

Using traditional games to increase active participation in physical education

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to address the issue of low student participation in Physical Education by implementing the traditional game Gobak Sodor as an intervention. The study explores its effectiveness in enhancing students' active engagement during Physical Education lessons. Conducted in Grade VII.6 of State Junior High School 13 Palembang, the study involved 32 students (16 boys and 16 girls). The research employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design using the Kemmis and McTaggart spiral model, consisting of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. The primary instruments for data collection were observation sheets to assess student participation and documentation. The results revealed a significant improvement in student participation, increasing from 34% in the pre-cycle to 78% in the second cycle. The integration of Gobak Sodor successfully fostered a joyful learning environment, encouraging students to be more active, cooperative, and socially engaged. These findings indicate that traditional games like Gobak Sodor can effectively enhance student involvement in physical activity. This study contributes to the development of Physical Education teaching methods by incorporating enjoyable and culturally meaningful activities as practical strategies to increase student participation.

Keywords: active participation, traditional games, physical education

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INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental pillar of sustainable human development. It guides individuals in realizing their full potential across cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Beyond merely transmitting knowledge, education is a process of internalizing values, building character, and enhancing overall quality of life. According to [Rahman et al. \(2022\)](#), education is a conscious effort to nurture individual potential in alignment with cultural values and the needs of society. Within this broader framework, physical education plays a crucial role in fostering the development of well-rounded individuals.

In formal education settings, learning must not only emphasize academic achievement but also support students' physical and health development. Physical Education, Sports, and Health (PESH) is a key subject at the junior high school level that aims to develop students' physical fitness, mental well-being, and social competence. [Mustafa \(2022\)](#) emphasizes that physical education significantly contributes to improving students' quality of life through

active lifestyles and physical literacy. The subject also cultivates essential values such as responsibility, discipline, and cooperation—elements critical to character formation and daily functioning. Hence, PE should not be viewed as a supplementary or recreational subject, but as a strategic and integral component of the education system. However, the implementation of PE in schools often encounters several challenges. One pressing issue is the low level of active student participation in physical fitness activities. Conventional teaching approaches that rely heavily on lecture-based instruction, lack of variety, and passive learning methods frequently lead to boredom and disengagement among students ([Damanik & Sinaga, 2021](#)). This was evident in Grade VII.6 of State Junior High School 13 Palembang, where observations indicated that many students were passive, unmotivated, and reluctant to participate in physical fitness sessions. These conditions underscore the need for innovative teaching strategies that are both contextually relevant and developmentally appropriate.

One promising approach to revitalizing PE instruction is the integration of traditional games into the learning process. Traditional games, as part of Indonesia's rich cultural heritage, hold significant pedagogical value. They offer meaningful opportunities for movement, social engagement, and character development. In the modern digital era, children are increasingly drawn to online games, which often reduce social interaction and lead to issues such as isolation, low self-confidence, and limited emotional growth. [Cahyani et al. \(2023\)](#) emphasize that traditional games, as part of Indonesia's cultural heritage, offer a meaningful way to instill character values such as cooperation, discipline, and responsibility—values that are often eroded by excessive digital gameplay. As modern games dominate children's play preferences, traditional games—which embody cultural, moral, and social values—are gradually being forgotten ([Prayitno et al., 2022](#)). Yet, these games hold important pedagogical potential for fostering character in school-aged children. [Hartanto et al. \(2021\)](#) note that traditional games encourage social interaction, respect for others, and the reinforcement of cultural identity within the classroom. In addition, such games promote core values like cooperation, honesty, and discipline ([Damanik & Sinaga, 2021](#)). [Irawan et al. \(2021\)](#) further highlight that traditional games are effective in enhancing children's gross motor skills, coordination, and overall physical fitness.

Among these traditional games, Gobak Sodor stands out for its educational potential. The game requires players to develop physical fitness components such as speed, endurance, and agility while fostering strategic thinking and teamwork. Students take turns defending and attacking within a grid-like area, making it both physically demanding and socially engaging. [Iwandana et al. \(2021\)](#) found that traditional games like Gobak Sodor contribute to the

development of discipline, sportsmanship, and social cohesion in PE contexts. The traditional game *Gobak Sodor* not only promotes physical skills like agility and coordination ([Prasetyo, Destriana, & Segar, 2025](#)) but also holds strong educational and character-building values. [La Ode \(2021\)](#) emphasized that *Gobak Sodor* fosters self-confidence, cooperation, leadership, honesty, responsibility, physical health, and sportsmanship. A national survey revealed that 92.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that *Gobak Sodor* carries these values, indicating broad societal recognition of its potential in character education.

[Subagio et al. \(2024\)](#) argue that *Gobak Sodor* also fosters creativity, independence, and cooperation, serving as a culturally grounded alternative to modern digital games that often encourage individualism and isolation. As emphasized by [Rianto & Yuliananingsih \(2021\)](#), traditional games such as *gobak sodor* foster core character traits like patience, empathy, and discipline. These values are essential for holistic education and should be integrated meaningfully into school programs. As noted by [Perdima & Kristiawan \(2021\)](#), *Hadang*—another name for *Gobak Sodor*—has been shown to cultivate important character values such as discipline, honesty, responsibility, and religious integrity in elementary students.

Empirical studies further support the educational value of traditional games. [Yilmaz et al. \(2022\)](#) reported that participation in traditional action games is positively associated with enhanced social problem-solving skills and collaborative behavior among students. Irawan et al. (2021) documented a significant increase in motor skill development through repeated engagement with traditional games, with students classified as “very developed” increasing from 33% to 83%. In addition, [Aliriad et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that the integration of traditional games significantly improved students’ motor skills, cognitive abilities, and motivation to learn physical education. Their study showed that hands-on experience in traditional games contributed not only to students’ physical coordination, speed, and strength, but also fostered cognitive growth through strategy use, situational analysis, and spatial awareness. Furthermore, [Kuriawan et al. \(2024\)](#) found that the use of *Gobak Sodor* in classroom action research improved students’ locomotor skills—specifically balance, agility, and speed—with learning mastery reaching 100% by the second cycle. These findings highlight how traditional games can serve as both cultural tools and pedagogical strategies in PE learning.

Despite these promising outcomes, few studies have systematically explored the integration of traditional games like *Gobak Sodor* using a structured Classroom Action Research (CAR) model—presenting a clear opportunity for pedagogical innovation. Given this context, the present classroom action research seeks to examine the effectiveness of

incorporating the traditional game Gobak Sodor in increasing students' active participation in physical fitness activities. The study is expected to make both theoretical and practical contributions by supporting the development of culturally responsive, engaging, and student-centered instructional strategies in physical education.

METHODS

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which consists of a cyclical process involving four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. This model was selected due to its suitability for solving practical problems in classroom settings through iterative improvements. The research was conducted in two cycles, each of which aimed to improve students' active participation in physical fitness activities through the integration of the traditional game *Gobak Sodor*.

The participants of this study were 32 students from Grade VII.6 at State Junior High School 13 Palembang during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The class consisted of 16 male and 16 female students. This class was purposively selected based on preliminary observations indicating low levels of active participation in physical education activities. The uniformity of observed challenges among students made this group representative for classroom-based intervention.

The study began with a preliminary observation to identify the root cause of low student participation in physical fitness activities. Based on the findings, the researchers collaboratively developed a PE learning module that incorporated the game *Gobak Sodor* and aligned it with the curriculum objectives. In the planning stage, learning activities and observation instruments were prepared. In the action stage, the module was implemented in class while researchers and the PE teacher facilitated and supervised the game-based learning. During the observation stage, data were collected using prepared observation sheets. Finally, in the reflection stage, researchers and the collaborating teacher reviewed and analyzed the data to assess the effectiveness of the intervention and planned adjustments for the next cycle. This process was repeated in the second cycle with improvements made based on the evaluation of the first.

The primary data collection instrument was an observation sheet designed to measure four indicators of student participation: enthusiasm, cooperation, discipline, and responsibility. Each indicator was rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). Observations were conducted jointly by the researcher and the collaborating PE teacher during each session. Additionally, supporting documentation—including photos and videos—was collected to strengthen the qualitative interpretation of student engagement during activities.

Data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data from the observation sheets were processed using a percentage formula to assess the level of student participation:

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100$$

Where:

P = Percentage of active participation

f = Total participation score obtained

n = Maximum possible score

The success criterion was set at a minimum of 70% of students achieving a “good” level of active participation. Qualitative data, such as visual documentation and field notes, were analyzed to support and contextualize the numerical findings. This mixed-method approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the intervention’s effectiveness in fostering a more active and engaging physical education environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Before the intervention was implemented, a pre-cycle observation was conducted to examine the initial conditions of student participation in PE learning. The observation aimed to identify the level of student engagement, particularly during fitness-oriented activities. The results revealed that only 11 out of 32 students (34%) demonstrated “good” participation, while 15 students (47%) were in the “fair” category, and the remaining 6 students (19%) fell into the “poor” category. These findings indicated that the majority of students were not actively involved in the learning process. They tended to be passive, showed minimal enthusiasm, and were reluctant to participate in group or movement activities. Several students appeared distracted or hesitant to follow instructions, and the classroom atmosphere lacked the energy typically associated with effective physical education.

In Cycle I, the researcher introduced the traditional game *Gobak Sodor* as the main instructional strategy to improve student participation. This intervention was carried out in accordance with the designed learning module, which included clear objectives, structured rules, and collaborative group roles. The implementation of *Gobak Sodor* was intended to promote not only physical movement but also interactive and engaging learning. Observation results during Cycle I showed a noticeable improvement in students' participation levels. A total of 17 students (53%) were now categorized as having “good” participation, 13 students

(41%) were “fair,” and only 2 students (6%) remained in the “poor” category. This indicated that the integration of the game had begun to create a more dynamic learning atmosphere, fostering increased enthusiasm and peer interaction. However, reflections on this cycle also revealed that several students still displayed inconsistent involvement. Some were reluctant to take leadership roles or had difficulty following strategic elements of the game. This suggested that further refinement of the instructional approach was needed.

Responding to these findings, the researcher implemented several improvements in Cycle II. Key changes included more explicit instructional guidance, better group composition to balance skill levels, and the use of motivational reinforcement to boost student confidence and accountability. These refinements aimed to create a more supportive and inclusive environment where every student could participate meaningfully. The results of Cycle II demonstrated a substantial increase in student engagement. A total of 25 students (78%) were observed in the “good” category, while the remaining 7 students (22%) were classified as “fair.” Notably, no students were categorized as “poor,” indicating that all students had reached at least a moderate level of participation. Students appeared more confident, motivated, and physically active throughout the learning session. They demonstrated improved cooperation, communication, and adherence to rules, which positively influenced the overall classroom climate.

This consistent improvement across the cycles confirms the effectiveness of *Gobak Sodor* in increasing student participation. The shift from passive to active learning behavior was evident not only in numerical gains but also in qualitative observations of student behavior, such as increased verbal interaction, spontaneous collaboration, and visible enjoyment during the learning process. The learning environment became more lively and inclusive, fulfilling both the physical and social goals of physical education. The development of students’ active participation from the pre-cycle to Cycle II is illustrated in the following figure:

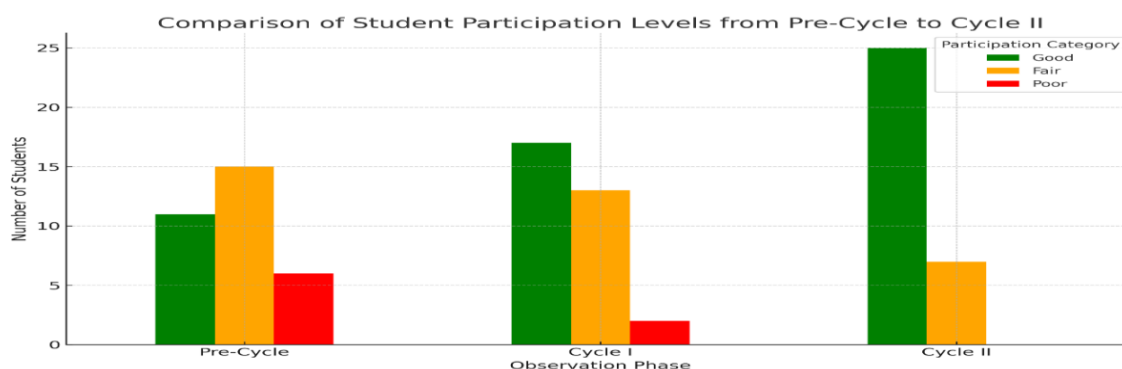


Figure 1. In the pre Comparison of Student Participation Levels from Pre-Cycle to Cycle II

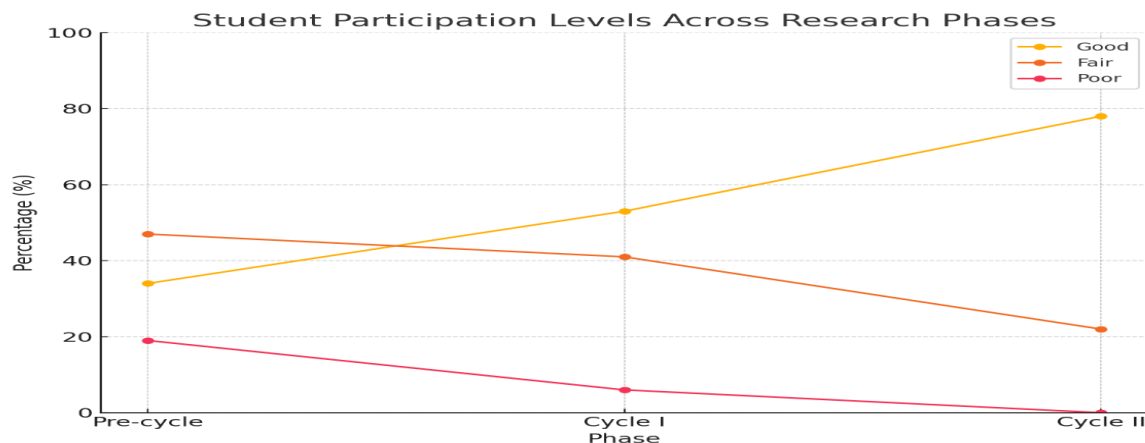


Figure 2. Line Graph “Good”, “Fair”, and “Poor” percentages across Pre-Cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II

As shown, the percentage of students in the “good” participation category increased from 34% in the pre-cycle to 53% in Cycle I, and further to 78% in Cycle II. Meanwhile, the proportion of students categorized as “poor” decreased significantly, reaching 0% in Cycle II. These results reflect the progressive and positive impact of using traditional games as a pedagogical tool in PE classes, particularly in enhancing students’ active participation.

Discussion

The progression of student participation from the pre-cycle to Cycle II clearly illustrates the positive impact of integrating *Gobak Sodor* into physical education learning. This traditional game successfully fostered a more engaging and inclusive learning environment that encouraged active movement, teamwork, and character development. These findings are consistent with [Hartanto et al. \(2021\)](#), who assert that traditional games strengthen social bonds and promote culturally responsive learning in classroom settings. Similarly, [Fajarwati & Sceisariya \(2020\)](#) demonstrated that the use of *Gobak Sodor* in PE lessons significantly increased student interest in locomotor activities, particularly in running, with student engagement rising from 65% to 87% following the intervention. Moreover, efforts to reintroduce *Gobak Sodor* into the school curriculum have shown positive results. [Risma & Sondarika \(2022\)](#) found that socializing *Gobak Sodor* among teachers and students in elementary schools helped promote its educational value and encouraged its integration into PE lessons, strengthening both local identity and holistic child development.

The results also support the study by [Irawan et al. \(2021\)](#), which found that repeated exposure to traditional games significantly improves children's gross motor skills—including coordination, agility, and balance. This is further corroborated by [Flaviani et al. \(2023\)](#), who reported that *Gobak Sodor* enhances agility in athletes and contributes positively to their

confidence and enjoyment during sports training. These outcomes confirm the game's potential not only in general PE settings but also in supporting sports-specific physical conditioning. As students participated in structured *Gobak Sodor* sessions, they adapted to its rules, strategies, and physical demands, reflecting both skill acquisition and increased enthusiasm.

In terms of character development, [Damanik & Sinaga \(2021\)](#) highlighted that traditional games foster values such as responsibility, honesty, and discipline—all of which were increasingly evident throughout the two research cycles. [Wigati et al. \(2024\)](#) further emphasized that *Gobak Sodor* nurtures a broad range of character traits among high school students, including self-confidence, respect, solidarity, and cooperation. These findings reinforce the game's educational value beyond physical skills, showcasing its role in shaping positive student behavior and social-emotional competencies.

The notable improvement in active participation—from 34% in the pre-cycle to 78% in Cycle II—also aligns with the findings of [Iwandana et al. \(2021\)](#), who concluded that traditional games enhance emotional engagement and a sense of belonging, thereby encouraging sustained involvement. This emotional connection is particularly relevant for Generation Z students, whose motivation and meaningful interaction are key to successful learning. The observed increase in students' cooperative and responsible behavior during group activities also reflects previous findings. [Sari et al. \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that *Gobak Sodor* significantly improved students' behavior in Mataram, particularly in aspects of teamwork and conflict resolution.

Their study showed a statistically significant improvement in post-test scores, highlighting the game's role in shaping positive attitudes and social interaction. With the rapid and revolutionary changes in modern life, many traditional cultural practices—including children's games—have begun to fade into obscurity. Modern digital games, which are often individualistic and passive, are increasingly favored by children today, despite their limited contribution to motor and cognitive development. [Körei et al. \(2021\)](#), argue that game-based learning can enrich every phase of the educational process by increasing enjoyment, autonomy, and learning outcomes—making it a powerful strategy in modern education.

Furthermore, *Gobak Sodor* carries deep philosophical and cultural meaning, serving as a relevant pedagogical tool in the face of challenges posed by rapid technological advancement and shifting student behavior. As noted by [Parengkuan \(2024\)](#), the game encapsulates traditional values that can be innovatively integrated into school learning to address behavioral and social challenges. From a practical perspective, traditional games like *Gobak Sodor* offer low-cost, easily accessible, and culturally meaningful alternatives to conventional fitness

activities. [Yilmaz et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasized that such games promote social problem-solving, peer cooperation, and behavioral engagement across different cultural contexts. These results align with [Fairuz & Masudah \(2024\)](#), who demonstrated that *Gobak Sodor* enhances interpersonal intelligence in early childhood, thereby supporting collaborative behavior and social interaction from a young age.

In addition to improving physical and social skills, traditional games have also been shown to contribute meaningfully to students' emotional and moral development. For example, [Iswinarti & Wahyu Nur Laily \(2024\)](#) found that playing *Gobak Sodor* and *Bentengan* significantly increased junior high school students' moral emotions, an essential component for making ethical decisions and avoiding repeated misconduct. This highlights the broader psychosocial benefits of traditional games, making them a powerful tool for character education in school settings.

Moreover, traditional games are not merely for recreation; they are intergenerational carriers of values embedded in symbolic movements, spoken traditions, and communal practices. [Suryawan \(2020\)](#) highlights that traditional games represent local wisdom that fosters cultural preservation and character education, preparing children for adulthood through meaningful, symbolic play. [Dewi \(2023\)](#) supports this view, showing that *Gobak Sodor* helps young learners develop emotional awareness, conflict resolution skills, and empathy—critical elements of social-emotional learning.

These findings are consistent with [Mantsuro et al. \(2022\)](#), who demonstrated that *Gobak Sodor* instills religious values, democratic practices, and mutual respect among junior high school students, making it an effective medium for character education through physical activity. Similarly, [Regina et al. \(2023\)](#) found that the *Gobak Sodor* game not only enhances student engagement and motivation at Singkawang, but also fosters key character values such as honesty, sportsmanship, cooperation, strategic thinking, and leadership. These character values are essential for shaping students' behavior and social interaction both in and outside the classroom environment.

The game's accessible nature and the joy it brings to students further reinforce its role as a culturally relevant and pedagogically sound tool in physical education. Furthermore, traditional games contribute to creating a joyful and engaging classroom atmosphere, which helps reduce boredom and increase learning motivation. His qualitative research revealed that students demonstrated a noticeable improvement in energy and enthusiasm during lessons after the game was introduced, highlighting the game's role in transforming monotonous classroom routines into dynamic and interactive experiences. This study also supports the findings of

[Sholikin et al. \(2022\)](#), who identified five core character values—religiosity, nationalism, independence, cooperation, and integrity—embedded in traditional games like Gobak Sodor and Egrang. These values reflect national education goals and further emphasize the cultural and pedagogical significance of traditional games in shaping students' character.

In conclusion, the integration of traditional games like *Gobak Sodor* in PE not only increases physical participation but also achieves broader educational objectives such as inclusion, engagement, and character development. Embedding culturally relevant games into structured physical education lessons provides a strategic, student-centered approach to revitalizing PE in a way that is both meaningful and enjoyable.

CONCLUSION

This classroom action research concludes that the integration of the traditional game *Gobak Sodor* significantly increased students' active participation in physical education learning among Grade VII.6 students at State Junior High School 13 Palembang. Through two research cycles, student engagement improved from 34% in the pre-cycle to 78% in Cycle II, with all students achieving at least a fair level of participation. The implementation of *Gobak Sodor* created a more enjoyable, inclusive, and dynamic learning environment, while also fostering essential character values such as cooperation, discipline, and responsibility. These findings highlight the effectiveness of traditional games as a culturally relevant and student-centered approach to improving motivation and engagement in PE. It is therefore recommended that physical education teachers incorporate traditional games creatively into fitness-oriented lessons to enhance participation and promote holistic student development.

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