



Traditional Games for Strengthening Sportsmanship and Cooperation in Elementary School Physical Education

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of traditional games in strengthening sportsmanship and cooperative behavior in elementary school physical education. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research involved one physical education teacher and 20 fifth-grade students. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using thematic analysis. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on how social values are naturally developed through students' interactions during game-based learning activities. The findings reveal that students developed fair play attitudes, rule compliance, emotional control, communication skills, responsibility, and collaborative problem-solving abilities during learning activities. However, several challenges were still identified, including passive participation and inconsistent social behavior among some students. The findings indicate that sportsmanship and cooperation develop simultaneously through social interaction during traditional games. Therefore, traditional games can serve as an effective and contextual approach for fostering students' social and emotional development in physical education.

Keywords: traditional games, sportsmanship, cooperation, physical education, social interaction

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A. Introduction

Physical education in elementary schools is often still oriented toward the mastery of technical sports skills, while the development of social and character values has not been optimally integrated into daily learning practices (Cereda, 2023). In fact, physical education is not only aimed at improving physical competence, but also plays an important role in shaping students' attitudes, motivation, and social interactions through meaningful movement experiences (Putra et al., 2024). As a holistic learning process, physical education should facilitate the development of cognitive, affective, and social domains simultaneously (Pasaribu et al., 2025; Saleh et al., 2024). However, classroom practices frequently reveal problems such as blaming peers, refusing to share roles, showing low respect toward classmates, and difficulties in accepting victory or defeat during activities. If these conditions continue, they may negatively affect students' socio-emotional development and reduce the quality of peer interaction in elementary school settings (Huang & Lajoie, 2023; Valiente et al., 2020).

In this context, sportsmanship and cooperation become essential values that should be strengthened through physical education learning. Sportsmanship reflects honesty, respect, emotional control, and fair play attitudes during activities, while cooperation encourages communication, responsibility, and collaborative participation among students. These values are important because elementary school students are in a critical stage of social character development. Physical education therefore has a strategic role in promoting integrity, teamwork, and positive social behavior through active participation in learning activities (Russo et al., 2025).

One learning approach that has strong potential to support these values is the integration of traditional games into physical education. Traditional games naturally involve rules, teamwork,

communication, and direct social interaction among players, allowing students to experience character values through authentic play situations (Putri & Apriani, 2024; Tia et al., 2024). In addition, traditional games are closely related to children's daily experiences and local culture, making learning more contextual, enjoyable, and meaningful (Lathifah et al., 2025). Through these activities, students are encouraged not only to participate physically, but also to develop mutual respect, responsibility, and group awareness during the learning process.

Previous studies have demonstrated the positive contribution of traditional games to students' character development. (Insani et al., (2026) found that gobak sodor and bentengan games improved students' responsibility, cooperation, and sportsmanship. (Fauzi et al., 2024) further explained that traditional game-based learning can strengthen social character development in elementary schools. Other studies also highlighted that traditional games support the development of honesty, discipline, solidarity, and teamwork through interactive learning experiences (Anjani et al., 2026; Miratunnisah, 2024). These findings indicate that traditional games have considerable educational potential in supporting character education within physical education learning.

Nevertheless, previous studies have predominantly focused on the outcomes of character formation, such as increased cooperation or discipline, without deeply examining the pedagogical process through which these values emerge during learning interactions. Limited research has specifically explored how sportsmanship and cooperation are simultaneously developed through students' social experiences, communication patterns, emotional responses, and teacher facilitation in traditional game-based physical education at the elementary school level. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing students' learning experiences and social dynamics during

traditional game activities rather than merely evaluating character outcomes.

The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on understanding how sportsmanship and cooperation are naturally constructed through direct interaction in traditional game-based learning. This study also highlights the role of teachers, group dynamics, and students' meaning-making processes during physical education activities. Furthermore, the study contributes to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 concerning quality education by promoting contextual, inclusive, and socio-emotional learning approaches while supporting the preservation of local cultural values. Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the role of traditional games in fostering sportsmanship and cooperation in elementary school physical education learning.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to explore how sportsmanship and cooperation were developed through traditional games in elementary school physical education learning. A case study design was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of social interactions, learning experiences, and teacher facilitation within a real educational context (Sugiyono, 2019). The study focused on students' behaviors, emotional responses, and group dynamics that emerged naturally during traditional game activities rather than on quantitative measurement outcomes.

The participants consisted of one physical education teacher and 20 fifth-grade elementary school students aged 10–11 years, including 12 boys and 8 girls, from a public elementary school in Sumedang Regency, West Java. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because they were directly involved in traditional game-based physical education learning and were

considered capable of providing rich and relevant information related to the research objectives (Marhani, 2026).

Data were collected over four weeks during the even semester of the 2025–2026 academic year through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted during physical education learning activities involving traditional games to identify students' behaviors related to sportsmanship, emotional control, communication, and cooperation. The observation sheet included indicators such as adherence to rules, fair play behavior, participation in group activities, emotional responses during winning and losing situations, and collaborative interaction among students.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher and selected students to gain deeper understanding of their experiences during learning activities. Interview questions focused on students' perceptions of fairness, teamwork, emotional management, communication, and participation during traditional games. Examples of interview questions included: "How do you feel when your team loses the game?", "Why is cooperation important during the activity?", and "What do you usually do when disagreements occur during the game?" Documentation in the form of field notes, photographs, and learning activity records was also collected to support data completeness.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by NVivo 12 Plus software. The analysis process involved transcription, data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation. In the first stage, open coding was conducted to identify meaningful units from observation notes, interview transcripts, and documentation related to students' social behaviors during learning activities. The identified codes were then grouped through axial coding into broader categories and themes.

The coding process produced six major themes: sportsmanship, emotional management, cooperation, communication, barriers, and value relations. NVivo visualization features, including hierarchy charts and project maps, were used to identify relationships among themes and the dominance of categories within the dataset. The analysis focused on how students demonstrated fair play attitudes, rule compliance, responsibility, participation, communication, and collaborative problem-solving during traditional game activities.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were applied. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. Member checking was carried out by confirming several interview results with participants to ensure the accuracy of interpretation. In addition, peer debriefing was conducted with fellow researchers experienced in qualitative research to review coding consistency and thematic interpretation. An audit trail was also maintained through detailed documentation of data collection procedures, coding processes, field notes, and analytical decisions to enhance the transparency and dependability of the study.

This study obtained permission from the school before the research was conducted. Informed consent was provided by the teacher and students' parents or guardians prior to data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, voluntary

participation, confidentiality of information, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time. To maintain confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized throughout the research and reporting process.

Overall, this methodological approach enabled an in-depth exploration of how traditional games contribute to the development of sportsmanship and cooperation through social interaction and contextual learning experiences in physical education.

C. Result and Discussion

Result

The results of this study were obtained through thematic analysis using NVivo 12 Plus software. The findings were visualized through hierarchy charts and project maps to identify the dominance of themes and the relationships among categories in traditional game-based physical education learning.

1. Sportsmanship and Cooperation as Dominant Themes

The hierarchy chart analysis revealed two dominant themes: sportsmanship and cooperation. The sportsmanship theme contained several prominent indicators, including rule compliance, discipline, fair play attitudes, emotional management, and social support among students. Among these indicators, rule compliance and fair play appeared most frequently during learning activities, indicating that students began to understand the importance of honesty and respecting agreed rules during games.

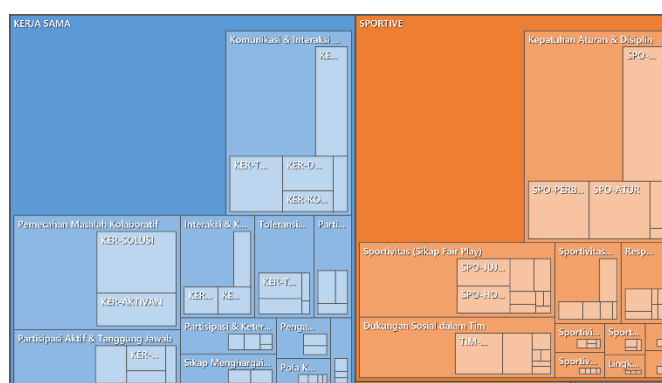


Figure 1. Hierarchy Chart Sportsmanship And Cooperation
Source : Researcher (2026)

Observational data showed that students increasingly accepted game outcomes more positively. During interviews, one participant stated:

“We must stay honest during the game because winning unfairly does not feel satisfying.”

Another student explained:

“Even if we lose, we should still respect our friends and continue playing together.”

These responses indicate that students began to associate sportsmanship with honesty, emotional control, and respect for peers during physical education activities. The hierarchy chart also identified several negative indicators, such as emotional inconsistency and unsportsmanlike behavior in certain situations. Some students still showed frustration when losing or blamed teammates during group activities. However, these behaviors appeared less dominant compared to positive indicators such as fair play and discipline.

2. Development of Cooperation During Traditional Games

The second dominant theme was cooperation. The hierarchy chart showed that communication and active participation were the most visible indicators during traditional game activities. Students demonstrated collaborative behavior through group

discussions, role sharing, and collective decision-making during games. One student stated:

“We need to work together because the game cannot be completed alone.”

Another participant explained:

“I listen to my friends’ ideas first so we can decide together.”

These interview excerpts indicate that students developed awareness of teamwork and shared responsibility during learning activities. Observation data also showed that students frequently communicated to organize strategies and solve problems collaboratively during games.

Despite these positive findings, several barriers were still identified. A few students tended to participate passively and communicated less actively within their groups. These obstacles were particularly visible during activities requiring collective decision-making and role distribution.

3. Relationship Between Sportsmanship and Cooperation

The NVivo project map demonstrated a close relationship between sportsmanship and cooperation during traditional game activities. Sportsmanship was strongly connected to emotional control, fair play attitudes, and respect for rules, while cooperation was linked to communication, participation, responsibility, and collaborative problem-solving.

internalize fair play values through authentic situations rather than abstract explanation. For example, students stated that “winning unfairly does not feel satisfying” and “we should still respect friends even when losing.” Such responses indicate that sportsmanship was constructed through emotional and social experiences during activities. This finding supports (Sholikhah et al., 2025), who explains that experiential learning strengthens value internalization through hands-on participation.

The findings also align with Social Learning Theory, which highlights the importance of observation, imitation, and reinforcement in the learning process (Lyu et al., 2024; Zhang & Qian, 2024). In this study, students developed positive behaviors by observing peers and teachers during traditional games. The teacher’s role as a facilitator and behavioral model contributed significantly to shaping students’ attitudes toward honesty, discipline, and respect (Sarwono et al., 2020). Teacher reinforcement, group norms, and peer interaction created a social environment that encouraged students to imitate constructive behaviors (Tasik et al., 2024). This explains why students gradually demonstrated improved emotional regulation and respectful interaction during learning activities.

From a Constructivist perspective, the findings indicate that students actively constructed social meaning through interaction and collaboration during games. Traditional games created opportunities for students to negotiate rules, solve problems together, share responsibilities, and interpret social situations collectively (Sari, 2025). Rather than passively receiving moral instruction, students developed understanding through contextual experiences and communication with peers. This explains why cooperation emerged strongly during activities involving collective strategy and role distribution. Students were not only

learning physical skills, but also constructing social understanding through participation in culturally meaningful activities.

The strong relationship between communication, participation, and teamwork identified in this study also reflects principles of Cooperative Learning Theory (Nguyen & Oanh, 2025). Traditional games naturally require interdependence among group members to achieve common goals. Students became aware that successful participation depended on mutual support, active communication, and shared responsibility. Statements such as “the game cannot be completed alone” demonstrate the emergence of positive interdependence among students. This finding suggests that traditional games function similarly to cooperative learning structures by encouraging collaboration, interaction, and social accountability during physical education learning.

The cultural context also plays an important role in explaining why traditional games effectively foster social values among elementary school students. Traditional games are closely connected to local cultural practices emphasizing togetherness, mutual respect, and collective participation. Because these activities are already familiar within children’s social environments, students may feel more emotionally engaged and socially connected during learning. The contextual and culturally relevant nature of traditional games allows students to experience character education in a more natural and meaningful way compared to purely formal instructional approaches. Therefore, the effectiveness of traditional games cannot be separated from the social and cultural values embedded within the activities themselves.

Another important finding is that the development of sportsmanship and cooperation did not occur uniformly among all students. Several participants

still demonstrated passive participation, emotional inconsistency, and limited involvement during group interaction. This phenomenon may occur because socio-emotional development is influenced by differences in confidence, communication ability, previous social experiences, and classroom dynamics. Consequently, character development through traditional games should be understood as a gradual process requiring continuous reinforcement and teacher facilitation rather than as an immediate outcome.

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for physical education teachers. Traditional games can be integrated systematically into learning activities to strengthen students' social and emotional development alongside physical competence. Teachers may design collaborative game sessions involving small-group interaction, shared responsibilities, and reflective discussion after activities.

In practice, traditional games can be implemented in 20–30 minute activity sessions integrated within regular physical education lessons. Teachers should provide clear rules, balanced group composition, and opportunities for all students to participate actively. Reflection activities at the end of learning are also important to help students connect gameplay experiences with values such as honesty, teamwork, emotional control, and respect for others.

In addition, teachers need to act not only as instructors but also as facilitators and behavioral models during activities. Positive reinforcement, guided reflection, and emotional support are essential strategies for helping students internalize social values more effectively during gameplay.

This study contributes theoretically to the literature on character education and physical education by demonstrating that sportsmanship and cooperation develop simultaneously through experiential and

socially constructed learning processes. The findings strengthen the relevance of Experiential Learning Theory, Social Learning Theory, Constructivism, and Cooperative Learning Theory within traditional game-based physical education contexts.

The study also expands previous research by focusing not only on character outcomes, but also on the pedagogical and interactional processes through which social values emerge during gameplay. This perspective provides a deeper understanding of how contextual and culturally relevant learning activities contribute to socio-emotional development in elementary school students.

This study has several limitations. First, the research involved a relatively small number of participants from only one elementary school, limiting the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts. Second, the study focused primarily on students' experiences during a limited period of observation, so long-term changes in behavior were not examined. Third, the findings were based on qualitative interpretation, which may be influenced by researcher subjectivity despite the use of validation strategies.

Future studies are recommended to involve larger participant groups, different school settings, and longitudinal designs to examine the sustainability of character development through traditional game-based learning. Further research may also combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide more comprehensive evidence regarding the impact of traditional games on students' socio-emotional development.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that traditional games play an important role in fostering sportsmanship and cooperation in elementary school physical education. Through direct interaction and

collaborative activities, students developed fair play attitudes, emotional control, responsibility, communication skills, and active participation during learning activities.

This study contributes to the literature on character education by demonstrating that social values are developed through contextual and culturally relevant learning experiences rather than solely through direct instruction. The findings also highlight the importance of teacher facilitation in guiding reflection, reinforcing positive behavior, and supporting students' socio-emotional development during traditional game activities.

Practically, traditional games can serve as an alternative learning approach for integrating character education into physical education in a more interactive and meaningful way. The use of culturally based games also supports the preservation of local cultural values within school learning environments.

Future research is recommended to examine the long-term impact of traditional game-based learning on students' character development, involve larger and more diverse participant groups, and explore the integration of traditional games with digital or technology-supported learning models in physical education.

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F. Conflict of Interest

No Conflict of Interest

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