

Traditional Sports Games for Character Development in Preservice Primary Teachers

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Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Sep 3, 2026	Oct 2, 2026	Oct 13, 2026	Oct 18, 2026

Abstract

Traditional sports and games are widely discussed as culturally grounded resources for character education, yet research predominantly concerns children and provides limited guidance on translating gameplay into assessable professional learning for preservice primary teachers. This article synthesizes recent evidence on the potential of traditional games to support character development and proposes an instructional and assessment framework for Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) students. A critical narrative review examined 25 journal articles published between 2023 and 2026, purposively selected for their relevance to traditional games, physical education, social and moral learning, and preservice teacher preparation. Thematic synthesis identified three interconnected learning mechanisms: rule-governed cooperation and fair competition, emotionally meaningful interaction followed by guided reflection, and pedagogical transfer to primary school lesson design. These themes informed a five-stage framework comprising value orientation, inclusive gameplay, behavioral observation, reflective dialogue, and assessment linked to teaching transfer. Supporting resources include illustrative mappings between games and behavioral indicators, a six-session learning plan, and an analytic observation rubric. The synthesis suggests that traditional games provide plausible opportunities to practice cooperation, discipline, honesty, responsibility, sportsmanship, tolerance, and leadership. However, the review does not establish their causal effectiveness for PGSD students. The proposed framework offers a context-sensitive basis for connecting culturally grounded character education with professional learning in preservice teacher preparation. Pilot implementation involving repeated behavioral assessment and

comparisons across learning contexts is needed to evaluate its applicability and effectiveness.

Keywords: Traditional Sports and Games; Character Education; Preservice Primary Teachers; Experiential Learning; Pedagogical Transfer

INTRODUCTION

Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) programs are expected to prepare graduates who can combine subject knowledge, pedagogical judgment, ethical conduct, and respect for cultural diversity. Character formation is consequently not an optional complement to university coursework: prospective teachers must be able to demonstrate fairness, responsibility, cooperation, and care in situations that resemble their future classroom responsibilities. These dispositions are difficult to assess through declarative knowledge alone because they become visible when individuals negotiate rules, distribute roles, face disagreement, and respond to success or failure. Sport-related moral learning research similarly cautions that ethical behavior depends on how activities are organized and facilitated, not merely on participation itself (Afriyandi et al., 2025).

Traditional sports games provide an accessible setting for this purpose. Indonesian activities such as gobak sodor, bentengan, team bakiak, kasti, and engklek have identifiable rules, embodied challenges, and social meanings. Reviews describe their potential for motor development, interaction, and cultural transmission (Arfanda et al., 2024; Wulansari et al., 2025), while investigations of elementary-school experiences report opportunities to practice cooperation, rule compliance, and prosocial conduct (Cahyani et al., 2023; Astuti & Apriliani, 2025). Such findings are relevant, but the educational value of a game should be distinguished from evidence that a lasting character disposition has changed.

A growing empirical literature clarifies both the promise and the limits of this approach. A study of elementary physical education observed character-related behavior in structured traditional-game lessons (Nevitaningrum et al., 2023), and a qualitative case study described fair play and collaborative problem solving alongside uneven participation (Firdaus et al., 2026). A separate case study linked culturally situated play with value negotiation (Dulyapit et al., 2026). Traditional-game lessons have also been examined as settings for character-value internalization (Sutarman & Saputra, 2026). A systematic synthesis of primary-school physical education also highlighted cooperation, socioemotional outcomes,

and discipline, while drawing predominantly on school-age samples rather than adult teacher candidates (Anggraini & Warni, 2026). These differences in setting, age, and instruments limit direct generalization to PGSD students.

The pedagogical argument of this article is that character learning requires intentional design: clear values are introduced before the game; participants enact them under fair and inclusive rules; observers document specified behaviors; and guided reflection connects actions with reasons, consequences, and future professional practice. This argument is compatible with game-based physical education research emphasizing instructional structure (Camacho-Sánchez et al., 2023) and with evidence that traditional games create affective and relational experiences (Moya-Higueras et al., 2023; Lavega-Burgués et al., 2023). Emotional intensity can produce learning opportunities, but may also generate exclusion or conflict without appropriate facilitation.

An important contextual gap concerns teacher preparation. Activities involving PGSD students at Universitas Negeri Makassar have demonstrated practical opportunities to recognize, modify, and use traditional games as contextual learning materials (Darmawan et al., 2025); support for constructing traditional play equipment offers a complementary view of cultural preservation and instructional innovation (Naheria et al., 2025). However, these practice-oriented reports do not provide a validated model linking direct character enactment, repeated observation, reflection, and the design of school-level instruction. Work on peace-related values in higher-education physical education suggests that university settings deserve separate attention (Kogoya et al., 2023).

This article therefore contributes a cautiously framed conceptual synthesis rather than an experimental claim. It aims to (a) map character-relevant processes documented in recent research, (b) specify observable values in selected traditional games, and (c) propose a replicable, inclusive instructional sequence and assessment scheme for PGSD coursework. The analysis integrates structured participation, social interaction, reflective appraisal, and pedagogical transfer as a coherent pathway for future field testing.

METHODS

Research type and review design

The article uses a critical narrative literature review with thematic synthesis. This design was selected because the guiding question concerns the connections among diverse empirical studies, conceptual analyses, and instructional applications rather than the pooled effect of a single standardized intervention. No original participant recruitment, classroom intervention, or pretest–posttest measurement was conducted for this article. Accordingly, descriptions of character development are treated as evidence from cited publications or as proposed instructional mechanisms, not as new empirical findings.

Source selection and unit of analysis

Twenty-five journal articles published between 2023 and 2026 formed the review corpus. Sources were identified through targeted online searches and examination of journal/publisher pages and bibliographic records using combinations of “traditional games”, “character education”, “physical education”, “social skills”, “sportsmanship”, “preservice teachers”, and “PGSD”, including Indonesian-language equivalents. The searches and bibliographic verification were updated in October 2026. Eligibility required an identifiable publication source and DOI or accessible publisher page, substantive relevance to at least one review dimension, and sufficient bibliographic information for citation. Duplicate, irrelevant, or bibliographically unreliable items were excluded. Purposive selection prioritized methodological and contextual diversity; the initial search universe and screening counts were not prospectively logged, so this review is not described as systematic or PRISMA-compliant.

Evidence extraction and trustworthiness

Each included source was read at the level of publisher abstracts, available full-text descriptions, and bibliographic information to identify its setting, broad design, participant group when reported, central finding, and implication for PGSD. Studies were grouped by four analytic domains: (1) character and social interaction, (2) psychosocial and motor engagement, (3) cultural and pedagogical preparation, and (4) conditions affecting implementation. Evidence was interpreted conservatively: findings from primary-school pupils and early-childhood groups were not presented as direct evidence about PGSD students. Comparisons considered convergent patterns, notable divergences, differences in instructional design, and weaknesses in causal attribution. The proposed teaching sequence

and rubric were derived as conceptual products and have not undergone psychometric validation.

Analysis procedure and ethical scope

The synthesis proceeded by coding recurring constructs (e.g., cooperation, rule following, emotional regulation, inclusion, reflection), comparing how studies operationalized them, and translating the resulting themes into a game–value–indicator matrix and a staged learning design. The article uses publicly available scholarly materials and does not contain personally identifiable primary data. Because no new participants were involved, an experimental ethics approval or informed consent process was not applicable to this review; future implementation studies must secure appropriate ethical permissions and participant consent.

RESULTS

Patterns in the reviewed evidence

The 25 reviewed publications are distributed across school-based traditional-game studies, broader physical-education reviews, work on emotion and social processes, and a smaller cluster directly connected to teacher preparation. Table 1 summarizes the most informative evidence streams without treating heterogeneous outcome measures as statistically comparable. The reviewed studies collectively indicate educational affordances rather than a common effect size for teacher candidates.

Table 1. Evidence Streams Relevant to Traditional-Game Character Education

Evidence stream	Illustrative studies	Synthesis from sources	Limit for PGSD inference
Social and moral behavior	Agustian et al. (2026); Firdaus et al. (2026); Dulyapit et al. (2026)	Cooperation, rule adherence, fair play, and conflict negotiation emerge in structured games.	Primarily primary-school participants; variable duration and measures.
Psychosocial development	Julianti et al. (2025); Gunawan et al. (2025); Dugas & Ben Ali (2023)	Social skills, emotional engagement, and empathy-related mechanisms are plausible learning pathways.	Context and research designs differ; transfer to adults is uncertain.
Physical and motivational engagement	Mo et al. (2024); Rahma et al. (2025); Arfanda et al. (2024)	Games support enjoyable movement and motor engagement that can enable participation.	Motor or enjoyment improvements are not direct evidence of moral change.

Evidence stream	Illustrative studies	Synthesis from sources	Limit for PGSD inference
Cultural and pedagogical relevance	Darmawan et al. (2025); Naheria et al. (2025); Lathifah et al. (2025)	Game adaptation can connect local culture to teacher preparation and contextual learning.	Many studies are descriptive or community-service reports.
Higher-education / value teaching	Kogoya et al. (2023); Afriyundi et al. (2025)	Explicit moral objectives, guidance, and structured tasks are essential to value learning.	No validated PGSD-specific longitudinal outcomes were identified.

Table 1 highlights a methodological imbalance: many studies involve children, whereas the target population in this article is university students preparing to teach those children. The source corpus contains qualitative case descriptions, quantitative interventions with differing endpoints, reviews, and community-service activities. Therefore, any claim that a particular traditional game will reliably improve character among PGSD students would exceed the evidence available.

Character affordances and observable conduct

The reviewed studies support an analytic distinction between a value attached to a game and the behavior actually displayed while playing it. For example, a team game creates a reason to cooperate, but cooperation is only demonstrable when members exchange information, listen to less confident participants, or coordinate responsibilities. Table 2 maps illustrative traditional games to observable indicators. These are pedagogical proposals for field use, not psychometrically validated test items.

Table 2. Traditional Games, Character Values, and Observable Indicators

Traditional game	Target character values	Behavioral evidence to observe
Gobak sodor	Cooperation; discipline; sportsmanship	Coordinates defense and attack; follows agreed boundaries; accepts referee decisions.
Bentengan	Leadership; responsibility; solidarity	Distributes roles; includes quiet members in decisions; accepts responsibility for decisions.
Team bakiak	Communication; patience; tolerance	Negotiates pace; adjusts movement to teammates; avoids blaming slower participants.
Traditional kasti	Honesty; discipline; sportsmanship	Reports scores accurately; recognizes a fair out; respects both teams.
Engklek	Self-regulation; perseverance; fairness	Takes turns; follows sequence; handles mistakes without disparaging others.
Adapted local game	Cultural respect; inclusion; care	Explains cultural origin respectfully; agrees inclusive rule changes; assists peers.

As shown in Table 2, the relationship between game type and target value is not exclusive. Gobak sodor, for instance, may occasion leadership as well as cooperation, while engklek may involve peer support in addition to individual perseverance. Studies of gobak sodor have illustrated cooperative interaction (Kurnia & Djiwo, 2024; Agustian et al., 2026), and cultural-learning analyses likewise indicate that rule-based play can carry multiple values simultaneously (Cahyani et al., 2023; Karoso et al., 2025). Evaluation should therefore rely on observed actions within specified opportunities, not on assumed properties of a game.

Conditions, counterexamples, and evidence boundaries

Not all reports indicate uniformly positive participation. Firdaus et al. (2026) observed passive participation and inconsistent social behavior in some pupils, implying that gameplay alone is insufficient. Lavega-Burgués et al. (2023) and Moya-Higueras et al. (2023) underscore the emotional complexity of interactions, while reflection-oriented arguments point to the importance of processing experiences rather than only producing them (Dugas & Ben Ali, 2023). Moreover, higher enjoyment in game-based physical education (Mo et al., 2024) cannot be equated with durable improvements in integrity or responsibility. These distinctions inform the safeguards built into the proposed PGSD model.

DISCUSSION

Interpreting the review through experiential, social, and culturally responsive learning

The central interpretation is that a traditional game becomes a character-education resource only when embodied action is coupled with explicit value reasoning. Social interaction provides opportunities for participants to make fair decisions under time pressure and respond to differences in ability; structured dialogue subsequently helps identify why an action was helpful or harmful. This interpretation accords with accounts of relational and emotional complexity in traditional sporting games (Lavega-Burgués et al., 2023; Dugas & Ben Ali, 2023), the peace-oriented teaching of traditional games in higher education (Kogoya et al., 2023), and recent moral-value reviews that emphasize deliberate instruction (Afriyandi et al., 2025).

A culturally responsive orientation adds another layer. Local games are not interchangeable exercise drills; their names, rules, meanings, and material resources connect learning to community knowledge. Early-childhood studies explicitly relate traditional play

to cultural and prosocial learning (Lathifah et al., 2025; Karoso et al., 2025), while PGSD-focused training experiences show how students may adapt traditional-game materials for future instruction (Darmawan et al., 2025; Naheria et al., 2025). Nevertheless, local authenticity should not override safety, disability inclusion, consent, or respectful participation. The priority is educationally justified adaptation rather than rigid replication.

Proposed five-stage PGSD instructional model

Figure 1 presents the proposed five-stage cycle. It is a design hypothesis assembled from the reviewed literature, not an already tested intervention. The lecturer should begin by clarifying one or two values and their observable indicators; students then participate in games with equitable role rotation. Independent peers or trained observers record incidents, including counterexamples. Debriefing connects actions and emotions with ethical reasoning. Finally, students design and microteach modified lessons for primary-school pupils, using feedback to revise both their own conduct and their pedagogical plan.



Figure 1. Proposed Five-Stage Character-Learning and Pedagogical-Transfer Cycle

Figure 1 makes two relationships explicit: direct play yields behavior that can be documented, and reflective interpretation is needed before that experience can be transferred into an instructional design. The last stage is not a terminal test; observation and reflection should recur during subsequent sessions. This iterative logic addresses the risk of interpreting a single enthusiastic activity as sustained moral development.

Instructional integration and lesson planning

The six-meeting plan in Table 3 translates the model into a feasible teaching sequence for an introductory PGSD course such as physical education, pedagogical strategy, or local-wisdom-based learning. It retains the original manuscript's core games but clarifies objectives, evidence, inclusion, and assessment responsibility. The meeting sequence is illustrative and should be revised for class size, students' access needs, institutional timetables, and locally recognized rules.

Table 3. Proposed Six-Meeting PGSD Instructional Plan

Session	Learning activity	Character focus	Documented learning evidence
1	Orientation; co-create fair rules; baseline reflection and safety briefing.	Discipline; cultural respect	Signed agreements; initial reflection sheet.
2	Gobak sodor with rotated participants, referees, and observers.	Cooperation; sportsmanship	Event-based observation record; peer feedback.
3	Bentengan with explicit leadership rotation and dispute-resolution pause.	Responsibility; leadership	Role log; short incident analysis.
4	Team bakiak or accessible local equivalent with adaptive task design.	Tolerance; patience; communication	Inclusion checklist; group debrief.
5	Microteaching: groups redesign a game for an elementary-school class.	Ethical role-modeling; pedagogical care	Lesson plan; facilitation demonstration.
6	Repeat selected indicators, cross-assess, and compile portfolio.	Consistency; reflection; transfer	Multisource assessment; portfolio revision.

Table 3 shows that assessment begins before gameplay and continues into simulated teaching practice. The fifth session is especially important for PGSD: it tests whether prospective teachers can articulate learning objectives, apply equitable rules, select adaptations, and model appropriate language. Work on game-based instruction (Camacho-Sánchez et al., 2023), school participation (Nevitaningrum et al., 2023), and structured psychosocial programs (Julianti et al., 2025) supports this deliberate integration, although its effectiveness in the proposed course remains untested.

Assessment principles and a practical rubric

Character must be evaluated from observable evidence rather than perceived enthusiasm, game victory, athletic proficiency, or popularity. Table 4 proposes a four-level behavioral rubric for six indicators derived from the original article and the revised synthesis. Lecturers should give observers a shared definition and example for each indicator, record an opportunity for the behavior to occur, and document exceptional incidents. The rubric is intended for formative feedback; no claim of established reliability, factor structure, or predictive validity is made.

Table 4. Draft Character-Observation Rubric for PGSD Students

Score	Rating	Behavioral decision rule
4	Consistently demonstrated	Shows the target behavior across several relevant opportunities and supports peers without prompting.
3	Generally demonstrated	Shows the target behavior in most observed opportunities with minimal prompting.

Score	Rating	Behavioral decision rule
2	Emerging	Shows the behavior intermittently; needs explicit reminders or support.
1	Not yet demonstrated	Relevant opportunities were present but the behavior was absent or repeatedly contradicted.

The six proposed indicators for applying Table 4 are cooperation (listens, shares roles, helps peers), discipline (follows jointly agreed rules), honesty (reports incidents and results accurately), responsibility (fulfills assigned tasks and protects equipment), sportsmanship (respects opponents and accepts outcomes), and tolerance (adapts activities and makes space for diverse abilities). Leadership can be recorded as an additional context-specific indicator rather than inserted into the six-indicator composite automatically. Where all six indicators are rated on 1–4 and each has an observable opportunity, a formative percentage may be computed as $(\text{total observed score} \div 24) \times 100$. For example, a score of 18 out of 24 equals 75%; this is an arithmetic illustration, not a study result or an empirically validated cut-off.

Missing observations should not be scored as “1”: if a participant has not yet had a fair opportunity to exhibit a behavior, the indicator should be marked “not observed” and assessed again. The reviewer should triangulate lecturer ratings with peer logs and student reflection, assess consistency over multiple meetings, and conduct a small pilot to estimate inter-rater agreement and improve wording. Research on secondary-school social life skills and traditional games illustrates the potential usefulness of deliberately structured tasks and reflection (Gunawan et al., 2025), but its pretest–posttest findings should not be imported as expected PGSD effect sizes.

Theoretical, practical, and methodological implications

Theoretically, the synthesis positions character learning at the intersection of situated social participation, affective self-regulation, and reflective pedagogical judgment. Practically, the model offers a low-cost way to connect physical education, cultural knowledge, and professional ethics in preservice teacher curricula. A six-meeting format gives lecturers a workable starting point while making explicit which behaviors are assessed and why. Instructional resources should include accessible play areas, injury-prevention procedures, alternative participation roles, gender-sensitive and disability-sensitive rules, and culturally accurate introductions to each local game.

Methodologically, the proposed model supplies falsifiable expectations for future research: repeated observation should document whether behavior changes across varied games; students should demonstrate whether they transfer character principles into microteaching; and blinded or independent observers should rate conduct with a piloted rubric. These expectations are consistent with findings that planned physical education can strengthen engagement and motor learning (Rahma et al., 2025) but should not be conflated with proving a moral outcome. Similarly, reviews of physical education and traditional games favor contextual application while calling for more robust evaluation (Wulansari et al., 2025; Anggraini & Warni, 2026).

Limitations and directions for future research

This is a purposefully selected narrative synthesis of 25 journal publications, not an exhaustive systematic review. Search returns and exclusion counts were not documented prospectively; full-text access, publication quality, outcome definitions, and participant characteristics varied. A substantial proportion of evidence concerns children rather than adults, and some PGSD-relevant papers describe service or training activities rather than controlled research. The suggested mapping, lesson plan, and rubric have not been field-tested or validated. As a result, causal claims and generalizations about sustained PGSD character change are not warranted.

Future research should prospectively register a transparent review protocol or pilot the course with a comparison group, baseline and delayed observations, and multi-rater evidence. Studies should report accessibility adaptations, implementation fidelity, adverse or exclusionary incidents, effect sizes when appropriate, and transfer to real elementary-school teaching. Complementary interviews and reflective portfolios could help establish not only whether behavioral indicators increase but also how prospective teachers interpret fairness and responsibility in culturally diverse classrooms.

CONCLUSION

A critical narrative synthesis of 25 recent studies supports the educational plausibility of traditional sports games as settings for cooperation, honesty, discipline, responsibility, sportsmanship, tolerance, and leadership. The evidence does not show that PGSD students automatically develop these attributes through participation; instead, deliberate rules,

inclusive facilitation, repeated observation, guided reflection, and transfer into lesson design are needed to make the proposed pathway educationally credible.

This article's distinctive contribution is a five-stage conceptual cycle accompanied by an explicit game–value–indicator mapping, a six-meeting teaching plan, and a draft observation rubric tailored to prospective primary teachers. These components can support curriculum development and transparent formative assessment, but remain recommendations awaiting field validation. Controlled or mixed-methods trials with reliable indicators and longitudinal follow-up are necessary before claims of effectiveness or durable character development can be made.

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