

Revitalization Of Traditional Games As A Medium To Strengthen Nationalism And Character Of Students At SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda

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Abstract

Traditional games are part of cultural heritage that not only function as entertainment, but also contain social values and character education. Technological developments have caused traditional games to be played less frequently, so revitalization efforts are needed through the school environment. This study aims to describe the revitalization of traditional games through the Gema Merdeka program and identify characters that appear during activities at SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda. The research method used is qualitative descriptive with a case study approach. Data were collected through observation and documentation of the implementation of three traditional games, namely gobak sodor, sack racing, and tug-of-war. The results of the study show that the Gema Merdeka program can be a means of reviving traditional games through fun activities and involving active participation of students. During the activity, students showed enthusiasm, interaction, and involvement in participating in games. The characters that emerged included cooperation, mutual cooperation, sportsmanship, discipline, responsibility, and honesty. Students were observed to coordinate with friends, obey the rules, carry out their respective roles, respect each other, and accept the results of the competition sportively. Thus, the revitalization of traditional games through the Gema Merdeka program not only supports cultural preservation but also has the potential to be a medium for strengthening students' character and sense of nationality through school activities that combine culture, creativity, and direct play experiences

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1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization and advances in digital technology have changed the interaction patterns of the younger generation, so that traditional games that were once familiar to children are now increasingly played [1]. This change can be seen from the decline in children's interest in games such as gobak

sodor, sack racing, and tug-of-war which are slowly displaced by the presence of digital gadgets and games [2]. This phenomenon is supported by empirical findings [3]. In 314 secondary school students in Turkey, it was shown that children who played traditional games had a lower duration of internet use and better social skills than children who did not play traditional games. This condition has consequences on two aspects at once. In terms of culture, traditional games are a form of intangible cultural heritage that is inherited from generation to generation and becomes the identity of Indonesian society, so that the decline in interest in this game has the potential to erode one of the nation's cultural riches. In terms of education, traditional games have so far acted as informal learning spaces that shape children's social values so that the reduction in the intensity of play also reduces children's opportunities to learn cooperation, honesty, and sportsmanship directly [4]. On the other hand, a number of studies show that traditional games actually have great potential as a medium for character education. Folk games are known to support the development of various types of children's intelligence, ranging from language, logic, visual, kinesthetic, musical, to social skills [5]. This potential is also conceptually strengthened by [6], which shows that traditional games in various cultures consistently play a role as a vehicle for children's cognitive, social, and moral development, in line with the theoretical framework of cognitive and sociocultural development. Some studies even say that these games can encourage the development of a sense of nationality through the active participation of children in joint activities [7]. Observations in various schools show that the lack of emphasis on the preservation of traditional games is characterized by the absence of a curriculum or organized school activities to revive this game regularly [8]. Similar conditions are also found at SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda so that real efforts are needed to revitalize traditional games through planned school programs, one of which is through the Gema Merdeka program.

Character Education has become a top priority in the Indonesian education system because it is directed to improve the quality of educational processes and outcomes as a whole, various studies show that traditional games can be an effective means to instill these positive values, because in addition to being recreational, these games also contain local knowledge and train children's cognitive and motor abilities naturally through play activities. This is also reflected in research [9], in elementary schools who found that traditional games based on local wisdom were effective in fostering the values of honesty, tolerance, discipline, hard work, independence, responsibility, and communication in students. According to [10], traditional games not only have a recreative purpose but also instill local knowledge and traditional values that can be incorporated into educational activities as a means of promoting traditional values to the younger generation. However, students' opportunities to participate in traditional games on a regular basis are increasingly limited as today's forms of entertainment develop, now while in the school environment this game is still often seen as just a recreational activity without being used optimally as a medium for character education [11]. One of the steps that can be taken is to integrate traditional games into a series of independence commemorations through the Gema Merdeka program.

Based on these conditions, the students of Group 62 of Mulawarman University carried out the Gema Merdeka program at SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda as an effort to bring back traditional games in the form of school activities that are integrated with the commemoration of Independence Day. This program is used as a context for research cases because it meets a number of cultural revitalization indicators, namely: (1) the reintroduction of games that were previously rarely or even

no longer played by students on a daily basis, namely gobak sodor, sack racing, and tug-of-war, (2) active involvement of students as a game in each session rather than just spectators, and (3) the integration of the game into official school activities, namely a series of Independence Day commemorations so that its position is not as stand-alone entertainment but as part of the school agenda. This study captures revitalization at an early stage, namely the reintroduction of the games and student involvement, while the sustainability of the program depends on school policy after the program ends. Through these activities, students benefit from playing experience as well as the opportunity to develop teamwork, sportsmanship, solidarity, mutual cooperation, and responsibility [12]

Several previous studies have strengthened the picture of the role of traditional games in character education. [13] found that the use of traditional games in the educational environment can help students internalize the values contained in them into their daily lives, while [14] show more specifically that gobak sodor can develop children's character through activities that encourage teamwork, interaction, adherence to rules, and group dynamics. Other research by [15] It also integrates the traditional games of each hide and seek and congklak into classroom learning in elementary schools with the results of responses and student characters that are in the good to very good category. However, the studies above were mostly conducted at the elementary school level [7], [9], [13], [15], focused on a single game in physical education lessons [14], or took the form of classroom learning and stand-alone community service activities. To the authors' knowledge, no study has described how gobak sodor, sack racing, and tug-of-war are integrated into a series of national holiday commemoration activities as a structured school program at the junior high school level, nor which character values appear in students' behavior during such a program. This study addresses that gap by describing the revitalization of traditional games through the Gema Merdeka program at SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda and identifying the characters that appear during its implementation, without measuring changes in character.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach, with an analysis unit in the form of the implementation of the Gema Merdeka program as a case of revitalization of traditional games at SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda. The subjects observed were students who participated in a series of traditional game competitions in the program, which was held in August 2026 through three types of activities, namely gobak sodor, sack racing, and tug-of-war, as part of a series of Independence Day commemorations at school. The focus of this research analysis covers two things, namely the process of revitalizing traditional games through the program and the character of students that appear during its implementation. The observed characters include cooperation, discipline, sportsmanship, mutual cooperation, responsibility, and honesty, which are identified through direct observation of participation, enthusiasm, interaction, and attitude during the activity, and strengthened by documentation in the form of photos as supporting evidence. The qualitative method was chosen because the research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the process in the context of real-life in school, while the case study was chosen because the research examines in depth a case that is bound by the time and place of its implementation. Case studies allow researchers to obtain a complete picture through in-depth data collection and the use of various sources of information [16]

The descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach was chosen because this study aims to describe the process of revitalizing traditional games through the Gema Merdeka work program and identify the character of students that emerge during the activity, so that a deep understanding of the process and context is needed, not just a statistical measure. This approach is in line with the research [17]. Which uses a descriptive method with clear qualitative data to describe efforts to grow the character of love for the homeland through activities carried out with students. This research was carried out at SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda, East Kalimantan, in August 2026, with the location chosen because of its suitability to focus on strengthening nationalism and student character through traditional games. as an educational medium. Data from observation and documentation were analyzed with an interactive model of data focused on cooperation, sportsmanship discipline, mutual cooperation, responsibility, honesty, presented narratively and then drawn with conclusions. The validity of the data was checked through technical trigulation, which is comparing the results of observations with photo documentation and field notes.

The preparation stage is carried out through coordination between KKN participants and the SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda school. This coordination includes the preparation of the activity concept, type of game, participant criteria, competition regulations, implementation schedule, division of tasks, and preparation of facilities and infrastructure are all covered in coordination. The selection of games emphasizes the aspects of safety, ease of implementation, and character that can be developed through each game [18]. At the implementation stage, activities include three types of traditional games, namely gobak sodor, sack racing, and tug-of-war which will be carried out during the series of Gema Merdeka programs in August 2026. Data collection is carried out through observation and documentation. Observation is carried out directly by 6 KKN students who act as observers during the entire game session with a duration of about 90 minutes per type of game. Observation refers to observation sheets and field notes to assess indicators of teamwork, discipline, responsibility, and sportsmanship of students. According to [19], Observation is used to assess student participation, enthusiasm, interaction, teamwork, and attitude during activities, while documentation in the form of photos and field notes is used as supporting evidence. From the ethical aspect of research, the entire series of activities, observations and photo documentation collection have obtained official permission from SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda as the person in charge of assisting students during the activity.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model, which consists of three activities carried out continuously. First, data reduction was carried out by selecting and simplifying the observation sheets and field notes according to the observed character indicators, namely cooperation, mutual cooperation, discipline, sportsmanship, responsibility, and honesty. Second, data display was carried out by presenting the observed behavior in each game narratively and in a table that links the behavior to the character values it indicates (Table 1). Third, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the patterns of observed behavior and were verified through triangulation, namely by comparing the observation results with photo documentation and field notes. Because this study did not use a pre-test and post-test, the character values are interpreted as indications that appeared during the activity and not as measured changes in students' character.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Revitalization of Traditional Games through the Gema Merdeka Program

The Gema Merdeka program at SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda will be carried out in August 2026 through three types of traditional games, namely gobak sodor, sack racing, and tug-of-war, as part of a series of commemorations of Independence Day at school. In each type of game, students first receive an explanation of the rules of the game from KKN students and the school, then divided into several groups to participate in a competition session which is directly observed by 6 KKN students who act as observers for approximately 90 minutes per type of game. During this process, students are actively involved as players, not just spectators, by dividing roles in groups, determining joint strategies, and complying with the rules of the game that have been set. This form of involvement is recorded through observation sheets and field notes, and reinforced with photo documentation as supporting evidence (see Table 1). Based on field notes, in the game of gobak sodor, students are seen discussing dividing roles and focusing on maintaining the line according to the rules; In the sack race, students were orderly lining up at the start line and honestly acknowledging the finishing position; while in the tug-of-war students seemed to be compact pulling the rope and shaking hands with each other after the match was over. This series of evidence shows that the revitalization process is not only declarative, but also illustrated by the consistent pattern of student involvement in the three types of games, as well as meeting the three indicators of cultural revitalization that are the reference for this study, namely the reintroduction of games that were previously rarely played by students, active involvement of students as players, and the integration of games into official school activities.

The findings are in line with the views of Sonjaya et al. who emphasized that the revitalization of traditional games is important considering that technological advances have changed children's behavior and made efforts to preserve traditions more difficult [20]. Traditional games can thus be part of character education as well as a means to revive traditional games as one of Indonesia's traditions.

Traditional games are not only used as a means of entertainment in Gema Merdeka activities, but also as educational activities. The students participate in the game by following the procedures and mechanisms that have been set so that the activities run smoothly. Competitive activities help students learn to interact with their peers [21]

Based on the results of observations and field notes, student involvement during the activity was reflected in a number of behavioral indicators that were observed directly, including students actively discussing dividing roles before the game started on gobak sodor, being orderly at the starting line and honestly acknowledging the finishing position in sack racing, and compactly pulling ropes and shaking hands with each other after the match was over in the tug-of-war, as summarized in Table 1. During the session, students were also seen communicating directly verbally with group members, such as giving instructions, encouraging teammates, and discussing determining strategies, without relying on digital devices. This field note is the basis that traditional game activities in the Gema Merdeka program provide space for students to interact directly and face-to-face. These findings can be discussed with the results of the research [22] in junior high school students in Kalimantan, who reported significant changes in students' social behaviour after involvement in traditional games. These findings are also in line with the results of the study [23]. Regarding traditional games, the book shows that traditional play activities encourage children to interact equally regardless of social, economic, religious, or gender backgrounds. Although the study was conducted at different age levels, the similar patterns of social involvement suggest that traditional games have the potential to support

students' interaction and social skills; however, this study only observed social involvement during the activity and did not measure changes in these skills. It should be underlined that this study does not use a pre-test/post-test design so that it cannot conclude that there is a change in students' social behavior in a measurable manner as in the study. However, the indicators of involvement observed in Gema Merdeka activities show a trend that is in line with these findings, namely that traditional games have the potential to be a relevant means of social interaction applied at the secondary school level.

Character of Students and Students Who Appear During the Activity

The use of traditional methods in educational activities provides students with the opportunity to live character values naturally through rules, interactions, and game procedures [24]. Students not only understand character theoretically, they also face situations that encourage them to cooperate, obey rules, and respect others. Based on the observation sheets and field notes of the Gema Merdeka program, the character values and signs of nationalism that appeared in students' behavior are presented in Table 1. These are interpreted as indications observed during the activity, not as measured changes in character. The nationalism indicator was inferred from students' enthusiasm in the independence competition and should therefore be interpreted cautiously.

Games	Observed Behavior	Character & Nationalism	Evidence
Gobak Sodor	Discuss dividing roles, focus on keeping lines, obey the rules	Cooperation, Discipline, Responsibility	Observations and Notes
Sack Racing	Orderly at the <i>starting</i> line, honestly admitting the <i>finish</i> position	Honesty, Discipline, Sportsmanship	Observations and Photos
Pull Mine	Compact pulling rope, shaking hands after the race	Cooperation, Cooperation, Sportsmanship	Observations and Notes
Echo of Merdeka	Enthusiastic about participating in the independence competition	Nationalism (Love of the Homeland & Culture)	Observations and Photos

The character indicators observed in this study are in line with previous research on traditional games. These indicators appeared in students' behavior when they participated in group activities, coordinated with other group members, obeyed rules, helped others, and accepted the results of the group's activities. However, they represent behavior observed during the activity and not a measured change in students' character. The use of traditional methods in educational activities encourages the development of social skills, such as confidence, resilience, and appreciation for culture [25]. This is in line with the researcher [26] In junior high school students, which shows that traditional games can strengthen students' solidarity and social interaction. Traditional games also contain the values of cooperation, courage, responsibility, and honesty that can emerge through play activities. Traditional

games can be a means of character strengthening because play activities provide opportunities for students to develop various character values through direct involvement in play [27].

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the research on the revitalization of traditional practices at SMP Negeri 9 Samarinda, it can be concluded that this kind of revitalization is carried out through the structured integration of traditional practices such as gobak sodor, sack racing, and tug-of-war into the school curriculum (Gema Merdeka). This activity is able to facilitate active participation and smooth communication among students. Based on observation data, the character traits that appear in an observable manner include teamwork, discipline, responsibility, honesty, and sportsmanship which are shown through students' compliance with group strategies, group coordination, and mutual respect.

The implementation of this activity has the potential to encourage the revival of local cultural heritage in the environment around the school. This study has limitations because it focuses on the evaluation of one KKN program only, not on the assessment of behavior change in the long term. Given the practical considerations and implications, schools are advised to facilitate these traditional activities in a timely manner so that student character development and compliance with the law can run on schedule.

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