

## TRADITIONAL GAMES AS MATERIAL FOR CHILDREN'S STORIES: A CULTURAL CONSERVATION STRATEGY FOR INTANGIBLE FOLKLORE

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### Abstract

Traditional games are an integral part of intangible folklore that reflect cultural values, local wisdom, and the social dynamics of past generations. However, globalization and shifting patterns of children's entertainment have contributed to the marginalization—and even disappearance—of these traditional games. This article aims to explore the potential of traditional games as narrative material for children's literature as a means to conserve intangible folklore through a literary and cultural literacy approach. Employing a qualitative-descriptive method based on literature review, this study analyzes various traditional Indonesian games—such as *engklek*, *gobak sodor*, *congklak*, and *hide-and-seek*—and their narrative potential in child-centered fictional stories. The findings indicate that traditional games possess rich narrative and symbolic elements that can be developed into children's stories with strong educational and cultural value. Incorporating traditional games into children's literature not only reintroduces cultural heritage to younger generations but also reinforces cultural identity and social values such as cooperation, fairness, and perseverance. Thus, children's stories based on traditional games can serve as a creative and sustainable literary strategy for preserving intangible cultural heritage. The article recommends collaboration between writers, educators, and cultural practitioners to produce children's literary works that are both engaging and effective in cultural conservation.

**Keywords – traditional games, children's stories, cultural, folklore**

### Introduction

Traditional games are an integral part of childhood life in the past. These games functioned not only as a source of entertainment but also as a medium for internalizing social and cultural values. In the Indonesian context, traditional games such as *engklek*, *gobak sodor*, *congklak*, and *hide-and-seek* embody philosophies, ethical principles, and patterns of social interaction deeply rooted in local culture. Unfortunately, the wave of globalization and the dominance of digital technology have gradually displaced traditional games, rendering them increasingly marginalized in the daily lives of modern children.

Children's literature is believed to have a significant contribution to the

development of a child's personality in the process of becoming an adult. Children's literature is a work that, in terms of language, has aesthetic value and contains moral educational values that can enrich a child's spiritual experience. According to Solchan (in Winarni, 2015), children's literature consists of two parts, first, children's literature is literature written by authors who are teenagers or adults whose content and language reflect the characteristics of a child's life and personality. Second, children's literature is literature written by authors who are still considered children whose content and language reflect the characteristics of a child's life and personality. Children's literature can be in the form of poetry, prose, and drama, just like literary works in general. The substance

of children's literature must be in harmony with the world and nature of children's lives that are specific to them and not those of adults.

Saracho, in Hunt (2021), explains the benefits of literature for children: "Children's literature is the complete, large body of literature that children have embraced. It becomes their own personal literature because it belongs to children rather than parents, teachers, preachers, or even the authors." This means that children's literature is a large body of literature that children have understood. The themes, settings, characters, and characterizations are certainly relevant to children. According to Saracho, children's literature allows opportunities for play through interpretation, storytelling, improvisation, and collaboration. Children engaged in a combination of education, fantasy, and morality provide profound experiences for children.

This phenomenon raises concerns about the gradual loss of essential aspects of **intangible cultural heritage**, which were originally transmitted through oral traditions and collective practice. In an effort to preserve their existence, the use of **children's literature** emerges as a compelling and promising approach. Children's literature serves not only as a form of entertainment but also as an educational tool and a vehicle for cultural conservation. By transforming traditional games into children's stories, cultural preservation can be carried out creatively and delivered to younger generations in ways that are both relevant and enjoyable.

This paper aims to examine traditional games as material for crafting children's stories, in the context of preserving intangible folklore. The study analyzes the narrative potential, symbolic values, and representational strategies of

traditional games when reimagined as fictional narratives for children, and proposes a collaborative model involving writers, educators, and cultural practitioners in the process of cultural conservation.

### Method

This study employs a **qualitative-descriptive approach**, aimed at exploring cultural phenomena through interpretive analysis of meaning. This method aligns with the research goal of examining the symbolic and narrative potential of traditional games as material for children's stories.

The research utilizes **secondary data**, collected through library research from the following sources: (a) Documentation of traditional games (books, ethnographic studies, cultural articles); (b) Collections of children's stories (both printed and digital), (c) Academic literature related to children's literature, folklore, and cultural conservation. The selected traditional games for analysis include *congklak*, *engklek*, *gobak sodor*, and *hide-and-seek*, chosen for their cultural significance and widespread recognition across Indonesian communities.

Data were collected through: (a) **Document analysis**, to understand conceptual frameworks of intangible folklore, traditional games, and children's literature, (b) **Content analysis**, to examine the narrative structure and symbolic representation of traditional games within or adaptable to children's stories

### Finding and Discussion

#### Traditional Games and Their Cultural Values

Traditional games in Indonesia are more than recreational activities—they are reflections of philosophical systems and social ethics. Traditional games such as

*congklak*, *gobak sodor*, *engklek*, and *hide-and-seek* represent rich cultural expressions embedded with social, ethical, and educational values. For example, *congklak* embodies the principle of resource distribution and foresight. The game's rule of moving seeds across holes represents patience and planning, mirroring economic wisdom practiced in agrarian societies. *Gobak sodor*, which involves teams guarding boundaries, reflects cooperation, discipline, and strategic thinking. It metaphorically represents the nations.

*Dakon*, or *congklak*, as it's sometimes called in some regions, originally entered the palace during the Majapahit era, specifically during the reign of Queen Kencana Wungu. According to a story, the queen enjoyed playing *dakon*. A second version, from the Dutch era, refers to *dakon* as "*mbedhil*" (gun/cannon), which was used during Sultan Agung's resistance to counterbalance the opponent's strength.

The game is very simple: two players take turns choosing one of their small holes and moving it clockwise to the other, until all the seeds in their hand are gone. The game ends when all the small holes are empty and all the seeds are in the large hole.

Some of the values of *dakon* include developing children's patience in waiting their turn, developing strategy, numeracy, accuracy, and honesty.

*Gobag Sodor* is a team game where the defenders try to block the attackers from crossing the line or playing square (their playing area).

*Gobag Sodor* fosters strategy and teamwork. Players are also challenged to quickly get past the defenders. *Gobag*

*Sodor* can stimulate gross motor skills by developing dexterity and agility.

*Engklek* is a traditional jumping game involving squares drawn on the ground, then jumping from one square to the next on one foot. Also known as *Sunda Manda*, this game is typically played by children in groups of 2-5.

*Engklek* symbolizes a human struggle for territory. However, it doesn't involve butting heads. There are certain rules that must be agreed upon to secure a foothold.

Hide-and-seek trains children to develop their physical abilities. Children compete in speed and strength. Furthermore, this game can train children in intelligence, accuracy, and acuity. Children are trained to find the right place to hide and how to hide to avoid guards. This game makes children stronger and more agile physically. Children must strategize to take over the fort or base, when to come out of hiding when the guards are not focused. Furthermore, it also teaches children to play fairly, honestly, and creatively.

Dana's research (2019:6) states that "a clinical report to the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded that play is so essential to a child's optimal development that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights recognized it as a right of every child." This is the conclusion of the clinical report from the American Academy of Pediatrics. The purpose of the statement above is to demonstrate that play is crucial to optimal student development, which the National Commission on Human Rights recognizes as a right of every student. From this statement, it can be concluded that play is crucial for students because through play, students discover and gather various experiences, for example, movement

experience, knowledge acquisition, and language development.

In their development, elementary school students are at a stage of playing with simple rules, one of which is playing traditional games. Based on the author's observations, traditional games reached their peak, a period when traditional games were still routinely played by elementary school students, estimated to be around 2005 or earlier. These traditional games were usually played in the afternoons in village yards. The students were clearly drenched in sweat and laughing heartily as they watched the various traditional games being played. It's undeniable that traditional games are gradually being abandoned due to technological advancements.

The abandonment of traditional games has many factors, including the rise of digital games like online games, mobile apps, and the PlayStation (PlayStation), as well as the resurgence of abandoned traditional games. The rise of online games has led to many children experiencing negative impacts, including excessive time spent playing, which can lead to addiction, a lack of interaction between children during play, the effects of excessive light on the eyes, which can cause redness, soreness, and even swelling. Furthermore, it can also lead to psychological issues that can make children difficult to manage.

Today's children are more familiar with games like Point Blank, Mobile Legends, Angry Birds, Sakura Simulator School, Pokemon, Free Fire, and others than hide-and-seek, *Dakon*, *Betengan*, *Gobak Sodor*, and so on. In modern games, the skills of collaboration, cooperation, and cooperative strategy are not developed in children when playing them (Agusta, 2019).

When children engage in opportunities for play, exploration, and experimentation, they begin to understand themselves and the world around them, develop self-confidence and engage in learning, and through social environments, engage with diverse perspectives (Huth et al., 2021). Children create knowledge as they play, interacting with their environment, friends, objects, and teachers.

This aligns with the needs of elementary school children, who enjoy playing. This characteristic demands that teachers be creative and introduce traditional games to children from the very beginning of school (Palumbo, 2021). Traditional games offer authentic interpretations of human social phenomena, affirming that culture was first played, and emphasizing fond memories of the past.

*Engklek*, often played by hopping on one leg through a series of boxes drawn on the ground, signifies perseverance, rhythm, and balance. In Javanese culture, balance symbolizes harmony between physical and spiritual life. Similarly, hide-and-seek teaches awareness, intuition, and the thrill of discovery, echoing children's curiosity toward the unknown. Each of these games transmits moral and social lessons embedded within physical activity. They teach children to wait for their turn, respect rules.

However, globalization and rapid modernization have marginalized these traditions. As Suryadi (2021) emphasizes, technological transformation has replaced outdoor communal games with indoor digital experiences. This shift not only alters physical habits but also redefines childhood identity. Losing traditional games means losing community-based modes of socialization. Therefore, their

reinterpretation through literature becomes essential—not as nostalgia but as innovation.

These games function not only as physical activities but as culturally coded forms of collective wisdom (Danandjaja, 2002; Widodo, 2015). However, their presence has significantly declined due to the growing dominance of individual-centered digital entertainment.

### **Narrative Potential of Traditional Games**

Traditional games possess inherent narrative structures. They include characters (players), challenges (game rules), conflicts (competition), and resolutions (winning or losing). These parallels with literary elements make them highly adaptable into children's fiction. For example, a story based on gobak sodor could depict children defending a village line against imaginary invaders, symbolizing teamwork and courage. Congklak can inspire a tale about strategy and patience through two friends who learn.

As Nodelman and Reimer (2003) explain, storytelling and play share similar imaginative frameworks—both rely on anticipation and creativity. By adapting games into stories, the child reader is not only entertained but also subtly educated. The joy of reading becomes an extension of the joy of play. Such narratives also reinforce language learning, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving skills. In this sense, storytelling is both pedagogical and aesthetic—it teaches while it delights.

When adapted into modern contexts, these stories can integrate multicultural dimensions. For instance, a tale inspired by *engklek* can include themes of gender equality, perseverance, and ecological awareness. The setting may

shift from rural fields to urban playgrounds, yet the moral essence remains intact. This adaptability ensures that heritage remains relevant to today's children while preserving its symbolic roots. As Greenway (2019) observes, stories that evolve with the times strengthen cultural identity.

Viewed through the lens of children's literature, traditional games possess strong narrative structures suitable for fictional adaptation. They naturally contain characters (players), plot (game stages), conflict (competition), and resolution (winning or losing), which are essential in storytelling (Nodelman & Reimer, 2003).

For instance, *gobak sodor* can be imagined as an adventure story about crossing boundaries and facing challenges—an engaging metaphor for children's emotional or social growth.

### **Transformation into Children's Stories**

Transforming games into stories involves not only translating the activity but reimagining it into child-friendly, developmentally appropriate narratives. Characters can be modeled after local children and settings rooted in cultural contexts, enhancing relatability and identity reinforcement.

As Greenway (2019) suggests, stories based on traditional culture provide emotional resonance and help preserve communal identity in non-didactic ways.

One technique for transforming traditional games into children's stories is to integrate them into an imaginary storyline, featuring protagonists and antagonists. Conflict, of course, can provide a natural understanding of children's play. Simple conflicts include feeling tired and unwilling to continue

playing, wanting to win, leading to cheating, feeling teased for never winning, being embarrassed by friends, not understanding the game and not playing to their full potential, and so on. These conflicts need to be introduced to instill honesty and sportsmanship, and to train children to solve problems that arise during play and friendship.

### **Strengthening Cultural Literacy and Identity**

Children's stories based on traditional games offer a dual function: entertainment and cultural education. They introduce children to values such as cooperation, honesty, and persistence—values increasingly absent from digital play. Additionally, such stories strengthen cultural identity by familiarizing young readers with the traditions of their own communities.

Moreover, the storytelling approach encourages intergenerational dialogue. Parents and grandparents, once players of these games, can share memories as children read, creating family-based literacy interactions. These moments strengthen not only cognitive understanding but also emotional bonds, fostering a sense of belonging. In a broader sense, this supports the national goal of nurturing culturally resilient citizens in a globalized world.

Traditional games or folk games are considered almost abandoned by children due to the presence of online games. Therefore, with the presence of children's storybooks containing traditional games, it is hoped that children will re-discover Indonesian culture, namely traditional games. The more engaging storytelling, centered on the concrete world of children, and presented with easy-to-follow game steps are expected to attract children and encourage them to understand the story's content, as well as to be able to

practice the traditional games. In this way, students' abilities in cultural literacy, appreciation of children's stories, collaboration, social skills, and physical motor skills can be developed through the implementation of these children's storybooks containing traditional games.

### **Collaboration and Sustainability**

The long-term preservation of folklore through literature demands collaboration across sectors. Writers must interpret traditional elements artistically, while educators integrate them into curricula. Publishers and policymakers need to ensure accessibility by supporting culturally rooted children's books. Pramono (2016) suggests that traditional games promote character education; transforming them into stories thus multiplies their reach beyond playgrounds into classrooms and digital libraries.

Community engagement also plays a vital role. Storytelling festivals, cultural workshops, and reading movements can revive children's interest in local heritage. As Greenway (2019) emphasizes, when storytelling and play coexist, they maintain the vitality of cultural identity. By promoting local narratives, Indonesia not only preserves tradition but also builds creative industries grounded in its own culture. The sustainability of folklore depends on its ability to live within modern media and education system.

The preservation of intangible folklore through children's literature requires **collaboration** between writers, educators, cultural activists, and publishers. Writers are challenged to creatively adapt cultural material, while educators can integrate the stories into school curricula and literacy projects.

Such cross-sector collaboration ensures that traditional games are not merely archived but reimagined as living knowledge passed to younger generations through meaningful, engaging stories.

### Conclusions

Traditional games in Indonesia represent a valuable form of intangible cultural heritage, containing layers of social, cultural, and educational meaning. However, the widespread adoption of digital technology and the decline in communal play have increasingly marginalized these traditions in children's everyday lives.

This study has shown that traditional games possess significant potential as narrative material for children's stories. When creatively adapted, they can serve as powerful instruments for cultural conservation while simultaneously enriching children's literature. Stories inspired by traditional games not only provide entertainment but also convey values, build cultural identity, and foster social-emotional development in young readers.

By transforming traditional games into fictional narratives, cultural transmission becomes more engaging, contextual, and sustainable. This literary approach opens new opportunities to connect younger generations with their heritage through imaginative, culturally grounded storytelling.

**For children's literature authors:** It is recommended to explore local traditional games more deeply as narrative sources, creatively adapting them into stories that preserve cultural values while appealing to modern readers.

**For educators and curriculum developers:** Stories based on traditional

games can serve as contextual teaching materials within literacy and cultural education, aligning with national efforts to promote character education and cultural resilience.

**For policymakers and cultural institutions:** Support should be provided for the production and dissemination of culturally rooted children's stories, through national literacy programs, publishing grants, or cultural festivals aimed at young audiences.

**For future researchers:** Further studies are needed to investigate children's responses to such stories, including their impact on cultural awareness, reading engagement, and value internalization.

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