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The Application of Traditional Games to Enhance Children's Social Interaction at Kindergarten

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Abstract

Social interaction in early childhood develops through shared play, yet some children spend much of their time in solitary activities and rarely communicate or cooperate with peers. This classroom action research examined how the combined use of two traditional games, congklak and engklek, was implemented to support the social interaction of children in Group A at Sartika Kindergarten, Masalima Island, Liukang Kalmas District, Pangkajene dan Kepulauan Regency, Indonesia. The study followed the Kemmis and McTaggart model in two cycles, each consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting over three learning sessions, and involved all ten children in the group. Data were collected through structured observation with a four-level rating scale covering five indicators (verbal communication, group cooperation, tolerance and empathy, compliance with game rules, and social interaction activity), interviews with the class teacher, and documentation, and were analysed with descriptive percentages and interactive qualitative analysis. The classical achievement rose from 48.5% before the action (Starting to Develop) to 73.5% in Cycle I (Developing as Expected) and 83.0% in Cycle II (Developing Very Well), exceeding the 80% success criterion. The improvement in Cycle II followed reflection-based changes, namely heterogeneous grouping, rotating group leaders, structured distribution of play materials, positive reinforcement, and brief messages on ukhuwah before play. Because these strategies were introduced together with the games, the gains reflect the whole learning package rather than the games alone. Congklak and engklek, supported by deliberate teacher facilitation and Islamic values, offer a contextual way to strengthen children's social interaction in island kindergartens.

Keywords: traditional games; congklak; engklek; social interaction; classroom action research; early childhood.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a period in which children build the foundations of their social behaviour through daily experiences with adults and peers. Social interaction refers to reciprocal relationships in which children influence and respond to one another, and in early childhood it is shown in the ability to start and maintain contact with peers and teachers, to communicate, and to adjust behaviour to the group (Nurhayati et al., 2020). It is more than being near other children; it includes communicating ideas, taking part in shared tasks, waiting for a turn, respecting agreed rules, and responding to the feelings of others (Sugiyanti et al., 2023). Kindergarten offers a structured setting in which these abilities can be practised, especially through play that requires children to coordinate their actions with one another (Baroroh et al., 2022; Fadliany et al., 2025).

Developmental theory explains why these years are important for social learning. Erikson (1963) described children of preschool age as being in the stage of initiative versus guilt, in which they begin to plan activities, take part in shared play, and test their own role in a group. When this initiative is supported, children gain confidence and social competence; when opportunities to interact are restricted, they may become hesitant and withdrawn. Bandura's (1977) social learning theory adds that children learn much of their social behaviour by observing others. Observational learning involves attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation: children watch how peers wait, share, and talk, and they are more likely to repeat behaviour that is praised or that brings acceptance from the group. Both perspectives suggest that young children need frequent opportunities to interact in groups, together with adults who model and reinforce positive behaviour.

Social interaction in early childhood is also closely tied to other areas of development. When children talk with peers during play, they practise vocabulary and sentence structures; when they negotiate a rule, they practise reasoning; and when they wait for a turn, they practise self-control. Studies of play-based learning in Indonesian kindergartens therefore treat social interaction not as a separate subject but as a competence that grows through everyday activities, such as group projects, outdoor play, and shared routines (Fitriah & Pamungkas, 2023; Sugiyanti et al., 2023). Children who have difficulty interacting with peers may miss many of these learning opportunities, which is why early support in kindergarten is important.

Concern about children's social interaction has grown alongside the wider use of digital devices in families. Correlational studies with Indonesian preschool children have reported associations between screen time and children's social interaction and language skills (Afrillianti et al., 2026), and traditional games have been discussed as a way of returning children to face-to-face play in the digital era (Handayani & Munastiwi, 2022). These findings describe associations rather than causes, and they do not imply that every child who uses digital devices has limited social skills. They do, however, encourage teachers to provide play situations in which children must talk, negotiate, and cooperate directly.

Teachers can strengthen social interaction through several kinds of activity, including role play, storytelling, cooperative projects, and group games. Among these, games have the advantage of combining enjoyment with clear rules and shared goals. A game requires players to agree on how to begin, to take turns, and to accept the result, so children experience the social expectations of a group in a concrete way. Group games that are well facilitated by the teacher have been

reported to support cooperation and social skills in kindergarten children (Fitriah & Pamungkas, 2023; Hamidah et al., 2025).

This concern is also relevant in island and coastal areas. Sartika Kindergarten is located on Masalima Island, Pammas Village, Liukang Kalmas District, Pangkajene dan Kepulauan (Pangkep) Regency, South Sulawesi. Preliminary observations in Group A, together with conversations with the class teacher and several parents, indicated that many children preferred to play alone, were reluctant to lend play materials, found it difficult to wait for their turn, and often quarrelled when group rules were not followed. Teachers and parents linked part of this pattern to children's frequent use of mobile phones at home. Because these accounts were not measured systematically, they are treated in this study as contextual information that motivated the action, not as an established cause of the children's difficulties.

Traditional games are a promising learning medium for this situation. They are games passed on from one generation to the next within a community, and they carry the values and customs of that community, such as togetherness, honesty, and fairness (Damayanti et al., 2023; Himmawati & Ningsih, 2025). Unlike many digital games, they are usually played together and require direct communication among players, and their rules are simple enough to be learned by young children (Handayani & Munastiwi, 2022). Studies in Indonesian early childhood settings have reported that traditional games can support children's social and emotional development (Miskiyah et al., 2025; Ria & Musyaddad, 2019; Sudaryanti et al., 2024), cooperation (Hamidah et al., 2025), language (Cendana & Suryana, 2021), and character and national identity (Hidayanto, 2025). International work points in a similar direction: traditional games have been used to develop social skills in early childhood (Lathifah et al., 2025) and social-emotional skills for inclusion (Özcan & Sakız, 2025), and hopscotch has been introduced to early childhood educators as active play that also builds cultural awareness (Moore et al., 2025).

Two traditional games were selected for this study because their interaction structures complement each other. Congklak is a board game usually played by two children who sit facing each other and take turns distributing seeds or shells into the small holes and two larger store holes of a wooden board. When children play it, they practise counting and fine motor coordination as well as interpersonal skills such as waiting for a turn, distributing seeds fairly, and talking with their partner (Karuniah et al., 2023; Rambe et al., 2023; Trisnadewi et al., 2024). Studies have also reported that congklak can support children's social-emotional skills (Nurjani & Sopianti, 2022) and can be combined with other games to develop communication and social interaction (Srisuryani et al., 2023).

Engklek, in contrast, is an outdoor game in which children toss a marker (*gaco*) into squares drawn on the ground and hop through them on one foot. It trains balance and gross motor skills (Darmawati & Widyasari, 2022), but it also teaches children that actions have consequences: a marker that lands outside the lines means losing a turn. Queuing and boundary rules give children repeated practice in controlling their wishes, respecting the rights of others, and encouraging the child who is playing (Hayani, 2023; Wariyanti, 2022). Congklak therefore offers close interaction between two partners, whereas engklek offers interaction within a group.

The use of traditional games in kindergarten also contributes to the preservation of local culture. Many traditional games are becoming less familiar to children as modern toys and digital games become more common, and early childhood education is one of the places in which these games can be reintroduced and passed

on (Damayanti et al., 2023; Hidayanto, 2025). When teachers use traditional games as learning media, children learn both the social skills required to play and the cultural meaning of the games themselves. This dual function makes traditional games particularly suitable for kindergartens that wish to connect learning with the culture of the local community (Himmawati & Ningsih, 2025).

Ihya Ulum places early childhood learning within an Islamic educational perspective, which is also relevant to social interaction. Islam regards people as social beings and teaches *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *silaturahmi* (maintaining ties of kinship and friendship) as foundations of social life. Islamic values have been integrated into early childhood media and routines, for example to support children's emotion regulation (Iman & Diana, 2026). The principle of brotherhood is expressed in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Hujurat [49]: 10:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

> "The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear Allah that you may receive mercy." (Qur'an 49:10, Saheeh International translation)

The verse links brotherhood with making peace and settling disputes, which is directly relevant to children's play. In this study, its meaning was translated into simple messages before play, such as helping a friend, taking turns, and making peace after a quarrel, and the teacher reinforced these behaviours while the children played. It is useful to distinguish between the cultural values already embedded in congklak and engklek, such as fairness, togetherness, and respect for rules, and the Islamic pedagogical values that the teacher deliberately introduced, such as *ukhuwah*, honesty as part of good character (*akhlakul karimah*), and peaceful conflict resolution.

Previous studies have generally examined congklak or engklek separately, often in urban or semi-urban kindergartens, and have focused on emotional, motor, or numeracy outcomes (Darmawati & Widyasari, 2022; Karuniah et al., 2023; Rambe et al., 2023). Classroom action research has shown how traditional games can be improved from one cycle to the next (Cendana & Suryana, 2021; Delpiyani et al., 2025), but few studies have documented how two games with different interaction structures can be combined, how teachers adjust the activities after reflection, and how Islamic values can be built into the play routine of an island kindergarten. In this study, social interaction was observed through five indicators: (1) verbal communication, namely conveying ideas, responding to a peer's speech, and starting a conversation during play; (2) group cooperation, namely taking part in a shared task to reach a group goal; (3) tolerance and empathy, namely respecting differences, sharing play materials, and managing emotions; (4) compliance with game rules, namely following agreed procedures and accepting the consequences of breaking them; and (5) social interaction activity, namely engaging enthusiastically with others rather than playing alone. These indicators are consistent with the social aspects commonly observed in studies of traditional games in kindergarten (Hamidah et al., 2025; Srisuryani et al., 2023; Sugiyanti et al., 2023).

Based on this background, the study aimed to describe the implementation of the combined congklak and engklek games in Group A of Sartika Kindergarten and to examine changes in children's social interaction across two cycles of classroom action research. It also aimed to describe how the reflection after the first cycle

informed the changes made in the second cycle, and how Islamic values were incorporated into the play routine.

METHOD

Research Design

This study used classroom action research because its purpose was to improve children's social interaction directly within the learning process in their own classroom. The design followed the spiral model of Kemmis and McTaggart, in which each cycle consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Kemmis et al., 2014). Two cycles were conducted, and each cycle consisted of three learning sessions. The class teacher acted as a collaborator who implemented the activities together with the researcher, while the researcher planned the activities, observed the children, and led the reflection. Classroom action research designs with two cycles have been used in comparable studies of traditional games and social-emotional development in early childhood (Cendana & Suryana, 2021; Delpiyani et al., 2025).

Setting and Participants

The study was carried out in Group A of Sartika Kindergarten, Masalima Island, Pammas Village, Liukang Kalmas District, Pangkep Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The island is reached by sea from the regency capital, and the kindergarten serves children from the surrounding fishing community. All ten children in Group A took part, comprising four boys and six girls. The activities were carried out as part of the regular learning programme of the kindergarten with the knowledge of the principal and the class teacher. To protect the children's identity, they were coded S1 to S10, and no names or faces are published in this article. Engklek was played on level ground in the schoolyard under the supervision of the teacher and the researcher.

Action Procedures

Table 1 summarises the activities in each cycle. Every session followed the same structure. In the opening, the teacher gathered the children, reminded them of the rules of the game, and gave a short message about playing together well. In the core activity, the children played congklak in pairs indoors and engklek in small groups in the schoolyard. In the closing, the teacher and the children sat together and talked about how they had played, what had been difficult, and what they could do better the next time.

Table 1. Summary of actions in Cycle I and Cycle II.

Cycle	*Planning*	*Acting*	*Observing*	*Reflecting*
I	Lesson plans (RPPH) based on congklak and engklek; boards, seeds, chalk, and markers prepared; observation sheet compiled	Teacher introduced both games; children formed their own groups; congklak indoors in pairs, engklek in the schoolyard in groups	Children's interaction, communication, rule compliance, and problems during play recorded with the observation sheet and field notes	Scrambling for materials, unequal groups, and domination by a few children identified; four changes planned
II	RPPH revised: heterogeneous groups, rotating leaders, structured distribution of materials, reinforcement, and ukhuwah messages	Games played with clearer instructions; teacher facilitated dialogue, guided passive children, and praised cooperative behaviour	Same instrument used to rate the five indicators; interviews with the class teacher	Results compared with the 80% criterion and with Cycle I; cycles ended

In Cycle I, the teacher introduced both games and let the children form their own groups and pairs. The observations showed that children still scrambled for seeds and markers, that groups were unequal because friends chose each other, and that a few confident children dominated the turns while quieter children waited at the edge of the group. Some children took seeds from their partner's holes in congklak, and in engklek several children jumped the queue or argued about whose turn it was. During the reflection meeting, the teacher and the researcher discussed these notes and the observation scores and agreed on four changes for Cycle II.

In congklak, two children sat facing each other with the board between them. Each child took the seeds from one hole on their own side and distributed them one by one into the following holes, including their own store hole, and play passed to the partner according to the rules explained by the teacher. Because the turns alternate quickly, the game requires children to watch their partner, count together, and check that the seeds are distributed correctly. In engklek, a pattern of squares was drawn on the ground with chalk. Each child in turn tossed a marker into a square and hopped through the pattern on one foot, skipping the square with the marker, then picked it up on the way back. A child who stepped on a line or let the marker land outside the square lost the turn to the next child in the queue.

First, groups were formed heterogeneously by the teacher so that each group included children with higher and lower observation scores. Second, the role of group leader rotated in each session, so that quieter children such as S1, S5, and S8 also had the experience of leading the queue or explaining the rules. Third, play materials were distributed in a structured way: each congklak pair received an equal number of seeds, and each engklek group had its own marker and a fixed queue order. Fourth, before play the teacher gave a short message on *ukhuwah* based on Surah Al-Hujurat [49]: 10, explaining that friends are like brothers and sisters who help each other and make peace after a quarrel. During play she praised behaviours such as waiting, sharing, and encouraging a friend, and she gave appreciation stars at the end of each session.

Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The main instrument was an observation sheet for the five social interaction indicators.

Each indicator was rated on the four-level scale commonly used in Indonesian kindergartens: Not Yet Developed (*Belum Berkembang*, BB = 1), Starting to Develop (*Mulai Berkembang*, MB = 2), Developing as Expected (*Berkembang Sesuai Harapan*, BSH = 3), and Developing Very Well (*Berkembang Sangat Baik*, BSB = 4). The operational definitions and the behavioural criteria for each level are presented in Table 2. The criteria were formulated so that each level could be distinguished by observable behaviour; for example, a child who speaks only when prompted by the teacher was rated MB on verbal communication, whereas a child who starts and maintains conversation with peers was rated BSB.

Table 2. Indicators, operational definitions, and behavioural criteria of the observation instrument.

Indicator	***Operational definition***	***BB (1)***	***MB (2)***	***BSH (3)***	***BSB (4)***
Verbal communication	Conveys ideas, responds to a peer's speech, and starts conversation during play	Does not speak with peers during play	Speaks only when prompted by the teacher	Speaks with peers on own initiative but not consistently	Starts and maintains conversation with peers consistently
Group cooperation	Takes part in a shared task to reach a group goal	Does not join the group activity	Joins the group with teacher help	Joins and contributes on own initiative	Joins, contributes, and helps others to take part
Tolerance and empathy	Respects differences, shares materials, and manages emotions	Refuses to share or reacts with anger	Shares or calms down after a reminder	Shares and responds to a friend's feelings without reminders	Shares, comforts, or encourages peers consistently
Compliance with game rules	Follows agreed procedures and accepts consequences	Ignores the rules	Follows the rules after a reminder	Follows the rules independently	Follows the rules and reminds peers to do so
Social interaction activity	Engages enthusiastically with others instead of playing alone	Plays alone or watches	Joins others when invited	Joins others on own initiative	Actively invites and involves peers

Note. BB = Not Yet Developed; MB = Starting to Develop; BSH = Developing as Expected; BSB = Developing Very Well.

The researcher and the class teacher observed the children during each session and recorded the ratings together with brief field notes. Semi-structured interviews with the class teacher were conducted at the end of each cycle to confirm changes in children's everyday behaviour in and outside the classroom, for example during break time. Documentation consisted of field notes, lesson plans (RPPH), and photographs of the activities.

Each child was observed during both games in every session, and the ratings for the five indicators were based on behaviour shown across the session rather than on a single moment. The individual scores and the indicator percentages reported in the Results were calculated from the same ratings, so that the classical achievement could be obtained either from the ten individual percentages or from the five indicator percentages. Field notes recorded specific events, such as a dispute over seeds, a

child helping a friend who fell, or a child who stood apart from the group, and were used to explain the scores.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed descriptively. For each child, the total score of the five indicators (maximum 5 × 4 = 20) was converted into an individual percentage using the formula P = (score obtained / maximum score) × 100%. The classical achievement of the group was calculated as the mean of the ten individual percentages, which is equal to the mean of the five indicator percentages. Indicator achievement was calculated as the total score of all children on an indicator divided by the maximum score for that indicator, multiplied by 100%. Percentages were interpreted as BB (0–25%), MB (26–50%), BSH (51–75%), and BSB (76–100%). The action was considered successful when the classical achievement reached at least 80%.

Qualitative data from observation notes, interviews, and documentation were analysed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). The notes were grouped according to the five indicators and the two games, so that patterns of behaviour could be compared between the cycles. The findings from observation, interviews, and documentation were then compared with each other to strengthen their credibility.

RESULTS

Pre-action Condition

Before the action, the classical achievement of the ten children was 48.5%, which falls in the Starting to Develop (MB) category. Most children played on their own or only with one close friend, rarely started a conversation with peers, and needed repeated reminders to wait for their turn. When the teacher asked them to play in groups, several children stood apart or returned to playing alone after a few minutes. Disputes about toys were common and were usually resolved only when the teacher intervened.

Cycle I

In Cycle I, the children were introduced to congklak and engklek. They showed interest in both games and began to talk with their partners, especially while counting seeds in congklak. However, the observation notes recorded several problems: some children took seeds from their partner’s holes, disputes arose about whose turn it was, engklek groups were dominated by a few confident children, and some children jumped the queue. The classical achievement increased to 73.5% (BSH), but it did not yet reach the 80% success criterion. The indicator results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Achievement of social interaction indicators in Cycle I and Cycle II.

Social interaction indicator	*Cycle I (%)*	*Category*	*Cycle II (%)*	*Category*
Verbal communication	73.0	BSH	83.5	BSB
Group cooperation	71.5	BSH	81.0	BSB
Tolerance and empathy	74.0	BSH	84.0	BSB
Compliance with game rules	72.5	BSH	82.5	BSB
Social interaction activity	76.5	BSB	84.0	BSB
Classical achievement	73.5	BSH	83.0	BSB

Note. BSH = Developing as Expected (51–75%); BSB = Developing Very Well (76–100%).

Table 3 shows that in Cycle I all five indicators were in a similar range, from 71.5% for group cooperation to 76.5% for social interaction activity. Group cooperation was the lowest indicator, which is consistent with the field notes showing that groups formed by the children themselves were unequal and that a few children dominated the activity. Social interaction activity was the highest, indicating that the children were already eager to join the games, even if they did not yet cooperate smoothly. Only social interaction activity reached the BSB range; the other four indicators remained in the BSH category.

Cycle II

After the four changes described in the Method section, the children's interaction became more orderly and more inclusive. In congklak, pairs counted seeds aloud together and reminded each other of the rules instead of quarrelling. In engklek, the rotating leaders called the next player in the queue, and children cheered for a friend who lost balance or helped to pick up a marker that had fallen outside the lines. The class teacher reported in the interview that several children had started to invite classmates to play during break time and to lend their stationery more readily. The classical achievement increased to 83.0% (BSB), exceeding the success criterion, and all five indicators were in the BSB category (Table 3). Verbal communication increased by 10.5 percentage points, tolerance and empathy and rule compliance by 10.0 points each, group cooperation by 9.5 points, and social interaction activity by 7.5 points.

Table 4 shows the individual results. Every child's percentage increased from Cycle I to Cycle II, with gains ranging from 5 to 20 percentage points. The largest gains occurred in children who had the lowest scores in Cycle I, namely S5 (from 50% to 70%) and S1 (from 60% to 75%). In Cycle I, four children (S3, S6, S7, and S9) had reached the BSB category; in Cycle II, seven children were in BSB, while S1, S5, and S8 remained in the BSH category. Figure 1 displays the same data graphically.

Table 4. Individual social interaction achievement of the children in Cycle I and Cycle II.

Child	*Cycle I (%)*	*Category*	*Cycle II (%)*	*Category*	*Gain (points)*
S1	60	BSH	75	BSH	+15
S2	70	BSH	80	BSB	+10
S3	80	BSB	85	BSB	+5
S4	75	BSH	85	BSB	+10
S5	50	MB	70	BSH	+20
S6	90	BSB	95	BSB	+5
S7	80	BSB	85	BSB	+5
S8	65	BSH	75	BSH	+10
S9	95	BSB	100	BSB	+5
S10	70	BSH	80	BSB	+10
Classical achievement	73.5	BSH	83.0	BSB	+9.5

Note. Individual percentage = total score of the five indicators / 20 × 100%.

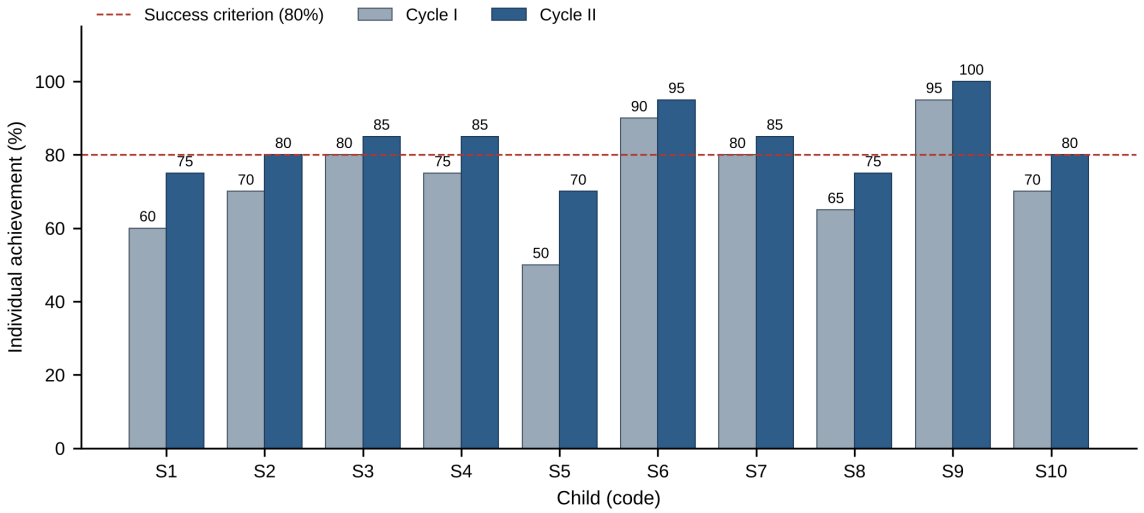

Figure 1. Individual social interaction achievement of the ten children in Cycle I and Cycle II. The dashed line marks the 80% success criterion.

Figure 1 shows that the gains were not evenly distributed. Children who already had high scores in Cycle I, such as S6 and S9, improved by only five points because they were close to the maximum, whereas children with lower scores improved more. The spread between the highest and lowest scores narrowed from 45 points in Cycle I (50% to 95%) to 30 points in Cycle II (70% to 100%), suggesting that the changes in Cycle II helped the less active children more than the already active ones.

The qualitative data support this pattern. In the Cycle I field notes, disputes over seeds and queue order were recorded in most sessions, and several children needed the teacher to settle them. In Cycle II, such disputes were recorded less often, and when they occurred, children more frequently settled them by themselves, for example by agreeing to count the seeds again or by letting the group leader decide whose turn it was.

Because the success criterion was reached in Cycle II and the observations showed that the new routines were followed consistently, the cycles were ended. The

three children who remained in the BSH category still needed support, particularly in starting conversations and staying in the group when they had to wait.

DISCUSSION

Changes Between the Cycles

The results show an observed improvement in the social interaction of the children in Group A across the two cycles, from 48.5% before the action to 73.5% in Cycle I and 83.0% in Cycle II. Because the study used descriptive percentages within a classroom action research design and did not include a control group or inferential testing, the improvement should be understood as a substantial change in the observed classroom behaviour of these ten children, not as a statistically significant or generalisable effect. Similar patterns of gradual improvement across cycles have been reported in classroom action research on traditional games in kindergarten (Cendana & Suryana, 2021; Delpiyani et al., 2025).

The change from Cycle I to Cycle II cannot be attributed to the traditional games alone. In Cycle II, the teacher introduced heterogeneous grouping, rotating leadership, structured distribution of materials, positive reinforcement, and messages on *ukhuwah* at the same time. The games provided the situations in which children had to interact, while the teacher's strategies shaped how fairly and how inclusively those interactions took place. The results therefore describe a learning package in which traditional games were combined with deliberate facilitation. This interpretation is consistent with studies that emphasise the teacher's role in guiding children before, during, and after traditional games (Lathifah et al., 2025; Srisuryani et al., 2023).

The pattern of the indicators supports this interpretation. Group cooperation was the lowest indicator in Cycle I and increased by 9.5 points in Cycle II, which coincides with the change from self-selected to teacher-formed heterogeneous groups. Social interaction activity, by contrast, was already relatively high in Cycle I and increased the least. This suggests that the games themselves were attractive enough to draw the children into play from the beginning, while the quality of their cooperation depended more on how the teacher organised the groups and the turns.

The improvement in verbal communication, which showed the largest gain among the indicators, is also noteworthy. Both games create natural reasons to speak: in congklak, children count aloud and announce the end of a turn, while in engklek they call the next player, cheer, and remind each other of the boundaries. In Cycle II, the rotating leaders were asked to explain the rules and call their friends, which gave quieter children a specific reason to speak in front of the group. This suggests that communication in early childhood can be supported by giving children meaningful roles in an activity, not only by asking them to talk.

Complementary Roles of Congklak and Engklek

The two games appeared to support different indicators. Congklak placed two children face to face for a longer period and required them to count, take turns, and agree on the distribution of seeds. These features gave children repeated practice in verbal communication, patience, and negotiation with one partner, which is in line with reports that congklak supports social-emotional skills and communication (Nurjani & Sopianti, 2022; Srisuryani et al., 2023). Engklek, in contrast, involved a whole group, a queue, and clear boundary rules. It gave children practice in following rules, accepting the consequence of a mistake, waiting in line, and encouraging peers, which corresponds to the social-emotional benefits reported for engklek

(Hayani, 2023; Wariyanti, 2022). Taken together, the two games offered interaction with one partner and interaction within a group, so that children could practise different social demands within the same theme.

The individual results also indicate that the games were not equally easy for every child. Children such as S6 and S9, who already had high scores, quickly took the lead in both games. Children with lower scores, such as S1 and S5, benefited most when the teacher assigned them roles, such as leading the queue or explaining one rule, and paired them with supportive partners. These observations suggest that the structure of the game and the support of the teacher need to be adjusted to each child, as has also been reported in studies of cooperation through group play (Fitriah & Pamungkas, 2023; Hamidah et al., 2025).

Social Learning in Group Play

The changes can be explained through Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. In both games, children were players and observers at the same time. Quieter children watched how more confident peers counted aloud, waited, and encouraged others, and they began to imitate these behaviours when the teacher gave them a role and praised their attempts. The appreciation stars and verbal praise in Cycle II functioned as reinforcement that made cooperative behaviour more visible and more valued in the group. From Erikson's (1963) perspective, the rotating leadership gave children who usually hesitated an opportunity to take initiative in a safe setting, which may explain why the children with the lowest scores in Cycle I showed the largest gains.

Heterogeneous grouping also created conditions for peer support. When children with higher and lower scores played together, the more confident children often explained the rules or demonstrated a move, while the quieter children practised under their guidance. This kind of peer tutoring is consistent with findings that traditional games naturally involve children in social interaction and cooperation (Baroroh et al., 2022; Hamidah et al., 2025), and it shows that the composition of the group matters as much as the choice of game.

The improvement in tolerance and empathy and in rule compliance can also be linked to the clear consequences built into the games. In engklek, a child who steps on a line loses a turn, and in congklak a child who miscounts has to accept the result. These consequences are agreed by all players before the game starts, so they are experienced as fair rather than as punishment from the teacher. Learning to accept such consequences, and to comfort a friend who loses, is an important part of emotional regulation in early childhood (Miskiyah et al., 2025; Sudaryanti et al., 2024). The teacher's praise for children who accepted the rules calmly reinforced this learning.

Islamic Values in the Play Routine

The integration of Islamic values gave the play routine a clear moral frame. Before play, the teacher reminded the children that friends are like brothers and sisters, as taught in Surah Al-Hujurat [49]: 10, and asked them to help a friend who fell and to make peace after a quarrel. During play, the teacher praised children who returned seeds they had taken by mistake, who waited for their turn, or who cheered for a friend. In this way, the value of *ukhuwah* was connected to concrete behaviour that the children could practise and that the teacher could observe, rather than delivered only as a verbal instruction. This approach is consistent with efforts to

embed Islamic values in early childhood learning media and routines (Iman & Diana, 2026). At the same time, the cultural values that are already part of the games, such as fairness in distributing seeds and respect for the boundaries in engklek, provided a natural context for these messages (Himmawati & Ningsih, 2025).

The distinction between cultural and Islamic values is also useful for teachers. The rules of congklak and engklek already teach fairness and patience, but they do not by themselves explain why these behaviours matter. The short messages on *ukhuwah* gave the children a reason that was meaningful in their religious community: being fair and kind to a friend is part of being a good Muslim. Combining the two kinds of values allowed the teacher to connect play, culture, and faith in a way that young children could understand.

The Island Context and Implications for Practice

The island setting of Sartika Kindergarten was relevant to the action. Traditional games require only simple materials, such as seeds, shells, chalk, or a drawing on the ground, which are easy to obtain on Masalima Island, and they can be played in the open spaces around the school. The study therefore suggests that traditional games are a practical choice for kindergartens with limited learning resources. Claims about the wider culture of the island community, however, are based on the researchers' observations and the teacher's accounts and should be read as contextual interpretation. The role of digital devices in children's play at home was also not measured; the association between screen time and social interaction reported in other preschool samples (Afrillianti et al., 2026) cannot be assumed to explain the behaviour of these particular children.

For practice, the findings suggest that teachers who use traditional games to support social interaction should plan the grouping rather than leaving it to the children, give quieter children specific roles, distribute materials fairly, and reinforce cooperative behaviour immediately. Short reflection sessions at the end of play, in which children talk about how they played together, can also help them become aware of the social skills they are practising. These steps require few resources and can be adapted to other traditional games familiar in the local community, in line with efforts to preserve traditional games through early childhood education (Damayanti et al., 2023; Hidayanto, 2025).

Limitations

This study has several limitations. It involved only ten children in one kindergarten, so the results cannot be generalised to other settings. The observations were conducted by the researcher and the class teacher, who were also responsible for the action, and inter-observer agreement was not reported, which may have influenced the ratings. The pre-action condition was reported only as a classical percentage, so changes in each indicator could be compared only between Cycle I and Cycle II. Several strategies were introduced together in Cycle II, so the contribution of each strategy cannot be separated. The study also did not include a follow-up observation to examine whether the changes lasted after the action ended. Future studies could compare congklak and engklek separately, use independent observers, report inter-observer agreement, and include a follow-up phase or a comparison group.

CONCLUSION

The combined application of congklak and engklek, supported by teacher facilitation and Islamic values, was accompanied by an improvement in the social interaction of Group A children at Sartika Kindergarten, Masalima Island. The classical achievement increased from 48.5% before the action to 73.5% in Cycle I and 83.0% in Cycle II, exceeding the 80% success criterion, and all five indicators reached the BSB category in Cycle II. The changes made after the Cycle I reflection, namely heterogeneous grouping, rotating group leaders, structured distribution of materials, positive reinforcement, and brief messages on *ukhuwah* based on Surah Al-Hujurat [49]: 10, were important parts of this improvement. Congklak mainly provided practice in communication and turn-taking with one partner, while engklek provided practice in following rules, queuing, and encouraging peers within a group.

Kindergarten teachers, particularly in island and coastal areas, may use congklak and engklek as low-cost learning media for social interaction, provided that the games are accompanied by clear rules, planned grouping, roles for quieter children, and reinforcement of the values of brotherhood and fairness. Future research should test the two games separately, involve larger groups of children, use independent observers, and examine whether the changes are maintained over time.

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