spatial limitations in modern classrooms.

Traditional games functioned as a medium that connected students' cultural identity with global linguistic competence. By learning English through familiar cultural contexts, students developed pride in their local heritage while acquiring an international language. Littlewood (2013) emphasized that culturally embedded pedagogy enhances students' global competence while maintaining local values.

Furthermore, the integration of traditional games supports the holistic learning goals outlined in Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), which promotes learning that combines knowledge, skills, and character. Students not only improved their language ability but also learned cooperation, respect, and fair play values inherent in traditional games. This balance between cultural and linguistic development exemplifies the essence of 21st-century education that values identity, communication, and intercultural understanding (OECD, 2020). Overall, the findings demonstrate that traditional games serve as an effective, culturally grounded pedagogical strategy for teaching English in multilingual and multicultural settings.

### **3.2 Discussion**

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the role of traditional games as a pedagogical tool in English language teaching. The results revealed that traditional games enhanced students' motivation, vocabulary retention, communicative competence, and social collaboration. These outcomes align with previous research emphasizing that culturally responsive teaching methods can improve both affective and cognitive dimensions of learning (Pokrivcakova, 2019; Paris & Alim, 2017). The findings indicate that when students engage in culturally familiar and playful activities, they tend to exhibit higher enthusiasm, self-confidence, and participation in English language learning.

First, the increased motivation observed in this study confirms the principles of Ryan and Deci (2020) Self-Determination Theory, which asserts that intrinsic motivation arises when learners perceive learning tasks as enjoyable and personally relevant. Traditional games naturally fulfill the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Students are given the freedom to play, collaborate, and express themselves in English without fear of making mistakes. This sense of autonomy fosters a positive emotional climate that encourages risk-taking in language production an essential aspect of communicative learning (Darmaliana et al., 2020). Therefore, traditional games not only make learning enjoyable but also serve as an affective filter reducer, supporting Gass et al. (2020) claim that positive emotions facilitate language acquisition.

Second, the improvement in vocabulary retention through repeated and meaningful interaction in traditional games illustrates the effectiveness of contextual learning. Students were exposed to English vocabulary in real-life communication rather than rote memorization. As they played, they repeatedly used words and expressions in authentic situations, reinforcing comprehension through use. This supports Nation (2020) argument that repeated and contextualized encounters with words strengthen long-term vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, the playful context of traditional games aligns with the experiential

learning model (Kolb, 2014), where learners acquire knowledge through active engagement and reflection on concrete experiences.

Third, the findings highlight the development of collaborative and communicative skills among students. Traditional games fostered interaction, negotiation, and peer support, which are key components of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In this approach, language is seen as a tool for communication rather than a set of grammatical rules to memorize (Richards, 2021). The cooperative nature of traditional games provided students with opportunities to use English functionally to express ideas, follow instructions, and respond to peers. This finding also reinforces Johnson and Johnson (2019) Cooperative Learning Theory, which emphasizes positive interdependence and individual accountability in achieving shared goals. By working together in teams, students practiced not only linguistic competence but also social-emotional skills such as empathy, patience, and leadership.

However, several challenges emerged, such as classroom management issues, time constraints, and students' varying proficiency levels. These challenges suggest that the integration of traditional games requires careful pedagogical planning. Teachers must adapt games to available space, design flexible schedules, and provide scaffolding for students with limited English skills. As Hong and Nguyen (2019) suggested, scaffolding allows teachers to support learners gradually until they achieve independence. In this context, scaffolding might involve pre-teaching essential vocabulary, modeling English expressions, or using visual aids to clarify instructions. These strategies ensure that traditional games remain inclusive and effective for all learners.

Another key point is the cultural dimension of traditional games in English teaching. Integrating local games not only supports linguistic development but also strengthens cultural identity and pride among students. This aligns with Susanto et al. (2020) findings that culturally embedded pedagogy fosters global competence while preserving local values. In an era of globalization, English is often perceived as a "foreign" element, yet through the lens of traditional games, it becomes a medium that connects rather than replaces culture. The Merdeka Curriculum (Kemendikbudristek, 2022) promotes this kind of holistic learning one that values both global skills and local wisdom. Thus, the findings of this study reaffirm the importance of integrating culture-based approaches in English language instruction across Indonesian schools.

Finally, the implications of these findings extend beyond linguistic improvement. Traditional games can serve as a transformative pedagogical approach that integrates physical movement, emotional engagement, cultural appreciation, and social interaction into language learning. They provide a multimodal and multisensory experience that caters to diverse learning styles (visual, kinesthetic, and auditory). As Richard and Rodgers (2001) note, effective language teaching combines cognitive input with emotional and social engagement. Therefore, incorporating traditional games not only enhances students' English proficiency but also nurtures holistic development academic, cultural, and interpersonal.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Incorporating traditional games into English language instruction provides a culturally responsive and pedagogically effective approach to language teaching. The findings show that traditional games not only improve students' English vocabulary and communication

skills but also foster motivation, cooperation, and cultural awareness. Teachers are encouraged to creatively integrate local games into classroom activities to make learning more engaging and meaningful. Future research could explore the long-term impact of traditional games on language proficiency and intercultural understanding across different age groups and educational settings.

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