

The Influence of Traditional Games on the Social Emotional Development of Children Aged 5-6 Years in Kindergarten

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Abstract

Social and emotional development is a crucial aspect of early childhood, as it relates to a child's readiness to interact, cooperate, take responsibility, understand the feelings of others, and express emotions appropriately. This study aimed to determine the impact of traditional games on the social and emotional development of children aged 5–6 years, specifically regarding cooperation, responsibility, empathy, and emotional expression. A quantitative approach was employed using a quasi-experimental design—specifically, the Non-equivalent Control Group Design. The study involved 20 children divided into an experimental group (n=10) and a control group (n=10). The experimental group participated in three traditional games—asing-asing, bom, and kucing dan tikus (cat and mouse)—conducted over six sessions, while the control group engaged in routine learning activities using puzzles and Lego. Data were collected via a structured observation sheet comprising eight items based on four indicators of social and emotional development. The results showed that the experimental group's mean score increased by 4.40 points (from 16.30 to 20.70), whereas the control group's score increased by only 0.20 points (from 15.10 to 15.30). The Wilcoxon test yielded a Z-value of -2.831 with an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.005 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant effect. Thus, traditional games serve as an effective and contextual learning alternative for stimulating the social and emotional development of children aged 5–6 years.

Keywords: traditional games; social emotional development; early childhood education; quasi-experiment.

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INTRODUCTION

The period from birth to age 6 is scientifically recognized as a critical phase in human development. During this age range, brain capacity grows at its highest rate throughout life, so every experience a child receives leaves a relatively permanent imprint on their neural structure. This situation underscores the urgency of quality early stimulation, encompassing not only the cognitive and physical-motor domains but also the often overlooked social-emotional dimension.

Social-emotional development refers to a child's ability to build harmonious relationships with those around them, manage feelings adaptively, and demonstrate sensitivity to the emotional states of others. These abilities are not merely interpersonal skills, but important predictors of a child's future mental health, academic achievement, and social success (Lubis, 2019). Ironically, many early childhood education practices still prioritize cognitive stimulation, while the social-emotional dimension has not received adequate attention.

Social and emotional skills in children aged 5–6 years develop gradually and are influenced by the environments in which they gain experiences. At this age, children begin to demonstrate the ability to understand simple rules, participate in group activities, form relationships with peers, and adjust their behavior to social situations. However, every child develops at a different pace. These differences require teachers to provide diverse learning experiences so that each child has the opportunity to develop their social and emotional skills optimally.

In kindergarten learning activities, social and emotional development can be stimulated through activities that allow for direct interaction among children. Such interactions are crucial because children learn not only from the teacher's explanations but also from peer responses, activity rules, and the consequences of their own actions. When children share materials, take turns, help a friend, or accept the outcome of a game, they gain experiences directly related to social and emotional development.

The theoretical foundation of this research rests on two broad frameworks. First, Bandura's social learning theory, which positions interaction and observation of others' behavior as the primary mechanisms in developing an individual's social competence. Second, Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence (Putri Mukhlisa et al., 2023), emphasizes the importance of identifying, interpreting, and controlling emotions—both those experienced by oneself and others—as the foundation of healthy interpersonal relationships. Together, these two perspectives point to authentic social activities—such as collaborative play—as the most effective learning contexts in preschool.

Preliminary observations conducted in November 2025 in Group B1 of Melati Kindergarten, DWP UNM revealed a worrying picture: of the 10 children observed, 7 experienced barriers to social interaction with peers. These barriers were evident in limited social interactions with only one or two friends, an inability to share and wait for turns, and a lack of independence in rearranging play

equipment. This condition needs attention because interpersonal intelligence and social skills are related to the independence of early childhood (Rusmayadi, 2019). These data reinforce the need for learning interventions that specifically target social and emotional aspects.

Apart from providing opportunities for interaction, traditional games also have advantages in terms of simplicity of tools and rules. Many traditional games can be played using relatively simple space and equipment. These conditions make traditional games easy to apply in early childhood education environments. Teachers can adjust the rules, number of players, duration and level of difficulty of the game to the characteristics and abilities of children.

Traditional games also provide opportunities for children to get to know the forms of play that have developed in community life. Thus, the application of traditional games in learning is not only related to social and emotional development, but can also be a means of introducing culture. Children gain playing experiences that have shared values and can help maintain the existence of traditional games amidst the development of various forms of modern games.

Traditional games offer a promising alternative. Unlike digital games, which are individualistic in nature, traditional games require group participation, agreed-upon rules, coordination among team members, and managing win-lose situations—all experiences that directly train social-emotional competencies. Benedicta & Gregorius (2020) emphasize that traditional games contain comprehensive positive values, from fostering solidarity and cooperation to instilling an appreciation for the realities of social life. Sholikin et al. (2022) likewise found that traditional games such as gobak sodor and egrang contain character values that are relevant to children's development.

Several studies support the effectiveness of traditional games on children's social development. Heryanto et al. (2024) demonstrated that gobak sodor effectively trains the social skills of children aged 5-6 years, and Kamelia (2025) found that gobak sodor improved the cooperation of children in the same age group. Priani et al. (2024) reported a significant increase in social-emotional abilities through playing fortifications, while Ramdani et al. (2024) showed that a cat-and-mouse (Tom and Jerry) game simulation supported the social-emotional development of children aged 5–6 years. Miskiyah et al. (2025) concluded that traditional games are worthy of integration into the early childhood education curriculum as an effective learning method. Mappapoleonro & Faisal (2025) also reported that learning through traditional games improved children's socialization skills. However, research systematically testing the impact of combining three types of traditional games in a single experimental design is still very limited.

These games were chosen because each has characteristics relevant to the socio-emotional indicators studied. The "stranger-stranger" game emphasizes teamwork and group coordination. The "bomb" game emphasizes responsibility, strategy, and adherence to rules. Meanwhile, the "cat and mouse" game fosters empathy, communication, and the ability to control and express emotions during play. The combination of these three games is expected to

provide more comprehensive stimulation for children's socio-emotional development.

The novelty of this study lies in the sequential use of three traditional games—stranger-stranger, bomb, and cat and mouse—each of which is designed to stimulate different but complementary social emotional aspects, within the framework of a Nonequivalent Control Group design. This study aims to: (1) describe the implementation of traditional games as social emotional stimulation; (2) analyze the differences in the level of social emotional development of children between the initial and final measurements of the two classes; and (3) test the significance of the social emotional development of children aged 5-6 years with traditional game treatment.

METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental Nonequivalent Control Group Design. This design choice was based on ethical and practical considerations in the context of early childhood education—where full randomization is not possible without disrupting the established class structure. However, this rigidity was overcome by pretesting both groups so that meaningful comparisons could still be made.

Table 1. Research Design

<i>Group</i>	<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Treatment</i>	<i>Posttest</i>
Experiment	O ₁	X	O ₂
Control	O ₃	-	O ₄

Description: O₁, O₃ = initial measurement; X = traditional game treatment; O₂, O₄ = final measurement.

The study population was all 107 children in Group B of Melati Kindergarten DWP UNM Makassar City. A purposive sampling technique was used to obtain the sample, with the criteria being 5-6 years old and actively participating in learning activities. Two classes were selected: Class B1 (n=10) as the treatment group and Class B2 (n=10) as the comparison group.

The independent variable in this study is the application of traditional games consisting of three types, including: (1) *Asing-Asing (gobak sodor)*—a cross-line game played by two teams that requires coordination of movement and group strategy; (2) *Bentengan* (fortress)—a base defense game that requires role division and teamwork; and (3) *Kucing dan Tikus*—a circle-based game that trains solidarity, quick response, and support between members. The dependent variable is children's social-emotional development which is operationalized through four indicators: cooperation in groups, awareness in carrying out personal and social obligations, empathy, and emotional expression.

The research instrument was a structured observation sheet with eight statement items reflecting the four indicators. Each item was scored using a four-level scale: Poor (1), Adequate (2), Good (3), and Very Good (4), resulting in a

total score range per child of 8–32. The instrument was validated by two experts in the field of early childhood education before use.

Data collection was conducted through two techniques: direct observation by the researcher during the activities, and a treatment test that allowed for systematic observation of changes in children's social and emotional behavior. The pretest was conducted on May 4, 2026, through group coloring activities; six treatment sessions were given from May 5–13, 2026; and the posttest was conducted on May 18, 2026, with activities identical to the pretest to ensure data comparability.

Data analysis involved two stages. First, descriptive statistics to describe the frequency distribution, minimum-maximum values, mean, and standard deviation. Second, the non-parametric Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to test the difference in pretest and posttest scores, chosen due to the small sample size and ordinal data scale. Decision criteria: H_1 is accepted if the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value is <0.05 . All calculations were performed using SPSS software.

RESULTS

Implementation of Traditional Games

The intervention was designed in three structured stages. In the preparation stage, researchers developed observation instruments, validated them with two experts, obtained administrative permits, and prepared game equipment. In the implementation stage, six treatment sessions were evenly distributed: two stranger-stranger sessions (Meetings 1–2), two bomb sessions (Meetings 3–4), and two cat-and-mouse sessions (Meetings 5–6). Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes, with a standardized flow of opening, main game, and closing activities. In the evaluation stage, all observation recordings were tabulated and statistically analyzed.

Throughout the treatment, a progressive increase in children's participation and social initiative was observed from session to session. Children who were hesitant to join the group in the initial sessions gradually demonstrated greater confidence and a greater willingness to coordinate with their peers.

Social Emotional Development of the Experimental Group

Table 2 presents the distribution of the experimental group's social emotional development categories at the initial measurement.

Table 2. Distribution of Pretest Categories for Experimental and Control Group

No.	Score Interval	Category	<i>f</i> (experiment)	%	<i>f</i> (control)	%
1	8 – 13	Less (K)	3	30%	4	40%
2	14 – 19	Enough (C)	4	40%	5	50%
3	20 – 25	Good (B)	3	30%	1	10%
4	26 – 32	Very Good (SB)	0	0%	0	0%
Total			10	100%	10	100%

Before the intervention, none of the children in the experimental group achieved the Very Good category, and 30% remained in the Poor category. After six sessions of traditional play, the distribution shifted substantially, as shown in Table 3.

Post-intervention, the Poor category completely disappeared, while 20% of children achieved the Excellent category. This shift is confirmed by the descriptive analysis in Table 4.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Pretest–Posttest of Experimental Group

<i>Measurement</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>
Pretest	10	13	21	16.30	3,199
Posttest	10	17	26	20.70	3,335

The mean score of the experimental group increased from 16.30 to 20.70—a 4.40-point increase. The relatively stable standard deviation (3.199 → 3.335) indicates that the improvement occurred evenly across the group, not just among a few children.

Social Emotional Development of the Control Group

For comparison, the distribution of control group categories is presented in Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 4. Distribution of Post-test Categories for Experimental and Control Group

<i>No.</i>	<i>Score Interval</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>f (experiment)</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f (control)</i>	<i>%</i>
1	8 – 13	Less (K)	0	0%	3	30%
2	14 – 19	Enough (C)	4	40%	6	60%
3	20 – 25	Good (B)	4	40%	1	10%
4	26 – 32	Very Good (SB)	2	20%	0	0%
Total			10	100%	10	100%

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of Pretest–Posttest Control Group

<i>Measurement</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>
Pretest	10	12	20	15.10	2,424
Posttest	10	13	20	15.30	2,214

The control group only recorded a mean increase of 0.20 points (15.10 → 15.30)—a practically insignificant value. The distribution of categories remained virtually unchanged; no child advanced to the Excellent category. The difference in the rate of improvement between the two groups visually illustrates the significant contribution of the traditional play treatment.

Hypothesis Test Results

Table 6 and Table 7 present the output of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test for each group.

Table 6. Results of the Wilcoxon Test for the Experimental Group

<i>Test Statistics</i>	<i>Posttest – Pretest</i>
Z	-2,831
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005

Table 7. Results of the Wilcoxon Test for the Control Group

<i>Test Statistics</i>	<i>Posttest – Pretest</i>
Z	-1,414
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.157

In the experimental group, the Wilcoxon test yielded $Z = -2.831$ with a significance value of 0.005, which is well below the threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$. Thus, H_1 is accepted: there is a statistically significant difference in children's social-emotional development before and after the implementation of traditional games. In contrast, the control group yielded a significance value of 0.157 (> 0.05), so H_0 cannot be rejected—there is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest. This contrast between the two groups strengthens the conclusion that the improvement in the experimental group is a direct impact of the intervention, not simply natural maturation.

Table 8. Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Experimental and Control Groups

<i>Group</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>	<i>Sum of Ranks</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Experiment	10	14.90	149.00	6,000	-3,310	0.001
Control	10	6.10	61.00			
Total	20					

Based on Table X, the results of the Mann-Whitney U test on the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups show a Mann-Whitney U value of 6.000, a Wilcoxon W value of 61.000, a Z value of -3.310, and an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.001. Since the significance value of $0.001 < 0.05$, H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. Thus, there is a significant difference between the posttest scores of children's social-emotional development in the experimental and control groups.

Based on the ranking results, the experimental group had a Mean Rank of 14.90, while the control group had a Mean Rank of 6.10. These results indicate that the experimental group's social-emotional development scores tended to be

higher than those of the control group after treatment. This is also in line with descriptive statistics, namely the experimental group's posttest mean of 20.70, while the control group's was 15.30.

Thus, the results of the Mann-Whitney U test confirm the results of the Wilcoxon test which previously showed a significant change in the experimental group ($p = 0.005$), while the control group showed no significant change ($p = 0.157$). The results of this inter-group comparison provide statistical evidence that there is a difference in the socio-emotional development outcomes between children who received traditional game treatment and children in the control group.

DISCUSSION

Traditional Games as a Means of Social Emotional Stimulation

The results of this study consistently show that the three traditional games used—stranger-stranger, bomb, and cat and mouse—can create micro-social ecosystems in which children organically practice skills that are central to social and emotional development. This ecosystem is qualitatively different from individual or passive play activities.

The game of strangers, known in the literature as gobak sodor, requires each team member to constantly read the field situation, communicate strategies, and respond to their teammates' decisions. Bari (2025) notes that the nature of this game—which combines intensive physical activity with team coordination—inherently encourages genuine collaboration, not just coexistence. Meanwhile, the bomb game places children in situations where they must choose between self-interest and group loyalty—a dilemma that trains basic moral judgments relevant to the development of empathy and social responsibility (Saputri & Ardiyanto, 2025). The game of cat and mouse, with its circle structure, explicitly teaches the value of collective protection: circle members actively bear the burden of protecting more vulnerable friends, an experience that concretely instills caring and empathy (Satria & Efendi, 2025).

The alignment of these findings with Bandura's theoretical framework is clear: all the learning mechanisms that occur in these three games—observation, imitation, and internalization—occur naturally in the context of play. Children are not "taught" to cooperate or empathize; they "experience" that cooperation leads to pleasure and victory, while selfishness is detrimental to the group.

Comparative Analysis of Improvement of Both Groups

The difference in improvement between the experimental group (4.40 points) and the control group (0.20 points) is not simply a numerical difference, but rather reflects a fundamental difference in the quality of the social experiences the children receive. Playing puzzles and building Legos are primarily cognitive-individual activities; even when done in groups, the social interactions are secondary and not structured socially-emotionally.

In contrast, traditional games position social interaction as a core element, not a secondary one. Every play decision has immediate social consequences that children must grapple with in real time—this is what makes traditional games

excellent socio-emotional laboratories. This finding aligns with Miskiyah et al. (2025) argument that traditional games are not only pedagogically effective but also contextually relevant because they are rooted in local culture with which children are already familiar.

Implications for Four Social Emotional Indicators

When examined individually, the contribution of traditional games to social-emotional development can be described as follows. In terms of cooperation, role rotation between sessions ensures each child experiences different positions—guard, attacker, protector—so that an understanding of team interdependence develops holistically. This is in line with Rahmawati & Fitri (2023), who found that group games can influence the cooperation skills of children aged 5–6 years. In terms of responsibility, the clarity of game rules and the immediate consequences for violating them create a climate of real accountability. In terms of empathy, critical situations in the game—such as rescuing a captive friend—naturally elicit prosocial responses. In terms of emotional expression, the repeated experiences of winning and losing, combined with a safe and enjoyable play atmosphere, provide space for children to practice expressing and regulating emotions adaptively.

It's worth noting that the success of this intervention was also underpinned by the consistency of the implementation procedures. Each session began with a clear explanation of the rules, was monitored using a structured observation sheet, and concluded with a brief reflection with the child. This structure ensured that the play experience didn't stop at just having fun but was internalized as meaningful learning.

CONCLUSION

This study provides strong empirical evidence that the implementation of traditional games—stranger-stranger, bomb, and cat and mouse—significantly improves the social and emotional development of 5–6-year-old children at Melati Kindergarten DWP UNM. The average score increase of 4.40 points in the experimental group, confirmed by the Wilcoxon test ($p = 0.005$), contrasts sharply with the stagnation of the control group, which only recorded an increase of 0.20 points. The advantage of traditional games lies in their nature, which places social interaction as a core element of the game—not a side effect—so that children authentically practice cooperation, responsibility, empathy, and emotional expression in each session.

These findings have immediate practical implications: Early Childhood Education (ECE) educators are recommended to periodically integrate traditional games into weekly lesson plans, particularly as a means of stimulating the social-emotional aspects that have often been marginalized by a focus on cognitive development. From a policy perspective, these research findings support the importance of developing standardized traditional game modules as part of a culture-based ECE curriculum.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged: the small sample size ($n=20$), the relatively short intervention duration (six sessions), and the single location limit the generalizability of the findings. Further research is

recommended to expand the sample size, extend the intervention period, and explore other types of traditional games rooted in diverse local wisdom.

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