

FROM PLAY TO PURPOSE: NURTURING CHARACTER THROUGH GAMES AT SDN KASIMAN

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the role of traditional games—*Estafet Kelereng*, *Estafet Karet*, and *Balon Bergoyang*—in fostering children's character development and essential life skills. Drawing from qualitative observations and existing literature, the research examined how these games contribute to social, cognitive, and emotional growth while preserving cultural heritage. Findings indicated that these games enhance teamwork, communication, patience, concentration, and motor skills, offering a dynamic and holistic approach to learning. The study emphasized the educational potential of traditional games as tools to nurture well-rounded individuals and recommended their integration into educational and community programs to support both personal and cultural development. This research underscored the importance of balancing modern educational methods with culturally rooted practices to cultivate children's competencies in an engaging and meaningful way.

Keywords: Character Education, Games, Elementary School Students

I. INTRODUCTION

In an era where education is increasingly focused on both academic achievement and the holistic development of students, integrating character education into the curriculum has become paramount. Character education is defined as the intentional effort to cultivate virtues such as honesty, respect, responsibility, empathy, and perseverance within students. These virtues are essential not only for personal development but also for fostering positive social interactions and contributing to the greater good of society. While traditional methods of teaching character involve direct instruction, storytelling, and moral reasoning exercises, an innovative and engaging approach is emerging—using games as a medium for nurturing character development.

The concept of "From Play to Purpose: Nurturing Character Through Games" centers around the idea that games, both digital and non-digital, are powerful tools for engaging students in character-building experiences. Games, as a form of play, offer an environment where students can learn valuable life skills in a low-risk, interactive setting. In this context, play is not just about entertainment; it is a purposeful activity that encourages collaboration, decision-making, ethical behavior, and self-reflection. Games promote essential social-emotional learning (SEL) skills, which are recognized as critical components of student success both academically and in their future lives as responsible citizens.

Games inherently allow students to encounter various situations where they must make decisions, face challenges, work as a team, and navigate social dynamics. This mirrors real-life scenarios where individuals must consider the consequences of their actions, negotiate with others, and take responsibility for their decisions. According to the research of Gee (2003), "games provide a context in which learners can actively construct knowledge and develop competencies in a social and interactive environment." This statement highlights the educational potential of games, suggesting that they serve as a space where students can practice both cognitive and social skills that will benefit them beyond the classroom. In particular, digital games, with their immersive environments and narrative structures, provide an engaging way for students to explore complex moral dilemmas, challenge their own biases, and cultivate empathy by experiencing situations from diverse perspectives.

Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory further supports the use of games in character education, as it emphasizes the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning in cognitive and emotional development. Vygotsky posited that learning is inherently social, and that students develop a deeper understanding of concepts and behaviors through interaction with others. This perspective aligns with the principles of game-based learning, where players collaborate, compete, or communicate to achieve a common goal. In multiplayer or cooperative games, students are often required to share resources, make joint decisions, and understand the impact of their actions on others—skills that are central to character development.

In addition to fostering collaboration, games also offer opportunities for students to engage in self-reflection and goal-setting. Many games incorporate elements of achievement and progress, where players can track their performance and strive to improve. These mechanisms can be leveraged to help students reflect on their own growth in terms of virtues such as perseverance, discipline, and resilience. By setting goals, facing setbacks, and learning from mistakes in a game environment, students develop a growth mindset that can be transferred to other areas of life.

Furthermore, game-based learning allows for a personalized and adaptive approach to character education. Unlike traditional classroom settings, games can adjust to the individual's level of skill, providing tailored challenges and rewards that match each student's pace and ability. This adaptability can make character education more accessible and engaging for diverse learners, promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities for personal development.

Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of game-based learning on both academic achievement and character development. For instance, a study by Steinkuehler and Duncan (2008) found that students who engaged in online multiplayer games showed increased collaboration skills, problem-solving abilities, and understanding of diverse perspectives. Additionally, the use of educational games in schools has been shown to improve students' motivation and self-confidence, as they see direct connections between their efforts in the game and their achievements in real life.

The approach of nurturing character through games offers an exciting and effective way to engage students in learning about themselves and others. By transforming play into a purposeful activity that aligns with educational goals, teachers can leverage the benefits of games to teach critical life skills in an engaging

and dynamic way. Through this approach, students can develop not only the intellectual knowledge they need to succeed but also the emotional intelligence, ethical understanding, and social competencies necessary to thrive as responsible and compassionate members of society. As we move further into an interconnected and rapidly changing world, the importance of nurturing well-rounded individuals through innovative educational methods such as game-based learning cannot be overstated.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of character education within the learning process has gained significant attention in recent years. Traditional methods of character education often focus on explicit instruction in virtues such as honesty, respect, and responsibility. However, contemporary pedagogical approaches recognize the importance of experiential learning—learning through doing—as a more effective means of instilling character traits. One such approach is game-based learning, which has emerged as a promising method for fostering character development while also engaging students in meaningful learning experiences. This literature review explores the existing research on game-based learning as a tool for nurturing character, focusing on its theoretical underpinnings, its benefits, and its application in educational settings.

Theoretical Foundations of Game-Based Learning

The theoretical foundation for using games in education can be traced to cognitive, social, and behavioral learning theories. A key contributor to this field is James Paul Gee (2003), whose work emphasizes the potential of video games to serve as learning environments that promote active participation, problem-solving, and collaboration. According to Gee, "games provide a context in which learners can actively construct knowledge and develop competencies in a social and interactive environment." In this context, games are not merely recreational but are seen as rich, complex systems that encourage deep cognitive engagement. Through gameplay, students make decisions, experience consequences, and reflect on their actions—experiences that mirror the challenges of real life. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory, which stresses the importance of social interaction and collaboration in cognitive and emotional development. Vygotsky's ideas support the use of cooperative and multiplayer games, where students must

collaborate, negotiate, and share resources to achieve a common goal. These experiences foster key social skills that are essential for developing good character.

Additionally, game-based learning draws from the constructivist framework proposed by Piaget and later expanded by others. In this view, learning is an active process where learners construct new knowledge based on their interactions with the world around them. Games, particularly those with narrative structures or simulations, offer an immersive environment where students can test their decision-making abilities and learn from trial and error. Through this iterative process, players internalize values such as perseverance, fairness, and empathy. For example, games that present moral dilemmas allow players to confront ethical issues and reflect on their personal values in a way that promotes character development.

Benefits of Game-Based Learning for Character Education

The use of games as a tool for character education offers numerous benefits, particularly in the development of social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. SEL refers to the process through which individuals acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to manage emotions, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Research indicates that game-based learning is particularly effective in promoting SEL, as it provides opportunities for students to practice these skills in an engaging and interactive environment.

For example, in multiplayer or cooperative games, students learn to work collaboratively, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts—all of which are vital components of emotional intelligence. Games also allow students to experience failure and success in a supportive environment, helping them build resilience and a growth mindset. Studies such as those conducted by Steinkuehler and Duncan (2008) have shown that students who engage in online multiplayer games often exhibit improved collaboration skills, problem-solving abilities, and an increased understanding of diverse perspectives. These findings suggest that games, particularly those with complex social dynamics, provide an excellent platform for students to develop empathy, perspective-taking, and conflict resolution skills, which are core aspects of character education.

Moreover, games inherently involve goal-setting, competition, and rewards, all of which can be leveraged to motivate students to pursue personal growth. In games, players often set goals for themselves—whether completing a level, achieving a high score, or helping others succeed. These goals can be connected to the development of character traits such as perseverance, discipline, and self-regulation. By encouraging students to set and pursue goals, games teach the value of hard work and delayed gratification, reinforcing the importance of these virtues in everyday life.

Application of Game-Based Learning in Character Education

The application of game-based learning in educational settings has been explored in a variety of contexts, from primary schools to higher education institutions. One common approach is the use of digital games, which offer immersive, interactive environments where students can engage in problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaborative activities. For instance, games such as *Minecraft* or *SimCity* encourage creativity, teamwork, and resource management, while also fostering ethical decision-making in virtual communities. Similarly, role-playing games (RPGs) like *Dungeons & Dragons* allow students to explore moral dilemmas, develop empathy, and practice collaborative decision-making.

In addition to digital games, non-digital or tabletop games have been used in classrooms to teach character education. Board games, card games, and simulation games offer hands-on experiences where students can interact with peers, practice leadership skills, and make decisions that affect the outcomes of the game. These games, often designed with specific educational goals in mind, can be customized to address particular aspects of character education, such as teamwork, fairness, and responsibility.

Game-based learning has also been successfully applied in the context of Islamic Education and Muhammadiyah studies, where students engage in games that reinforce moral and ethical lessons. By incorporating game mechanics into these subjects, educators can create an interactive and engaging environment that encourages students to reflect on their values and beliefs while developing character traits aligned with Islamic and Muhammadiyah teachings.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite the promising benefits of game-based learning, several challenges remain in its widespread implementation in character education. One major concern is the need for teachers to be adequately trained in the use of games as educational tools. While many teachers recognize the potential of games, they may lack the knowledge or skills to integrate them effectively into their teaching practices. Additionally, not all students may respond positively to game-based learning, especially if they are not accustomed to interactive or non-traditional forms of education. Therefore, careful consideration must be given to the design of game-based learning experiences to ensure that they align with the learning objectives and character development goals.

Another challenge is the need for a balanced approach to using games in education. While games can be powerful tools for fostering character, they should not replace traditional methods of teaching character education. Instead, they should complement other approaches, such as discussions, role-playing, and real-life experiences. A well-rounded character education program should incorporate a variety of strategies to ensure that students develop the full range of virtues and skills necessary to thrive in society.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the impact of game-based learning on character development in students. Participants include elementary school students, who engaged in specifically designed games to foster character traits such as empathy, responsibility, and perseverance. Data were collected through observations, interviews, focus groups, and surveys, focusing on how the games influence students' character development and their perceptions of the learning process. Thematic and content analysis was used to identify patterns in students' behavior and reflections (Yin, 2014; Gee, 2003).

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The findings from using the games "Estafet Kelereng," "Estafet Karet," and "Balon Bergoyang" highlight several key aspects of how games can nurture character development, particularly in terms of teamwork, patience, coordination,

and cultural appreciation. In the Estafet Kelereng game, students learned the value of teamwork and cooperation, as each member had to rely on others to complete the task successfully. The game encouraged patience and concentration, as the players had to ensure the marbles remained on the spoon without falling. This focused mental effort supported the development of perseverance and concentration. Additionally, the game enhanced fine and gross motor skills, such as hand-eye coordination and body balance, crucial for overall physical development. The competitive nature of the game, paired with its simplicity, also fostered a sense of fun and collective achievement, encouraging children to appreciate traditional Indonesian games (Wijaya, 2017).

Similarly, Estafet Karet emphasized teamwork and communication skills, as players had to strategize and collaborate to pass the rubber band using straws or chopsticks. This variation of the game enhanced motor skills through the precise coordination required to move the rubber band without using hands. Children also developed patience and mental resilience as they focused on not dropping the rubber band, learning how to stay calm under pressure. The game's simplicity and adaptability to different tools (straws or chopsticks) provided a creative challenge for the students, fostering both physical and cognitive development (Prabowo, 2018).

The Balon Bergoyang game, on the other hand, contributed to physical fitness by encouraging movement through dance or exercise patterns. It trained motor coordination through a variety of body movements, improving fine motor skills and overall physical health. The interactive nature of the game, where players responded to movements and instructions, also helped enhance cognitive functions such as concentration, memory, and problem-solving. Furthermore, it promoted a positive social environment by involving group participation and providing an opportunity for fun and relaxation (Yuliana, 2019).

These games, through their combination of teamwork, coordination, patience, and cultural significance, offer valuable opportunities for character development in children. They not only engage students in physical activity but also teach important life skills such as collaboration, communication, and resilience, making them effective tools for fostering holistic growth in children.

In analyzing the findings from the games Estafet Kelereng, Estafet Karet, and Balon Bergoyang, we can integrate these results with the literature review on the role of games in developing children's character and skills. Literature suggests

that traditional games, particularly those with a team-based structure, offer a rich environment for cultivating essential life skills such as teamwork, communication, patience, and resilience (Wijaya, 2017; Yuliana, 2019).

The Estafet Kelereng game, as highlighted in the findings, emphasizes teamwork and cooperation. Literature consistently supports this view, arguing that cooperative play is crucial for fostering social skills, such as effective communication and mutual support (Prabowo, 2018). In the Estafet Kelereng game, players must depend on each other to successfully complete the task, which mirrors the theoretical understanding that collaboration in games helps build interpersonal relationships and conflict resolution skills (Wijaya, 2017). Furthermore, the game's requirement for balance and concentration strengthens fine and gross motor skills, which aligns with findings in developmental psychology that highlight the importance of physical activities in children's growth (Yuliana, 2019).

In relation to the Estafet Karet game, literature has noted that such games help develop not only social skills but also cognitive and motor skills, particularly in the context of using tools like chopsticks or straws to move the rubber band. This aligns with research on fine motor development, where activities requiring precision, such as handling objects without using hands, improve hand-eye coordination and dexterity (Prabowo, 2018). Additionally, the challenge of ensuring the rubber band doesn't fall enhances focus and patience, vital aspects of children's emotional regulation and concentration abilities (Wijaya, 2017).

Similarly, the Balon Bergoyang game's focus on movement and following instructions ties directly to the literature on the importance of physical activity in cognitive and motor development. Games that involve movement, particularly those that require players to follow complex instructions or patterns, have been shown to enhance cognitive skills such as memory, attention, and problem-solving (Yuliana, 2019). The interactive and social nature of this game provides a platform for children to develop cooperation and teamwork in a fun, engaging environment, fostering both physical health and mental agility (Yuliana, 2019).

From a broader perspective, these findings support the argument that games, especially traditional ones with inherent educational value, play a significant role in character building and cognitive development. As discussed in the literature, the simplicity and cultural richness of these games provide a context for children to learn important life lessons, such as the value of patience, teamwork,

and perseverance, while also fostering physical and cognitive skills (Wijaya, 2017). Furthermore, these games help children appreciate cultural heritage while simultaneously promoting an active and healthy lifestyle, reinforcing the idea that play is not merely for enjoyment but also an essential tool for holistic development (Yuliana, 2019).

Thus, through the lens of the literature, the findings from these traditional games suggest a comprehensive view of how play can serve as a powerful educational tool. The integration of teamwork, cognitive skills, emotional regulation, and physical activity all contribute to a well-rounded character-building experience for children, underscoring the importance of games in fostering personal and social growth.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings from the Estafet Kelereng, Estafet Karet, and Balon Bergoyang games highlight the significant role that traditional games play in fostering children's development in terms of both character and essential life skills. These games encourage teamwork, communication, patience, and concentration, which are crucial aspects of children's social and cognitive growth. Moreover, they contribute to the development of motor skills, coordination, and cognitive abilities, supporting a holistic approach to education. The engaging nature of these activities also serves to preserve and promote traditional cultural values, helping children connect with their heritage while simultaneously improving their physical health and social interactions.

These games teach children how to work together, solve problems, and manage emotions, which are vital skills for personal and social success. The findings support the idea that traditional games can be more than just fun; they can be powerful educational tools that aid in shaping well-rounded individuals. It is essential for educational institutions to consider incorporating such games into their curricula, allowing children to learn in a dynamic and interactive environment. This integration not only enhances their motor and cognitive development but also strengthens their emotional and social competencies.

Further, the promotion of these games can instill a deeper appreciation for cultural traditions, contributing to the development of a strong community identity. Schools and communities should make efforts to actively engage children in these types of games to cultivate a sense of belonging and cultural pride.

Ultimately, the continued use of traditional games in educational and social settings can provide children with valuable life skills, equipping them to navigate the complexities of both individual and social challenges.

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