



Exploring Traditional Games to Stimulate Foundational Phases in Strengthening the Transition from ECE to Primary School: Teachers' Creative Practices

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores the role of traditional games in strengthening six foundational competencies in early childhood education (ECE) during the transition from ECE to primary school in Pinrang, Indonesia. The study utilized interviews, direct observations, document reviews, and video transcripts to investigate how culturally embedded play supports holistic child development and school readiness. The research reveals that traditional games effectively stimulate religious and moral values, social and language skills, emotional maturity, cognitive readiness, motor skills, and positive attitudes toward learning. Teachers demonstrate significant creativity in adapting these games pedagogically to accommodate diverse learner needs, while institutional collaboration between ECE and primary schools fosters continuity and shared understanding. Moreover, digital documentation enhances formative assessment and parental engagement. Traditional games also serve as vital cultural tools, preserving indigenous knowledge and instilling community pride among children. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating culturally relevant play in early education policies and practices to support inclusive, engaging, and meaningful transitions for young learners. Despite the positive outcomes, the study identifies limitations related to the incomplete observation of the full range of traditional games and the need for deeper investigation into primary school and inclusive settings. This research contributes to the growing evidence on culturally responsive play-based pedagogy and suggests directions for future studies focusing on scalability, sustainability, and inclusivity. The study advocates for strategically incorporating traditional games to enhance educational equity and holistic development in global ECE transitions.

Keywords:

Foundational Phases, Teachers' Creative Practices, Traditional Games, Transition

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Abstrak

Studi kasus kualitatif ini mengeksplorasi peran permainan tradisional dalam memperkuat enam kompetensi dasar dalam pendidikan anak usia dini selama masa transisi dari PAUD ke sekolah dasar di Pinrang, Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan wawancara, pengamatan langsung, tinjauan dokumen, dan transkrip video untuk menyelidiki bagaimana permainan yang tertanam secara budaya mendukung perkembangan anak secara holistik dan kesiapan sekolah. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa permainan tradisional secara efektif menstimulasi nilai-nilai agama dan moral, keterampilan sosial dan bahasa, kematangan emosional, kesiapan kognitif, keterampilan motorik, dan sikap positif terhadap pembelajaran. Para guru menunjukkan kreativitas yang signifikan dalam mengadaptasi permainan-permainan ini secara pedagogis untuk mengakomodasi beragam kebutuhan peserta didik, sementara kolaborasi kelembagaan antara PAUD dan sekolah dasar mendorong kesinambungan dan pemahaman bersama. Selain itu, dokumentasi digital meningkatkan penilaian formatif dan keterlibatan orang tua. Permainan tradisional juga berfungsi sebagai alat budaya yang penting, melestarikan pengetahuan lokal dan menanamkan kebanggaan masyarakat di antara anak-anak. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya mengintegrasikan permainan yang relevan dengan budaya dalam kebijakan dan praktik pendidikan anak usia dini untuk mendukung transisi yang inklusif, menarik, dan bermakna bagi peserta didik usia dini. Terlepas dari hasil yang positif, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi keterbatasan yang berkaitan dengan pengamatan yang tidak lengkap terhadap berbagai macam permainan tradisional dan perlunya investigasi yang lebih dalam di sekolah dasar dan lingkungan inklusif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada bukti yang berkembang tentang pedagogi berbasis permainan yang responsif terhadap budaya dan menyarankan arah untuk penelitian di masa depan yang berfokus pada skalabilitas, keberlanjutan, dan inklusivitas. Penelitian ini mengadvokasi untuk menggabungkan permainan tradisional secara strategis untuk meningkatkan kesetaraan pendidikan dan pengembangan holistik dalam transisi PAUD global.

Kata Kunci:

Fase Dasar, Praktik Kreatif Guru, Permainan Tradisional, Transisi

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) shapes children's cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development, forming a foundational base for lifelong learning and well-being (Alotaibi, 2024; Parker et al., 2022). Transitioning from ECE to primary school is a critical developmental phase, requiring academic readiness, emotional resilience, and social competence (Moir & Johnson, 2021; O'Keeffe & McNally, 2021).

Play-based learning has been widely recognized as a practical pedagogical approach that supports holistic development in young children by engaging them in meaningful and enjoyable activities. However, despite extensive global advocacy for play as a fundamental right and a core method in early education (Demarie & Bugos, 2023; Wong et al., 2025), practical implementation remains uneven due to systemic barriers, curricular pressures, and limited teacher preparedness (Ilyas & Lismayani, 2023; Wong et al., 2025).

One promising yet underexplored dimension of play-based pedagogy is integrating traditional child games, which embody rich cultural heritage and developmental benefits (Hidayati, 2020; Temel et al., 2024). Traditional games have been shown to foster social-emotional skills, motor coordination, and cultural identity among children (Özcan & Sakız, 2025; Suryadi et al., 2024). These games also serve as inclusive, contextually relevant learning tools that stimulate creativity, collaboration, and communication (Prameswari & Lestarinigrum, 2020; Saearani et al., 2024).

In regions where globalization and digital media dominate, revitalizing traditional games in educational contexts is crucial to preserving local wisdom and providing children with grounded, culturally meaningful learning experiences (Fitri et al., 2020; Hidayati, 2020). Furthermore, studies demonstrate that traditional games can effectively support children with diverse needs, including children with disabilities and from refugee backgrounds, by enhancing social inclusion through culturally embedded play (Özcan & Sakız, 2025).

Despite these benefits, the transition from ECE to primary education often suffers

from inadequate pedagogical models that fail to bridge developmental domains effectively (Kacar & Ayaz-Alkaya, 2022; Moir & Johnson, 2021). Traditional schooling models may prematurely emphasize academic skills such as literacy and numeracy, neglecting emotional and social readiness, which is critical for successful adaptation (Ramadhani & Fauziah, 2020). Teachers face challenges in adapting curricula to accommodate differentiated learning needs and cultural relevancy, further complicated by a lack of professional development on integrating play and tradition-based methods (Ilyas & Lismayani, 2023).

Moreover, while policies often endorse inclusive, child-centered transition programs, empirical evidence on such initiatives' actual application and impact remains limited, especially in diverse cultural settings (Ospankulov et al., 2023). Previous research has highlighted the general efficacy of play-based learning and creative arts in enhancing school readiness and child development outcomes (Demarie & Bugos, 2023; Huang et al., 2024). However, few studies have systematically examined how teachers creatively utilize traditional games within early learning environments to promote foundational skills critical for transition phases (Saearani et al., 2024). Some investigations focus on motor skill improvements through traditional games, showing superior retention and engagement compared to conventional drills (Hussain & Cheong, 2022; Suryadi et al., 2024). Other studies demonstrate the role of traditional games in nurturing peace, cooperation, and cultural literacy in school-aged children (Gultom et al., 2022; Kogoya et al., 2023).

However, there remains a research gap regarding the pedagogical creativity of teachers in adapting and integrating these games into differentiated, culturally responsive curricula that support a smooth transition from ECE to primary school (Ilyas & Lismayani, 2023; Ngaisah et al., 2023; Saearani et al., 2024). This study addresses this gap by exploring how teachers creatively employ traditional child games as practical tools to foster foundational competencies—including cognitive, social-emotional, and motor skills—during the transition from ECE

to primary school. It also investigates the extent to which institutional support, stakeholder collaboration, and digital documentation enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of such pedagogical innovations (Alotaibi, 2024; VanLone et al., 2024).

This study aims to elucidate how teachers creatively integrate traditional games into early learning environments, focusing on their contribution to holistic child development and facilitating smooth transitions to primary school. By emphasizing culturally embedded play as a vital link between children's developmental readiness and educational expectations, the research advances the discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive education (Gultom et al., 2022; Saearani et al., 2024; Temel et al., 2024). Furthermore, it explores the supportive roles of policy frameworks, community engagement, and digital tools in fostering innovative teaching practices (Jannah & Harun, 2023; Ngaisah et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2025). Ultimately, the study proposes a play-based, culturally grounded pedagogy model to inform global curriculum development, teacher training, and policymaking in early childhood education.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine the implementation of the early childhood education (ECE) to primary school transition program in Pinrang Regency, South Sulawesi, with a particular focus on the integration of traditional games and cross-level educational collaboration to strengthen the six foundational phases of child development. The researcher took on the role of a practitioner-researcher actively engaged in the Program Sekolah Penggerak (PSP) or School Transformation Program, documenting the processes and activities throughout one full academic year.

Research Design

The qualitative case study design was selected to gain an in-depth and contextualized understanding of how traditional games are utilized within the transition program, and how these practices support pedagogical innovation, cultural integration, and

institutional collaboration. This approach facilitated a comprehensive exploration of a complex phenomenon within a specific sociocultural and policy context. A multi-source embedded case study framework was adopted, focusing on six educational institutions—three kindergartens (PAUD) and three primary schools (SD)—that participated in a localized implementation of the national joyful transition policy. These institutions represented model schools within the Program Sekolah Penggerak (PSP) initiative. As a practitioner-researcher embedded within the program, the investigator actively engaged in and observed transition activities, capturing rich data on policy, practice, and cultural context dynamics. The study particularly emphasized the collaborative efforts across educational levels, facilitated by the program's alignment with regional education policies and community involvement, with Bunda PAUD Pinrang playing a central leadership role. This collaboration was essential for sustaining program momentum and fostering a supportive ecosystem for children's developmental readiness.

Research Site and Participants

This study was conducted in Pinrang Regency, which has actively implemented and supported various activities to successfully carry out the government's joyful transition program from early childhood education (PAUD) to primary school (SD). The program utilizes traditional games deeply rooted in local culture and wisdom to support a quality transition. Five schools participating in the Sekolah Penggerak Program (PSP) and one non-PSP participant who attended the Maccule Festival, where the researcher served as a master trainer, were involved in this study. These schools are spread across urban and rural areas, including three Islamic and two public schools. All five schools actively participated in all PSP activities, including learning communities, practitioner communities, the Maccule Festival, and other collaborative activities related to the transition program.

A total of 26 participants were purposively selected, representing various stakeholders, including Bunda PAUD Pinrang (the central figure and main informant), school

supervisors, representatives from the PMO BBGP South Sulawesi, principals of kindergarten and primary schools, as well as classroom teachers actively involved in the transition activities.

Data Collection

Data collection employed four complementary qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, direct observations, document analysis, and video analysis. This triangulated approach ensured the validity and richness of the data by capturing diverse perspectives and types of evidence. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of key informants, including Bunda PAUD Pinrang (the program's central figure and key informant), school supervisors, Program Management Office (PMO) representatives of Sekolah Penggerak, principals of kindergarten and primary schools, as well as classroom teachers actively involved in the transition activities. These interviews gathered insights on perceptions, experiences, pedagogical adaptations, challenges, and stakeholder collaboration.

Observations were conducted during traditional game-based learning sessions, several transition activities, and the Maccule Festival—a culturally significant event showcasing traditional games as part of the educational transition. Detailed field notes documented interactions, teaching strategies, child engagement, and community participation. Document analysis included policy directives such as the 2023 Circular from the Pinrang Education and Culture Office, official decisions regarding the PAUD-SD communication forum, normative documents supporting the transition, as well as plans and reports of the MACCULE program—an initiative integrating traditional games into transition pedagogy. Additionally, video archives and public testimonies from Bunda PAUD Pinrang's YouTube channel further enriched the data with visual and narrative evidence.

Although PSP policies later restricted activities to be conducted only at the education level, this study continued during the launch of the PAUD-SD transition program, allowing cross-level connections and joint training between PAUD and SD to proceed smoothly.

It provided a valuable opportunity to observe how early collaboration paved the way for implementing the PAUD-SD transition program.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles in *Qualitative Data Analysis*, involving iterative cycles of data condensation, display, and drawing/verifying conclusions. Raw data from field notes, transcripts, video recordings, and documents were systematically coded and thematically organized.

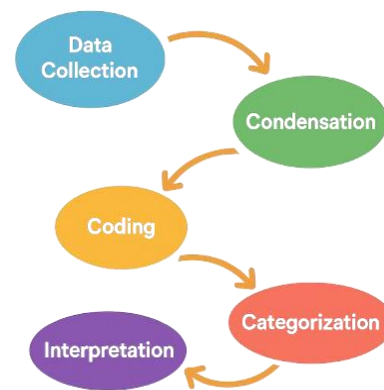


Figure 1. Qualitative Analytical Process

The coding process was inductive but anchored by the six foundational developmental domains outlined in Indonesia's national curriculum: religious and moral values, social and language skills, emotional maturity, cognitive readiness, motor and self-care skills, and positive learning dispositions. This combination of inductive and deductive analysis allowed both emergent themes and pre-established categories to be explored, enhancing depth and coherence. Thematic narratives were developed to connect practice with policy directives and theoretical frameworks on holistic early childhood development and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Triangulation and Validation

The study employed triangulation across data sources (interviews, observations, documents, videos) and informant groups (teachers, principals, officials, parents) to

enhance credibility and reduce bias. Key program events such as the Festival Maccule were focal points for cross-verification of narratives and documentation. Member checking was conducted informally through follow-up discussions and group reflections during ongoing program activities to confirm the accuracy of findings. Peer debriefing sessions with external ECE experts provided additional validation and reflexivity, supporting the dependability and confirmability of results. A comprehensive audit trail was maintained, documenting research processes and decision points.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were rigorously followed. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring their voluntary involvement and understanding of the study's purpose. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and no identifying information was disclosed. The research was conducted in alignment with the values of PSP, which emphasize community participation, collaborative reflection, and respect for local knowledge systems. Publicly accessible materials such as videos and policy documents were used with appropriate acknowledgment and sensitivity toward communal contributions.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

The study rigorously applied the four criteria of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln & Guba in *Naturalistic Inquiry*: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation of multiple data sources, and member checks. Dependability and confirmability were assured via audit trails, peer debriefings, and transparent methodological reporting. Transferability was enhanced by providing rich, thick descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, data collection methods, and analytical procedures, enabling readers to assess applicability to similar cultural and policy settings.

Unique Contributions of the Study

This research offers a rare, empirically grounded case study illustrating how traditional games serve as both pedagogical and cultural tools during the critical ECE to primary school transition. It highlights the integrative role of culturally responsive play, institutional collaboration, and digital innovation in supporting holistic child development aligned with national educational goals.

The practitioner-researcher stance enriched the depth of understanding and fostered reciprocal learning between policy, practice, and community perspectives. This case study thus contributes to broader discourses on inclusive, culturally embedded ECE and transition practices, providing a model that can inform similar initiatives nationally and internationally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the main findings from a qualitative study examining the role of traditional games in strengthening the transition process from ECE to primary school by reinforcing six foundational phases of child development. Data were collected through interviews, field observations, video transcripts, and document reviews related to the MACCULE program in Pinrang Regency. The findings were organized according to six major themes reflecting key aspects of practice and outcomes observed in the field.

Recognition of Foundational Skills through Traditional Play

Traditional games in Pinrang reinforce the six foundational phases that underpin children's readiness for primary school, but are also deliberately integrated into learning practices through structured programs such as MACCULE. These foundational phases encompass religious and moral values, social and language skills, emotional maturity, cognitive readiness, motor and self-care skills, and positive dispositions toward learning. Field observations revealed that traditional games are multi-dimensional learning tools that simultaneously holistically stimulate these developmental domains. For instance, at the MACCULE festival, a primary school teacher

noted, "*These games also build physical abilities... from a health perspective, such as running and children's body movements,*" highlighting how gross motor skills and physical health are nurtured through active play.

An early childhood educator reinforced this, stating, "Through jumping games, children gain meaningful learning... their emotional self is also trained," emphasizing that such play fosters emotional and social development alongside physical growth. By supporting this, in classroom and outdoor settings, children engaged in the game of *Bakiak Kelapa* displayed spontaneous prosocial behaviors, such as encouraging peers and offering help when others struggled with balance. A PAUD teacher reflected, "Children spontaneously say 'let's help our friends' when someone struggles to keep balance," illustrating how moral values intertwine with socio-emotional skills and gross motor coordination during play.

Games, such as *Dende-dende (Engklek)* and *Jengkal-jengkal*, were observed to boost language, communication, and social interaction. Children actively negotiated game rules and encouraged teammates, demonstrating the development of empathy and advanced social skills. One teacher remarked on children's lively discussions about strategy during these games, signifying cognitive engagement.

Cognitive and reasoning abilities are further cultivated through strategic and numerical aspects embedded in games such as *Jengkal-jengkal* and *Lompat Tali*. A primary school teacher explained, "Children choose their jumping position based on foot size, showing logical thinking and prediction skills." Such activities enhance spatial reasoning, mathematical understanding, and executive functioning.

Complementing these observations, document analysis and policy review underline the integration of these traditional games within the official MACCULE curriculum framework as critical tools to build six phases of foundational skills. The *Buku Saku Maccule*, for example, details how each game is designed to develop specific aspects of motor skills, language, cognition, and social-emotional growth, positioning play as a

purposeful pedagogical strategy rather than mere recreation. Video analysis of Bunda PAUD Pinrang's messages further confirms the program's child-centered philosophy, stressing the importance of play as a natural and rights-based learning medium: "Children must have the right to learn through play, not be forced to read, write, or count before their time." It reflects a progressive stance against early academic pressure and supports emotional well-being during the transition. Moreover, these innovative adaptations were very beneficial.

The previously discussed traditional games provide varied opportunities to develop children's foundational skills. These descriptions deepen our understanding of the multi-dimensional learning each game fosters by highlighting its specific mechanics and the developmental domains they engage. Below, we elaborate on several of these games as outlined in the appendix, reinforcing how each contributes to holistic child development. For example, *Bakiak Kelapa* requires children to walk in pairs wearing coconut shell clogs, demanding coordination, cooperation, and communication to maintain balance and avoid falling. This game nurtures gross motor skills while cultivating socio-emotional learning through peer interaction. Similarly, *Dende-dende (Engklek)* has children hopping sequentially on numbered squares on the ground with one foot, following rules and turn-taking that foster balance, emotional regulation, cooperative behavior, and understanding of game rules.

Lompat Karet (Jumping Rubber) involves two children holding a rubber rope that is rhythmically swung, while others take turns jumping over it in sync with the rhythm. This game develops agility, balance, and gross motor coordination. *Jengkal-jengkal* challenges children to measure distance with their outstretched hands ("*jengkal*") and individually jump over each other's hands, enhancing spatial reasoning, gross motor control, and turn-taking.

Toko-toko'diang promotes language skills, coordination, collaboration, and empathy as children line up holding shoulders and navigate together through a "gate," with the child at the back trying to avoid being caught when the line breaks. Additionally,

Maccele-celle requires children to sit or stand in a circle, taking turns throwing and catching a woven bamboo ball hanging overhead, which trains hand-eye coordination, cooperation, and patience. Other games, such as *Ma'hadang*, where children form a circle holding hands to block entry attempts by others, develop teamwork, strategic thinking, and gross motor skills. Meanwhile, *Ma'gasing*, involving spinning tops, enhances fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, concentration, and strategy.

These detailed descriptions from the appendix visually and contextually support how traditional games are implemented as meaningful pedagogical tools within programs like MACCULE. They confirm that play is intentionally designed to preserve Bugis-Makassar cultural heritage and foster comprehensive development across the six foundational phases critical for early childhood education. Table 1 below summarizes the observed traditional games and the foundational phases they support based on document reviews and field observations.

Table 1. Traditional Games and Supported Foundational Phases

Traditional Game	Supported Foundational Aspects
<i>Bakiak Kelapa</i>	Gross motor skills, socio-emotional, and moral values
<i>Dende-dende (Engklek)</i>	Balance, emotional regulation, cooperative behavior, and rules
<i>Toko Diang-diang</i>	Language, coordination, collaboration, empathy
<i>Jengkal-jengkal</i>	Spatial reasoning, turn-taking, gross motor control
<i>Lompat Tali</i>	Rhythmic movement, timing, language interaction, and emotional control
<i>Paka' Karung</i>	Gross motor, speed, coordination, emotion, social, and moral
<i>Baji Lompoa / Massallo</i>	Gross motor, balance, coordination, emotion, social, and moral
<i>Maccele-celle</i>	Fine & gross motor, coordination, language, emotion, social, moral

<i>Bataraga</i>	Fine motor, coordination, precision, social, and language skills
<i>Baji Gau</i>	Gross motor, agility, balance, social, and emotional
<i>Balakka</i>	Gross motor, agility, strength, social, and emotional
<i>Patiga Lompoa</i>	Gross motor, coordination, strategy, social, and language
<i>Sambat Kebbo</i>	Gross motor, precision, reaction, social, emotion

The data showed that traditional games are important in comprehensively supporting the six foundational phases of child development and serve as a powerful medium for preserving the unique Bugis-Makassar cultural values in the educational context. Although many traditional games are listed in official documents, only a portion are actively implemented in current learning practices. It indicates a significant opportunity to strengthen and sustainably preserve traditional games through revitalization and broader integration, ensuring the continuity of cultural transmission while optimally supporting child development.

Teachers' Creativity and Pedagogical Adaptation in Supporting Traditional Learning

Teacher creativity is crucial in adapting traditional games into effective and enjoyable learning media. Teachers act as facilitators and innovators who tailor learning methods to children's unique characteristics and needs. The principal of TK Islam Plus emphasized the importance of teacher roles and school leadership in this regard: "*We facilitate differentiated learning through individual coaching, classroom supervision, and the Tudang Sipulung forum as a platform for sharing best practices and teacher experiences.*" This strategy enables teachers to develop their pedagogical skills and adapt traditional games to be more relevant to learning objectives and children's needs. Field observations revealed that teachers actively modified traditional games such as *Toko Diang* by incorporating storytelling and music to enrich children's learning experiences. A kindergarten teacher stated, "*We added songs and stories so children could*

practice language skills while learning empathy in an enjoyable environment."

This approach shows that pedagogical adaptation focuses on motor or cognitive aspects and integratively strengthens children's socio-emotional development. Official documents from TK Islam Plus e-School and reports from Bunda PAUD Pinrang reinforce these findings by highlighting the use of differentiated learning based on initial assessments, such as the Early Development Screening Questionnaire (KPSP) and the KWL (Know, Want to Know, Learned) method. Teachers use these assessment data to design learning tailored to children's readiness and interests. *"We conduct individualized mapping of children so that learning can be more personal and meaningful,"* explained one teacher.

Moreover, the school orientation program (MPLS) at TK Islam Plus e-School is integral to a joyful and child-friendly transition strategy. Bunda PAUD Pinrang added, *"Our MPLS is designed as a magical adventure that builds children's sense of security, emotional attachment, and exploratory spirit without academic pressure."* It emphasizes the program's focus on children's psychosocial aspects, ensuring a smooth and pleasant transition from early childhood education to primary school.

Innovation is also evident in the synergy of technology between teachers and parents, especially in supporting children with special needs. A special education teacher at TK Islam Plus e-School explained, *"Using Google Sites enables effective collaboration between teachers and parents to monitor children's progress and tailor necessary interventions."* Parental testimonials support it: *"My hyperactive child has shown significant improvement after attending individual support classes with technological support and teacher guidance."* It demonstrates that teacher creativity also includes leveraging technology for learning and communication. Video documentation of teacher activities further illustrates how the principal consistently conducts supervision and individual coaching to enhance the quality of differentiated learning. Principal of TK Islam Plus e-School explained, *"We provide training facilities, technological platforms, and sharing spaces*

so teachers can grow and implement learning that suits each child's characteristics."

The collaboration between teachers' pedagogical innovations, school leadership support, parental involvement, and technology utilization creates a holistic learning ecosystem focused on children's needs. This approach strengthens the six foundational phases of child development and realizes a joyful, meaningful, and sustainable transition from ECE to primary school.

Collaborative Stakeholder Involvement

Cross-level collaboration between early childhood and primary school teachers is crucial in ensuring a smooth and meaningful transition process for children. Joint activities such as training sessions, classroom visits, and combined reflection meetings are regularly conducted to align perceptions and teaching practices across both levels. The Bunda PAUD of Pinrang stated, *"We invite primary school teachers to practice and play together with PAUD children so that emotional bonds form before they enter primary school."* This statement underscores the importance of building emotional connections to reduce children's stress and anxiety when adapting to a new learning environment.

Documentation of trainings and reflection sessions, formally supported by the Education Office and involving various stakeholders, including parents, shows that this collaboration is carried out systematically and comprehensively. One parent shared, *"We are involved in initial assessments and reflection sessions with teachers, which makes us feel part of our child's learning process."*

This study demonstrated that parental involvement in cross-level collaboration fosters a strong sense of ownership and support for the child. A review of official transition program documents in Pinrang further strengthens these findings. The official documents highlight that the strategy of a joyful transition emphasizes synergy between educational levels as a key pillar. Joint trainings for kindergarten and primary school teachers, teaching modules developed based on shared assessments, and intensive communication with parents are integral to this approach. The documents also stress that successful transition is measured by academic readiness and the child's social-emotional and

psychological preparedness, supported by a coherent learning ecosystem across levels. Field observations support these data, which is evident during ECE children's visits to primary schools, where ECE and primary teachers accompanied the children. The children appeared more comfortable and enthusiastic interacting with new teachers and peers, while the teachers conducted observations and provided emotional support tailored to the children's needs. This cross-level collaboration facilitates academic adaptation and strengthens social-emotional aspects and holistic learning readiness. This approach aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum principles, emphasizing child readiness and joyful learning during the ECE to primary school transition phase.

Cultural Relevance and Sustainability of Traditional Games

Traditional games play a dual role in early childhood education, serving as practical learning tools and essential mediums for preserving the rich local culture. This cultural significance was emphasized by a kindergarten principal who stated, "*Maccule is more than just a game; it is an effort to preserve Bugis-Makassar cultural heritage that is nearly extinct.*" Such a statement reflects the deep intertwining of cultural identity and educational practice using traditional games within the curriculum.

Field observations during festivals and community activities further reinforced this perspective. Children were seen actively learning the rules and techniques of traditional games handed down through generations by parents and teachers. This intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge is critical for sustaining local heritage. In particular, older children took on mentorship roles by explaining game rules and guiding younger peers, fostering a social environment that strengthens communal bonds.

These observations highlight the role of traditional games as more than play; they are vibrant cultural practices that embed social values, cooperation, and shared identity. The communal nature of these games also promotes social cohesion and collective responsibility among children, which aligns with the broader goals of holistic child development. Therefore, the sustainability of

traditional games is closely linked to their incorporation into educational programs such as MACCULE, which intentionally integrates these games into early learning frameworks. By doing so, these programs nurture children's developmental skills and safeguard intangible cultural heritage dynamically and engagingly for new generations.

In summary, traditional games' cultural relevance and sustainability in Pinrang's early childhood education context provide a powerful example of how education can simultaneously foster developmental readiness and cultural continuity, ensuring that local traditions remain alive and meaningful in contemporary learning environments.

Institutional Support in the Transition Program

The success of the Pleasant PAUD to Primary School Transition Program, including the sustainability of joint training programs between ECE and early primary school teachers, ECE children's visits to primary schools, *Tudang Sipulung* activities, and the MACCULE Festival, is strongly supported by institutions such as the Education Office, Bunda PAUD, and school driving units. These institutions provide a formal and systemic foundation that enables schools to adopt child-friendly, play-based transition strategies in accordance with regional education policies.

A kindergarten principal emphasized the importance of this institutional support by stating, "*This program is fully supported by regional policy and has become a regency-wide movement involving many schools.*" This official backing from the local government creates a conducive environment for schools to integrate traditional games and holistic learning approaches as key components in the ECE transition.

The Education Office's document shows official decrees and circular letters mandating schools to carry out transition activities that prioritize children's emotional well-being and readiness through play. Additionally, joint training facilitated by the PMO and cross-level teacher collaboration enhances educators' capacity to implement the program effectively.

Field notes and observations of joint training sessions demonstrate active participation from ECE and primary school teachers, indicating institutional commitment

to continuous professional development and collaborative practices. The involvement of various stakeholders, including parents, community leaders, and education activists, further strengthens the support network that drives the program's objectives. This comprehensive institutional engagement guarantees the successful launch of the MACCULE program. It ensures its long-term sustainability as a key strategy to create a smooth and enjoyable transition from ECE to primary school.

Digital Documentation as an Innovation for Inclusive Learning, Differentiation, and Strengthening Traditional Games within the Six Foundational Phases

Digital documentation has become a crucial innovation supporting inclusive and differentiated learning while reinforcing the integration of traditional games in early childhood education. Teachers utilize digital platforms such as Google Workspace, YouTube, Google Forms, and Padlet to holistically record child development, share best practices, and maintain intensive communication with parents. This approach strengthens the partnership between home and school. It ensures comprehensive stimulation across the six foundational phases of child development: religious and moral values, social-language, emotional, cognitive, physical-motor skills, and art-expression. A kindergarten teacher stated, "*We upload videos of traditional games to YouTube so parents can watch and continue playing at home.*"

This method allows for ongoing stimulation of motor skills, language, and socio-emotional aspects through traditional games at school and home while reinforcing local cultural values. Field observations show that digital documentation is routinely utilized to capture moments of traditional play such as *Engklek*, *Lompat Tali*, and *Bakiak Kelapa*, which serve as multidimensional learning media. Videos and photos of these activities archive child development and serve as reflective materials for teachers to develop differentiated learning strategies tailored to each child's unique needs, particularly strengthening socio-emotional and cognitive domains.

One best practice example is teachers' use of the Padlet platform. Through Padlet, all

classes at TK Islam Plus e-School systematically inventory and document children's activities, which parents can access through a visually easy-to-understand interface. It greatly facilitates parents in following their child's progress in real-time and assists teachers in conducting assessments and compiling holistic developmental reports.

This visual documentation also functions as a monitoring tool for principals to supervise teacher performance in stimulating all aspects of child development, clearly strengthening the six foundational phases. Furthermore, the collected data can serve as important information for primary school teachers to recognize new students' strengths and special needs, enabling effective individualized learning planning. However, formal collaboration between ECE and primary school teachers in discussing assessment results still needs strengthening to ensure a smooth and joyful transition.

Additionally, this program aligns with three significant target changes expected to be achieved in the new academic year: the elimination of literacy and numeracy tests (*calistung*) during new student admissions, implementation of a child-friendly MPLS Period, and the application of enjoyable learning systems in both ECE and primary schools to build foundational competencies optimally.

Within the context of inclusive and differentiated education, the use of digital technology is also supported by intensive training facilitated by PMO. This training strengthens teachers' abilities to utilize technology for documentation, assessment, and communication. This strategy aligns with efforts to preserve local traditions through traditional games integrated into curricula and learning practices.

Thus, digital documentation strengthens the six foundational phases by enriching traditional games and differentiated learning approaches. This innovation not only enhances the quality of early childhood education but also preserves local cultural sustainability while reinforcing parental involvement and teacher reflection.

Visualization of Key Findings

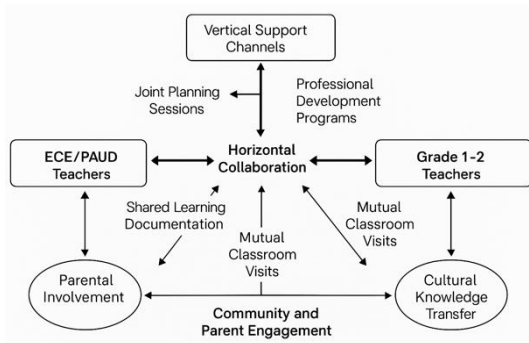


Figure 2. Teacher Collaboration Model Across ECE and Primary Stages

Figure 2 illustrates the collaborative framework between ECE and primary school teachers observed in this study, emphasizing horizontal and vertical support structures that facilitate mutual classroom visits, shared documentation, and professional development programs. This model highlights how pedagogical continuity and cultural knowledge transfer are fostered through structured planning and community engagement, particularly within the MACCULE program and other cross-level initiatives in Pinrang.

Discussion

This study explores the role of traditional games in supporting foundational competencies among early childhood learners within a culturally rooted transition program from ECE to primary school in Pinrang, Indonesia. The study focuses on six developmental domains aligned with the national curriculum: religious and moral values, social and language skills, emotional maturity, cognitive readiness, motor and self-care abilities, and positive learning dispositions. Findings reveal multifaceted benefits of traditional games, teacher creativity in pedagogical adaptation, collaborative stakeholder engagement, cultural preservation, institutional support, and differentiated digital documentation. This discussion connects these findings to established educational theories and recent research, addressing study limitations and future directions.

The Role of Traditional Games in Developing Foundational Competencies

Traditional games are holistic pedagogical tools, stimulating all six essential developmental domains needed for successful transitions to formal schooling (Gultom et al., 2022; Özcan & Sakız, 2025). The cultural elements embedded in these games align with culturally responsive pedagogy, enriching learning by connecting it to children's sociocultural backgrounds and strengthening identity and engagement (Temel et al., 2024).

For instance, *Bakiak Kelapa* simultaneously develops gross motor skills, socio-emotional competencies, and moral values such as cooperation and honesty (Adi et al., 2022; Hussain & Cheong, 2022). Games like *Dende-dende* and *Jengkal-jengkal* foster turn-taking, emotional regulation, and spatial reasoning, bridging cognitive and socio-emotional domains (Ramadhani & Fauziah, 2020). These activities promote positive learning dispositions, supporting Parker et al.'s (2022) claim that play-based learning nurtures engagement and intrinsic motivation crucial for long-term success (Alotaibi, 2024).

International studies show that traditional games in physical education enhance emotional awareness and well-being through cooperative and competitive play (Alcaraz-Muñoz et al., 2020). Compared to free play, traditional games increase physical activity and reduce sedentary behavior more effectively, even among older students (Azlan et al., 2021). Beyond physical and social domains, traditional games support academic learning through playful microprojects targeting math and science concepts, highlighting their interdisciplinary relevance and enriching early education curricula (Fernández-Oliveras et al., 2021).

Despite many traditional games being identified, only a few are actively practiced, indicating cultural erosion risks without preservation (Ngaisah et al., 2023; Rianto & Yuliananingsih, 2021). Programs like MACCULE serve developmental and cultural preservation roles by transmitting local knowledge and pride to younger generations (Fitri et al., 2020). It aligns with other contexts where traditional games support social and material sustainability (Luchoro-Parrilla et al., 2021).

Teacher Creativity and Pedagogical Adaptation

Teachers are innovators who adapt traditional games to meet diverse learner needs by incorporating storytelling, rhythm, and technology to enhance engagement and learning. It aligns with the Active-Tradir model linking folk games with imaginative and creative movement education (Saearani et al., 2024). Differentiated learning strategies are especially relevant when combined with traditional games as learning media. Through diagnostic assessments and digital reflection tools, teachers tailor methods and materials to children's unique needs and learning styles, designing playful activities that stimulate motor, socio-emotional, and cognitive skills (Adi et al., 2022; Ilyas & Lismayani, 2023). This flexibility fosters inclusion and personalization, particularly in diverse early childhood settings (Ngaisah et al., 2023; Nurwahidah et al., 2021).

Reflective teaching and peer collaboration through forums like *Tudang Sipulung* strengthen professional support and teacher self-efficacy (Lipscomb et al., 2021). It positively impacts teacher engagement and instructional quality, supporting the sustainability of play-based pedagogical innovations. Teacher creativity and adaptability are thus foundational for effectively integrating traditional games as meaningful, contextual tools for young learners (Mardiyah et al., 2021).

Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement

Cross-level collaboration between ECE and primary school teachers exemplifies best practice for smooth transitions into formal schooling. It aligns with Moir and Johnson's (2021) assertion that collaborative planning with families, schools, and community stakeholders improves transition quality, lowers anxiety, and increases readiness.

Joint observations and integrated training align pedagogical expectations and terminology across levels, reducing discontinuities commonly noted in transition literature (Osbankulov et al., 2023). Active parental involvement in assessment and reflection reinforces school-home partnerships, consistent with Mardiyah et al.'s (2021) findings, which emphasized family-school collaboration in nurturing children's

empathy and creativity. However, limited investigation into how primary teachers integrate traditional games into early curricula was noted—a gap highlighted by participants. Future research should explore primary educators' practices and perspectives to sustain culturally responsive pedagogy continuity (Moir & Johnson, 2021).

Cultural Relevance and Sustainability of Traditional Games

Cultural relevance is central to educational and social goals. Traditional games serve as living heritage practices, embedding local wisdom, norms, and values, strengthening children's identity and pride (Gultom et al., 2022; Hidayati, 2020). Community events like the MACCULE Festival are vital platforms for revitalizing traditional games and fostering intergenerational learning (Fitri et al., 2020). Threats persist for lesser-known games overshadowed by digital entertainment. Strategic integration of traditional games into school curricula and community programs is crucial, supported by clear policies and adequate resources (Ngaisah et al., 2023).

Institutional Support for Transition Programs

Strong support from local education offices, community leaders, and programs like Bunda PAUD underpins the program's success. It reinforces the importance of leadership and systemic backing for educational innovation (VanLone et al., 2024). Replacing early academic tests with play-based assessments marks a paradigm shift toward child-centered, developmentally appropriate practices. Decentralized governance fosters resource mobilization and community involvement, aiding scalability and ownership. Long-term sustainability depends on continuous advocacy, capacity building, and responsive policies—especially for integrating traditional games (O'Keeffe & McNally, 2021).

Digital Documentation and Differentiated Learning Practices

Digital tools are crucial for documenting children's learning, supporting formative assessment, and enhancing parent-teacher communication. It aligns with findings on digital platforms' positive impacts on engagement and transparency in early education (Alotaibi, 2024; Xie et al., 2021).

Teachers' flexible use of assessment platforms and media reflects mature differentiated instruction, personalizing learning and accommodating diverse needs, including children with disabilities (Nurwahidah et al., 2021). Digital documentation also promotes reflective teaching, empowering educators to adapt instruction dynamically using ongoing data. It improves parental engagement and understanding, which is critical for reinforcing learning beyond school (Mardiyah et al., 2021).

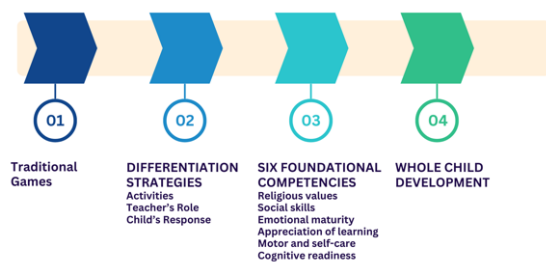


Figure 5. Differentiated Instruction Framework through Traditional Games for Foundational Competency Development.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite significant contributions, limitations exist. Although many traditional games were documented, observations focused on a small subset actively used by teachers, risking cultural loss without intentional preservation. Future studies should document and test lesser-known games to preserve cultural diversity. The study lacks an in-depth examination of primary teachers' use and integration of traditional games beyond early childhood education. Further research is needed on practices and challenges in primary schools for a complete transition picture.

While differentiated learning is addressed, specific traditional game use for children with special needs remains underexplored. Given culturally rooted play pedagogy's inclusive potential (Özcan & Sakız, 2025), further studies should focus on diverse learner adaptations. Finally, the scalability and long-term sustainability of integrating traditional games into broader policy and practice remain open questions. Ongoing evaluation and stakeholder engagement are essential to institutionalize

and expand this culturally responsive approach.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of traditional games in nurturing foundational competencies during the critical transition from ECE to primary school in Pinrang, Indonesia. The findings underscore that traditional games holistically stimulate six key developmental domains—religious and moral values, social and language skills, emotional maturity, cognitive readiness, motor skills, and positive learning attitudes—thereby preparing children effectively for school readiness. The creative pedagogical adaptations by teachers, including differentiated instruction and digital documentation, foster inclusive learning environments responsive to diverse children's needs.

Moreover, the study illustrates how traditional games serve as developmental tools and vehicles for cultural preservation and community identity reinforcement. The collaborative engagement of stakeholders across educational levels—teachers, parents, and institutional actors—strengthens program implementation and sustainability. This integrated approach demonstrates the potential of culturally embedded play-based pedagogy to address challenges in early education transitions.

Contributing to the existing knowledge base, this research empirically validates the multifaceted benefits of traditional games within culturally responsive education frameworks, emphasizing teacher creativity and institutional support as key enablers. However, limitations remain due to the partial observation of traditional game varieties and limited insight into practices at primary school and inclusive education levels.

Future research should explore the scalability and sustainability of integrating traditional games into broader curricula, particularly focusing on adaptations for children with special needs. Expanding investigations to diverse cultural contexts will enrich understanding and support global efforts to enhance equity and holistic development through culturally rooted play. Ultimately, this study advocates strategically including traditional games as essential

components of early childhood education transitions worldwide.

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APENDIX

Appendix 1. Traditional Games Used in the Study

Name of Game	Description (Brief Explanation and How to Play)	Visual
<i>Bakiak Kelapa</i>	Children walk in pairs wearing clogs made from coconut shells, coordinating to maintain balance and avoid falling. This game requires cooperation and communication to move synchronously.	 <p>A photograph showing children in orange shirts and blue pants walking in pairs on a paved area. They are wearing clogs made from coconut shells. A woman in a red shirt and white headscarf is supervising them. The background shows a park-like setting with trees and a banner that says 'Bermain Bakiak Kelapa'.</p>
<i>Dende-dende</i>	Children hop sequentially on numbered squares drawn on the ground using one foot, following rules and turns. They must maintain balance and avoid stepping on lines or falling.	 <p>A photograph showing children in yellow and blue outfits hopping on numbered squares drawn on the ground. A woman in a white headscarf and blue shirt is supervising them. The background shows a park-like setting with trees and a banner.</p>
<i>Lompat Karet</i>	Two children hold a rubber rope stretched and rhythmically swung, while others take turns jumping over it in time with the rhythm. This develops agility, balance, and gross motor coordination.	 <p>A photograph showing children in orange shirts jumping over a rubber rope held by two children. A woman in a white headscarf and blue shirt is supervising them. The background shows a park-like setting with trees and a banner.</p>
<i>Jengkal-jengkal</i>	Two children sit facing each other with their hands stretched out to measure the “jengkal” distance. Other children jump over the hands one by one, estimating distance and maintaining balance upon landing.	 <p>A photograph showing children in orange shirts jumping over the hands of two children sitting on the ground. A woman in a white headscarf and blue shirt is supervising them. The background shows a park-like setting with trees and a banner.</p>
<i>Toko-toko'diang</i>	Children line up holding the shoulders of the person in front and move forward together through a “gate” formed by two teachers or friends. The child at the back tries to avoid being caught when the line is broken.	 <p>A photograph showing children in orange shirts lined up, holding the shoulders of the person in front. They are moving forward through a “gate” formed by two women. A woman in a white headscarf and blue shirt is supervising them. The background shows a park-like setting with trees and a banner.</p>

<p><i>Maccele-celle</i> Children sit or stand in a circle and take turns throwing and catching a ball made from woven bamboo hanging overhead. The game trains hand-eye coordination, cooperation, and patience.</p>	 A group of children in yellow and orange uniforms are standing in a circle on a paved area. A colorful ball is suspended in the air above them. They appear to be participating in a game where they take turns throwing and catching the ball.
<p><i>Ma'hadang</i> Children form a circle holding hands while one or more try to enter the circle. Those inside coordinate their movements and strategize to block entries. This game develops teamwork, strategy, and gross motor skills.</p>	 A group of children in yellow and orange uniforms are standing in a circle on a grassy area, holding hands. Some children are in the center of the circle, and others are on the outside, trying to enter. This is a game of teamwork and strategy.
<p><i>Ma'gasing</i> Children take turns spinning tops and try to keep their tops spinning longer or knock down opponents' tops. The game enhances fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, strategy, and concentration.</p>	 A group of children in orange and blue uniforms are playing a game of spinning tops on a paved area. They are standing in a circle, and some are spinning tops on the ground. A man in a grey shirt is also visible, possibly a teacher or parent, watching the game.
