

## The Practice of Traditional Game “Galah Kepong” to Develop Bodily-Kinesthetic and Interpersonal Intelligence Among Students

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### ABSTRACT

Traditional games can serve as meaningful educational tools, particularly in teacher education programs where the development of physical and social-emotional competencies is essential. This study aims to explore the implementation of the traditional Indonesian game *Galah Kepong* and its contribution to the development of bodily-kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligences among early childhood teacher education students. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research involved 17 second-year students who participated in three structured game-based learning sessions. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The study revealed that *Galah Kepong* supported improvements in bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, including coordination, balance, agility, and spatial awareness. In parallel, it also enhanced interpersonal intelligence through teamwork, communication, empathy, and emotional regulation. Reflection sessions after gameplay allowed students to articulate their learning experiences and connect them to their future teaching roles, particularly in promoting play-based, inclusive, and culturally responsive practices in early childhood education. Additionally, the study identified practical challenges in implementing traditional games within higher education, such as space limitations and varying levels of familiarity with the game. Overall, *Galah Kepong* proved to be an effective, joyful, and culturally grounded strategy to foster holistic competencies in prospective early childhood educators.

**Keywords:** traditional games, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, teacher education, early childhood

### INTRODUCTION

The multiple intelligences theory by Gardner (2011) highlights the importance of addressing diverse forms of intelligence, including interpersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, and naturalistic, which are all present in traditional games like *Galah Hadang*. In the era of 21st-century education, there is a growing emphasis on the development of multiple intelligences among students, particularly for prospective early childhood educators who are expected to facilitate holistic learning (Gardner, 2011; Darling-

Hammond et al., 2020). Among the various types of intelligence, kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligence play a critical role in early childhood settings where learning is active, social, and play-based (Noddings, 2013; Rusdiana & Maryanti, 2021). However, teacher education programs often place more focus on cognitive and theoretical knowledge, leaving a gap in the experiential development of physical and social-emotional competencies (Sumantri & Whardani, 2017; Zahari & Ahmad, 2020).

Over the years, numerous approaches have been developed to enhance student engagement and practical skills in teacher education, ranging from collaborative learning to outdoor experiential activities (Hastie et al., 2011; Patton, 2015). Despite these efforts, the integration of cultural and traditional games into formal educational settings remains underutilized (Rahmawati & Utami, 2020). Traditional games, which are rooted in local wisdom and communal values, offer rich potential for fostering physical agility and social cooperation (Sugiyanto et al., 2022; Rusdiana & Maryanti, 2021). Research has shown that traditional games such as tag, relay, and group strategy games can enhance not only motor skills but also teamwork, communication, and emotional regulation (Rahmawati & Utami, 2020; Sugiyanto et al., 2022). Yet, studies specifically exploring their impact within the context of higher education for early childhood teachers are still limited (Zahari & Ahmad, 2020).

One such traditional game, *Galah Kepong* (also known as *Galah Hadang*), is a group-based strategic movement game that requires coordination, speed, communication, and strategic thinking. It has been widely played in Indonesian communities and offers opportunities to stimulate multiple intelligences (Rahmawati & Utami, 2020; Sugiyanto et al., 2022). While anecdotal and observational evidence points to its benefits, there is a lack of formal research examining its application in educational settings—especially in teacher training environments (Rusdiana & Maryanti, 2021; Sumantri & Whardani, 2017).

The practice of *Galah Kepong* can enhance bodily-kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligence in early childhood teacher education students. It offers a culturally relevant, enjoyable, and meaningful pedagogical strategy that aligns with the core principles of early childhood learning: learning through play, social interaction, and embodied experience (Gardner, 2011; Noddings, 2013). This study contributes to the discourse on culturally responsive pedagogy and experiential learning by integrating traditional game practices into formal education for prospective teachers (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Zahari & Ahmad, 2020).

## METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at exploring the implementation and impact of the traditional game *Galah Kepong* on students' bodily-kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligence. Qualitative methods are particularly suitable for capturing in-depth observations of behaviors, interactions, and learning outcomes in natural settings (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study was conducted in an early childhood teacher education program at a university in Indonesia, involving 32 second-year students as participants.

Data were collected through multiple techniques: (1) Participatory observation during game activities to capture behavioral expressions of kinesthetic and interpersonal skills, (2) semi-structured interviews to gather student reflections and perceptions, and (3) field notes and documentation (photographs and video recordings) to support triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yusuf, 2014).

The traditional game was implemented in three consecutive sessions over the course of one week. Each session included warm-up, game explanation, active play, and reflection. The *Galah Kepong* game was modified slightly for safety and educational alignment purposes: field boundaries were clearly marked, game rules were simplified to accommodate diverse physical ability levels, and reflection sessions were integrated to promote metacognitive awareness and social-emotional learning (Hastie et al., 2011; Rusdiana & Maryanti, 2021). These modifications were guided by prior studies on game-based learning in physical education and multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011; Sugiyanto et al., 2022).

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006), where recurring patterns and themes related to kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligence were identified. Coding was performed manually, with categories such as "coordination", "team communication", "empathy", and "strategic movement" emerging from the data. Credibility was ensured through data triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking with selected participants (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The research stages included: (1) preparation and game design, (2) implementation and data collection, (3) analysis of behavioral indicators, and (4) interpretation of findings in relation to the research objectives. The methodological framework was designed to authentically capture the educational potential of traditional games within higher education environments (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study affirm the relevance of Gardner's (2011) theory of multiple intelligences in teacher education contexts, particularly regarding bodily-kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligences. Through the traditional game *Galah Kepong*, early childhood education students not only

engaged in meaningful physical and social activities but also experienced reflective learning grounded in cultural heritage. The implementation demonstrated how a local game can align with the pedagogical principles of active, social, and embodied learning as emphasized by Noddings (2013) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2020).

### 1. Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence: Movement as Meaning

Throughout the three-day game sessions, students exhibited continuous physical engagement—running, dodging, pivoting, and strategizing—which indicated improvement in several aspects of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence:

- a. **Balance and agility** were developed as students navigated tight game spaces while avoiding or intercepting opponents.
- b. **Coordination and reflexes** improved through dynamic body movements requiring hand-eye-foot synchrony.
- c. **Spatial awareness** grew as students learned to read the game field, position themselves optimally, and adapt to fast-changing scenarios.

One facilitator noted: "The students learned to control their bodies to avoid collisions while staying focused on the objective of the game." Such control illustrates embodied cognition, where students internalize strategies through motion—an application of Gardner's kinesthetic domain that is often absent in conventional teacher training.

These observations are consistent with Yuliati (2018), who argued that traditional games can significantly boost gross motor skills. Here, students were not only learning through movement, they were learning about movement—a vital foundation for early childhood educators tasked with facilitating play-based learning.

### 2. Interpersonal Intelligence: Learning Through Social Dynamics

The cooperative nature of *Galah Kepong* revealed strong development in interpersonal intelligence. Each session required students to collaborate closely, assume rotating roles, and make collective decisions in real time. Specific patterns observed included:

- a. **Active communication**, both verbal (e.g., "Lewat kanan!") and non-verbal (e.g., hand signals, nods), for coordinating movement and strategies.
- b. **Empathy and support**, especially visible when students encouraged teammates after making mistakes.
- c. **Shared leadership**, where players took turns guiding the team or adapting to the group's needs.

One student reflected: "*Awalnya saya kesal kalau teman lambat, tapi lama-lama saya jadi ngerti kalau setiap orang punya kemampuan beda. Yang penting tetap semangat.*" This illustrates how play became a medium for emotional regulation and social learning, in line with the interpersonal aspects of Gardner's theory and 21st-century teacher competencies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Figure 1:

Galah Kepong Play



Source: Field Note (2025)

### 3. Reflective Practice and Pedagogical Awareness

A distinctive feature of this implementation was the structured reflection session after gameplay, which enabled students to articulate what they had learned and how it related to their future teaching roles. These discussions revealed:

- Insight into **how to facilitate play**, including managing group dynamics and promoting inclusion.
- Appreciation for **cultural heritage** as a source of pedagogical value.
- Recognition of **individual differences** in ability and personality through observing peers during the game.

These moments of reflection demonstrated a shift from merely playing to thinking like educators. Students were not just involved in physical and social activities, but were also cultivating critical awareness of teaching strategies rooted in cultural context—mirroring the call for culturally responsive pedagogy (Rahmawati & Utami, 2020).

### 4. Learning Atmosphere: Joyful, Dynamic, and Inclusive

The game took place in open areas such as campus yards and large halls. Boundaries were marked with chalk, ropes, or natural features. Each session lasted 60–90 minutes, beginning with warm-up and closing with cooling down and reflection.

Throughout, the atmosphere was consistently lively and non-monotonous. Facilitators played a dual role—not only officiating the game but also acting as motivators and coaches. Students participated with full physical and mental engagement, with excitement and laughter often punctuating the sessions. The playful tension of crossing the guard lines or defending boundaries kept everyone focused and emotionally present.

### 5. Challenges and Practical Considerations

Despite the enthusiasm, several challenges emerged during implementation, it is showed in table 1 below.

Table 1:



#### Challenges and Practical Considerations

Challenge	Field Evidence	Proposed Mitigation
Limited space	Not all campuses had suitable open fields	Use large indoor spaces; modify game layout
Unfamiliarity with game	Some students lacked prior exposure	Brief orientation & cultural background session
Group size	Difficult to manage large numbers fairly	Rotate smaller teams and use assistant facilitators
Risk of minor injuries	Slips or collisions observed	Conduct structured warm-up and monitor closely

Source: Field Note (2025)

These challenges reflect common limitations in integrating experiential, physical learning into higher education (Patton, 2015), yet they are manageable through thoughtful planning.

#### Synthesis with Theory

The overall findings support the key assumptions outlined in the Introduction:

- That bodily-kinesthetic and interpersonal intelligence can be effectively developed through traditional games (Gardner, 2011);
- That teacher preparation must involve active, reflective, and social learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020);
- That cultural heritage can serve as a rich pedagogical resource (Rahmawati & Utami, 2020);
- And that learning through play promotes not just child development, but also educator development (Noddings, 2013).

#### Summary of Findings

It is showed with table 2 below.

Table 2:  
Summary of Findings

Intelligence Domain	Observed Outcomes
Bodily-Kinesthetic	Motor coordination, balance, spatial navigation, agility, reflex
Interpersonal	Teamwork, empathy, emotional regulation, social negotiation
Reflective Pedagogical Skill	Awareness of learning process, classroom application of play, cultural relevance

Source: Field Note (2025)

#### CONCLUSION

The integration of *Galah Kepong* in early childhood teacher education has proven effective in developing two core intelligences—bodily-kinesthetic and interpersonal, as proposed by Gardner (2011). Students improved their motor coordination, agility, and spatial awareness, while also strengthening teamwork, empathy, and communication through real-time, social gameplay.

The structured reflections after the game enhanced students' pedagogical insight, allowing them to connect cultural play with classroom practices. This aligns with the principles of 21st-century learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020), emphasizing active, reflective, and culturally relevant education.

Despite challenges such as limited space and initial unfamiliarity, the game fostered joyful, collaborative, and meaningful learning. It also served as a platform for students to internalize the values of inclusion, cooperation, and responsiveness—all essential in early childhood settings. Thus, *Galah Kepong* is not only a cultural asset but also a practical, holistic teaching tool that should be integrated into teacher education to prepare future educators with physical, social, and reflective competencies.

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