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Fostering Deep Learning in Early Childhood Education Through Traditional Games: Joyful, Meaningful, and Mindful Learning

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Abstract

This study addresses the lack of meaningful planning in early childhood education (ECE) activities, particularly in the integration of traditional games. Traditional games possess rich educational value that can enhance learning experiences by making them joyful, meaningful, and mindful collectively referred to as deep learning in the context of this research, unrelated to artificial intelligence. The study aimed to explore how traditional games can be systematically implemented to foster deep learning in young children. Conducted as classroom action research, the study involved 16 children aged 5–6 years in a kindergarten setting, selected through purposive sampling. The research was carried out over two cycles, with data collected through structured observation and analyzed using descriptive quantitative methods to calculate developmental achievement percentages in cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. Results showed an increase in deep learning indicators: joyful learning rose from 62.5% in Cycle 1 to 87.5% in Cycle 2, meaningful learning from 56.3% to 81.3%, and mindful learning from 50.0% to 78.1%. These findings indicate that traditional games, when intentionally integrated into lesson plans, can significantly contribute to holistic child development. The study concludes that achieving deep learning through traditional games requires consistent implementation, teacher commitment, and thoughtful planning aligned with children's developmental stages.
Keywords: Deep learning in early childhood education; traditional games, meaningful; joyful; mindful

Introduction

The concept of deep learning in education is receiving increasing attention, particularly in efforts to develop learning that goes beyond surface-level understanding by fostering meaning, awareness, and holistic engagement in children (Mohammed & Kora, 2023). In the educational context, deep learning does not refer solely to artificial intelligence, but rather to a profound, reflective learning process that touches on children's cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. In early childhood education (ECE), this approach is translated into learning experiences that allow children to understand the meaning behind what they experience, find joy in the learning process, and engage mindfully in every activity. This approach has significant implications, as early childhood is a critical period for shaping children's thinking patterns and character development.

Field observations indicate that learning activities in early childhood education (ECE) are still largely dominated by surface learning—activities that emphasize rote memorization and

repetition without deeper meaning. Play, which should serve as the core of early childhood learning, is often treated merely as a break or entertainment rather than as an integral part of the learning process. At the same time, 21st-century challenges demand that children develop collaboration, creativity, communication, and critical thinking skills from an early age. Meanwhile, the rapid development of digital technology has shifted children's interaction patterns with their surroundings. Children are now more familiar with digital devices than with physical and social play, leading to a decline in opportunities for real-world exploration, direct interaction, and reinforcement of local cultural values. This presents a major issue that must be addressed seriously.

Based on observations at TK ABA Karangmojo XVII, it was found that traditional games conducted at school were treated merely as supplementary activities, without clear planning in the Daily Detailed Lesson Plan (RRPH) or teaching modules. These games were not systematically integrated into the learning process, resulting in children engaging in play without understanding the intended learning objectives. There was no explanation provided regarding the cultural values or historical background of the games being played. Consequently, children were not aware of the positive character traits that could be developed through traditional games, such as cooperation, sportsmanship, honesty, and responsibility. Games that should serve as joyful and meaningful learning tools instead lost their educational value. This condition indicates that the potential of traditional games as a learning medium to develop cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects has not been optimally utilized in the school's learning process.

An alternative solution to address the suboptimal use of traditional games in early childhood education (ECE) is the implementation of a deep learning approach. Traditional games can serve as highly effective media for fostering meaningful, joyful, and mindful learning, as they embody cultural, social, and emotional values that can be instilled from an early age. Through traditional games, children not only learn through play but also build emotional connections, enhance focus, and naturally develop social skills and emotional intelligence. Research conducted by Wulandari (2022) shows that implementing traditional game-based learning can enhance children's activeness, engagement, and understanding of social values in everyday life. Similar findings were also reported by Lestari (2021) who demonstrated that the integrated use of traditional games in the learning process can create a joyful and meaningful learning atmosphere, while also improving children's memory retention of the material learned (mindful).

Joyful learning refers to a teaching and learning atmosphere that enables children to fully concentrate during the learning process, resulting in a high level of attention span (Rahma & Hidayah, 2022). Furthermore, joyful learning is described as a learning process that captures children's attention through various applied methods, ensuring that children do not feel bored during the lessons. Joyful learning focuses on creating enjoyable and fulfilling learning experiences, where children feel free to express themselves and explore through play and activities that evoke positive emotions and curiosity (Diputera, 2024). An enjoyable and

memorable learning environment will attract children's interest to engage actively, thereby enabling the learning objectives to be achieved optimally.

Meaningful learning occurs when children not only receive and memorize information but are also able to understand the concepts being taught and apply them in their daily lives (Islami, 2021; Musringah & Dharin, 2025). For example, in the context of early childhood education (ECE), this is achieved through the concept of learning through play, where children actively engage in play activities designed to explore specific concepts. For instance, during a role-play of buying and selling, children learn to count, communicate, and understand social roles. In this way, children build knowledge from direct experience, making learning deeper, more enjoyable, and relevant to their world.

Mindful learning in the educational context can be defined as an approach that emphasizes full awareness of the learning experience. More specifically, this approach focuses on enhancing the quality of attention, managing stress, and developing children's cognitive flexibility (Pratama et al., 2024; Kosim Gifari et al., 2025). In line with this Diputera (2024) It states that mindful learning also encourages children's full presence in the learning process and heightens their awareness of ongoing experiences. In other words, mindful learning in education promotes children to be fully present during learning by paying attention to their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Mindful learning can be implemented through activities that train children's concentration and focus, such as listening to stories or performing simple body movements with full awareness (Diputera, 2024).

This study views traditional games not merely as a means of cultural preservation or a pastime activity, but as a strategic medium for holistically implementing deep learning in early childhood education (ECE). The study emphasizes the integration of three learning aspects—meaningful, joyful, and mindful—into traditional games, which has been scarcely explored in contextual pedagogical studies based on local culture. The aim of this research is to provide a comprehensive description of how traditional games can serve as an effective tool for creating a holistic, enjoyable, and mindful learning experience for young children. Additionally, this study seeks to inspire the development of more contextualized, culturally valuable, and relevant learning approaches in line with contemporary developments. Thus, it is hoped that the findings will enrich insights into deep learning-based and local culture-based learning practices.

Literature Review

First, research from Diputera (2024) stated that deep learning, characterized by joyful, meaningful, and mindful learning principles, is highly aligned with the nature of early childhood education, which emphasizes concrete experiences, social interaction, and play. In this context, traditional games serve as an effective medium to embody these three aspects. Therefore, the deep learning framework supports the theoretical foundation of this study, which highlights the importance of integrating traditional games into the learning process in early childhood education.

Second, the study from Rahma & Hidayah (2022) is the Loose Parts approach, which utilizes natural materials from the child's environment such as stones, leaves, sand, or twigs as

play media based on their imagination. In practice, this method not only fosters enjoyment (joyful) but also creates meaningful connections (meaningful), as the materials are closely related to the child's daily life, while also encouraging focus and awareness during play (mindful). This aligns with the essence of traditional games, which also use simple objects rich in cultural values, thereby supporting the principles of deep learning emphasized in this research.

Third, Research from Gifari et al (2025) shows that joyful, meaningful, and mindful learning play a crucial role in improving the quality of early childhood education, particularly in supporting children's socialemotional well being. Mindful learning helps develop emotional regulation and self-awareness, meaningful learning connects educational content with real-life experiences, and joyful learning fosters an enjoyable and inclusive learning environment. These three approaches align with the nature of traditional games, which are rich in cultural values, use simple materials, and promote social interaction, imagination, and concentration. Therefore, these findings strengthen the theoretical foundation, which highlights the integration of traditional games as an effective means of applying deep learning principles in early childhood education.

The various studies discussed above provide a relevant perspective on the importance of implementing joyful, meaningful, and mindful learning in early childhood education. These approaches have been shown to enhance learning quality while strengthening children's social-emotional development. In this context, traditional games serve as an effective medium by combining local cultural values, social interaction, and active exploration elements that align with the characteristics of early childhood learning. These findings reinforce the relevance of my research, which emphasizes the integration of traditional games as a holistic deep learning approach to create joyful, meaningful, and mindful learning experiences for young children.

Determine how integrating culturally rooted traditional games into early childhood classrooms can cultivate deep learning outcomes, defined as durable understanding, transfer, and meaningful sense making, while preserving children’s joy and agency. The study will examine whether guided play with traditional games supports conceptual development more effectively than either free play or didactic instruction, and whether the social rules and problem solving inherent in games like tag or cooperative chase games function as catalysts for cognition and language. It will test the proposition that guided play connects children’s curiosity to curricular goals and improves academic and domain knowledge without sacrificing engagement. (Skene et al., 2022; Fisher et al., 2013; Weisberg et al., 2016; Bonawitz et al., 2011; Lillard et al., 2013).

Evaluate how the cultural authenticity of traditional games enriches learning as meaningful, contextually situated activity, including identity affirmation and relevance for children’s lives. The study will analyze whether locally valued games promote social collaboration, moral emotions, and leadership, and whether these experiences scaffold children’s ability to connect new ideas with prior knowledge in ways that endure beyond single lessons. It will also explore how playfulness and relationality in classroom communities mediate

these effects, positioning playful activity as a sphere that carries new concepts into children's imaginative play. (Iswinarti & Laily, 2024; Raven, 2023; Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Vartiainen et al., 2024; Parker et al., 2022).

Reflective routines threaded through traditional game play enhance children's socioemotional self-regulation and attention in ways that deepen learning. The study will test whether adding short mindfulness practices and reflective talk before or after game sessions improves attention, executive functions, and classroom adjustment, and whether these benefits interact with guided play to strengthen academic outcomes. It will further consider school-level implementation factors that enable continuous improvement, such as teacher role on a play continuum and collaborative evaluation. (Haines et al., 2023; Mettler et al., 2023; Shlomov et al., 2023; Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Sando, 2023)

Methods

The study was conducted using Classroom Action Research (CAR) with a qualitative approach. The research design employed was the Kemmis and McTaggart model. Each cycle consisted of four components: Planning, Action, Observation, and Reflection, carried out over two cycles. The study took place at TK ABA Karangmojo XVII and involved children aged 5–6 years. The sample consisted of 16 children selected through purposive sampling. The research instruments included observation sheets, analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the children's average scores and to evaluate teacher activeness based on observed teaching performance. The quality of learning was assessed from both the process and outcome perspectives (Nursita, 2021). In terms of the process, learning is considered successful or of good quality if all or at least 75% of the students are actively engaged physically, mentally, and socially in the learning activities. Meanwhile, in terms of outcomes, the learning process is deemed successful if there is a positive behavioral change in at least 85% of the students (Hermawan et al., 2019).

The indicators developed in this study focus on the extent to which traditional games can create a holistic learning environment: touching positive emotions (joyful), sharpening children's awareness and focus (mindful), and being relevant to children's lives and development (meaningful). Several expert opinions on meaningful, joyful, and mindful learning have been analyzed and summarized as the foundation for formulating indicators for the implementation of traditional games in early childhood education. The deep learning indicators are as follows:

Table 1. Indicators of joyful, mindful, and meaningful learning

No	Aspect	Indicators	Scale			
			1	2	3	4
1	Joyful Learning	The child shows enthusiasm while playing.				
		The child actively participates.				
		The child expresses a desire to repeat the game.				
2	Mindful Learning	The child is focused during play				
		The child does not rush through the activity.				
		The child understands the rules of the game.				

3	Meaning learning	The child is able to explain what was learned from the game.
		The child recognizes character values within the game.
		The child understands the purpose of the game

Table 2. Indicators teacher performance

No	Aspect	Indicators	Scale			
			1	2	3	4
1	Learning Design	The teacher designs traditional games integrated into the daily lesson plan/teaching module.				
		The teacher formulates clear learning objectives.				
		The teacher connects the game with aspects of child development.				
2	Learning Facilitation	The teacher creates an enjoyable learning atmosphere.				
		The teacher facilitates children's active involvement.				
		The teacher appreciates and acknowledges children’s efforts.				
3	Learning Reflection	The teacher guides children in reflecting on the activity.				
		The teacher reinforces character values learned through the game.				
		The teacher evaluates the achievement of learning objectives.				

Result/Findings

Pre-Cycle

The implementation of pre-cycle activities involving 16 children aimed to assess the initial condition of children’s engagement in learning, particularly concerning the aspects of joyful, meaningful, and mindful learning in traditional game activities. Based on the observations conducted during the pre-cycle stage, the following summary data were obtained:

Table 3. Summary of Pre-Cycle Observation Results

No	Aspect	Category				Average
		BB	MB	BSH	BSB	(%)
1	*Joyful*	0	5	7	4	58
2	*Meaningful*	5	7	3	1	31
3	*Mindful*	5	6	4	1	28

The pre-cycle observation results indicate that the aspects of meaningful and mindful learning among the children were still relatively low, with average percentages of 31% and 28%, respectively. The majority of the children had not yet understood the meaning of the games they played and did not demonstrate sustained focus or self-awareness during play. Meanwhile, the

joyful aspect achieved the highest average at 58%, indicating that the children somewhat enjoyed the games despite their engagement not being fully meaningful or mindful. These findings suggest that the traditional games conducted had not yet optimally promoted deep learning. Based on this data, the researcher proceeded with improvement actions by optimizing the implementation of traditional games.

Cycle 1

In this cycle, observations were conducted to evaluate the development of the meaningful, joyful, and mindful aspects in the children. The results of the Cycle 1 observations showed changes in children's engagement in the games, as reflected in the distribution of developmental categories for each aspect. Complete observation data are presented in the following table:

Table 4. Summary of Cycle 1 Observation Results

No	Aspect	Category				Average (%)
		BB	MB	BSH	BSB	
1	*Joyful*	1	5	7	3	72
2	*Meaningful*	3	7	5	1	52
3	*Mindful*	2	8	5	1	58

The observation results in Cycle 1 showed an improvement compared to the pre-cycle, particularly in the joyful aspect, which reached an average of 72%, with most children falling into the BSH and BSB categories. The meaningful aspect also increased to an average of 52%, although it was still dominated by children in the MB category. Meanwhile, the mindful aspect achieved an average of 58%, with many children beginning to demonstrate focus and awareness during play. Although improvements were evident, the results of Cycle 1 indicate that the majority of children are still in the early development stage and require further reinforcement in learning.

Table 5. Summary of Teacher Performance Observation in Cycle 1

No	Aspect of teacher performance	Max score	Score	Persentase (%)
1	Learning desain	12	9	75%
2	Learning fasilitiation	12	9	75%
3	Learning reflection	12	8	66,7%
	Total	36	26	74%

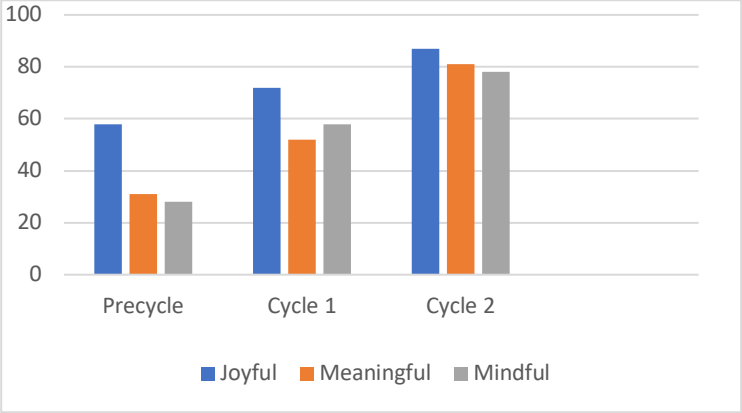
Based on the observation results of teacher performance, the overall percentage reached 74%, indicating a good category but still requiring improvement. In the learning design aspect, the teacher scored 75% for successfully planning traditional games in the RPPH and linking the objectives to child development. The learning facilitation aspect also showed a score of 75%, reflecting a classroom atmosphere that was becoming more enjoyable and showing increasing child engagement. However, in the learning reflection aspect, the teacher only achieved 66.7%, as the reinforcement of character values and active involvement of children in reflection were not yet optimal. These results serve as the basis for improvements in the next cycle.

Cycle 2

To measure the effectiveness of the actions taken and to observe further changes, observations were conducted again in Cycle 2. The evaluation in this cycle aimed to assess improvements in children's engagement based on the aspects of meaningful, joyful, and mindful learning. The summary of observation results is presented in the following table:

Table 6. Summary of Cycle 2 Observation Results

No	Aspect	Category				Average (%)
		BB	MB	BSH	BSB	
1	Joyful	0	2	6	8	87
2	Meaningful	0	3	8	5	81
3	Mindful	1	3	7	5	78



Learning achievements increased significantly across all three aspects. The meaningful aspect reached an average of 81%, with 13 children categorized in BSH and BSB. The joyful aspect showed the highest achievement at 87%, reflecting that children greatly enjoyed the play activities with positive emotional involvement. The mindful aspect also improved to 78%, indicating that most children were able to play with focus, awareness of the rules, and self-control. This improvement reflects that the implementation of learning through traditional games has successfully promoted deep learning more optimally.

Figure 1. Recapitulation of Pre-Cycle, Cycle 1, and Cycle 2 Results

The data presented in Figure 1 illustrates a progressive improvement across the three learning dimensions—joyful, meaningful, and mindful learning—throughout the pre-cycle, Cycle 1, and Cycle 2. In the joyful learning aspect, scores increased from 58 in the pre-cycle to 72 in Cycle 1, and further to 87 in Cycle 2. Meaningful learning showed a more pronounced growth, rising from 31 in the pre-cycle to 52 in Cycle 1, and reaching 81 in Cycle 2. Similarly, mindful learning progressed from a baseline of 28 to 58 in Cycle 1, and 78 in Cycle 2. These results indicate a consistent and significant enhancement in learning quality, suggesting that the

integration of traditional games effectively supports joyful, meaningful, and mindful learning experiences in early childhood education.

Table 7. Summary of Teacher Performance Observation in Cycle 2

No	Aspect of teacher performance	Max score	Score	Persentase (%)
1	Learning desain	12	12	100%
2	Learning fasilitiation	12	12	100%
3	Learning reflection	12	11	91,7%
	Total	36	35	96%

The teacher performance table in Cycle 2 shows a significant improvement compared to the previous cycle, with a total percentage reaching 96%. The teacher successfully implemented all indicators of learning design and facilitation at an excellent level (100%), and showed improvement in learning reflection with a score of 91.7%. This reflects that the teacher has become increasingly optimal in designing, conducting, and reflecting on the learning process comprehensively, making the learning process more effective and meaningful for the children.

Discussion

Deep learning in the context of early childhood education (ECE) emphasizes the full engagement of children cognitively, emotionally, and socially. This approach focuses on fostering deep understanding, meaningful learning experiences, and full awareness throughout the learning process. The findings of this study demonstrate that integrating traditional games as a learning medium effectively facilitates deep learning. Traditional games not only encourage active play but also present rich cultural contexts and social values, making the learning experience holistic and relevant to children's daily lives.

In practice, deep learning in ECE requires a learning environment that supports positive emotional involvement (joyful), full attention and awareness during learning (mindful), as well as understanding and applying the values gained through experience (meaningful). This study confirms that these three aspects are interconnected and must be integrated simultaneously so that the learning process is not merely an activity of playing but a means of character building and holistic development of children's abilities. Thus, the implementation of deep learning through traditional games provides an effective framework for teachers to design learning activities that align with the needs and potentials of early childhood learners.

Figure 1. Traditional game activities

Joyful learning in early childhood education (ECE) refers not only to enjoyable activities but also to creating a learning environment that is inclusive, equitable, and meaningful (Erwin et al., 2023). Early childhood education should support children's natural happiness, curiosity, and empathy, while also helping them cope with the negative influences of unfair social norms (Gifari et al., 2025). The concept of joyful learning aligns with the indicators used, namely that children show enthusiasm while playing, actively participate, and have the desire to repeat the game. An inclusive and equitable learning environment fosters a sense of safety and comfort for children as they explore play activities. Traditional games, which are collaborative and closely tied to the child's cultural context, are highly effective in creating a learning atmosphere that is both enjoyable and meaningful (Kuswanto et al., 2022; Lestari, 2021). Through traditional games, children tend to show high enthusiasm, actively participate because the activities are familiar and enjoyable, and want to repeat them because they feel valued and emotionally as well as socially involved.

Figure 2. Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning in daily activities at early childhood education (ECE) can be realized through a play-based approach that supports children's social and cognitive development, active involvement between school and family to strengthen learning experiences at home, and the provision of a conducive learning environment. This aligns with the mindfulness indicators in children, which include focusing while playing, not rushing, and understanding the rules of the game. In the context of PAUD learning, traditional games can

serve as an effective medium to apply mindfulness values. These games require children to concentrate on their turn, consistently follow the rules, and manage their emotions when winning or losing (MR, 2021; Wulandari, 2022). By integrating the mindfulness approach into traditional games, children learn to be fully present in the activity, demonstrate self-control, and strengthen social relationships through more conscious interactions. Additionally, these traditional games can be used as an enjoyable approach to teaching young children (Asih & El-Yunusi, 2024).

Although the term deep learning may not be explicitly used in early childhood education (PAUD), its underlying principles can be integrated into learning practices to support the holistic development of young children. In this context, traditional games emerge as a potential solution. As part of local cultural heritage, traditional games are not only recreational but also educational. They embody values such as cooperation, patience, responsibility, emotional regulation, and social intelligence. Moreover, each traditional game contains structure, rules, and interactions that support mindful learning-full engagement of the child in the present moment—while providing space for natural joy (joyful learning) and meaningful connections (meaningful learning) from the child's daily experiences.

Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating deep learning in early childhood education by thoughtfully designing, implementing, and reflecting on learning activities. This study highlights that the success of integrating traditional games into the learning process depends heavily on the teacher's ability to adapt and modify these activities to meet the developmental needs and dynamics of the classroom. Teachers must exhibit creativity and sensitivity to create an inclusive, engaging, and meaningful learning environment that fosters joyful, mindful, and meaningful learning experiences for children.

Moreover, the findings suggest that continuous professional development and support are essential for teachers to fully embrace and implement deep learning principles effectively. The improvement in teacher performance from cycle 1 to cycle 2 in this study reflects how increasing competence in lesson planning, facilitation, and reflective practice enhances the quality of learning. Consequently, empowering teachers with knowledge and skills on deep learning approaches is key to sustaining long-term improvements in early childhood education, particularly in utilizing culturally relevant tools such as traditional games.

The implications of this research article indicate that the implementation of joyful, meaningful, and mindful learning through traditional games requires time, consistency, and a high level of commitment from teachers. Teachers play a crucial role in designing and adapting traditional game activities to align with the needs, characteristics, and classroom dynamics they encounter. This process demands not only creativity but also sensitivity in creating an inclusive, equitable, and meaningful learning environment for early childhood learners. Currently, efforts to socialize the concept of deep learning are underway, thus requiring time to enhance teachers' understanding of deep learning principles and how to concretely integrate them into play-based activities, particularly through traditional games rich in educational and contextual values.

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted within a limited time frame and in only one early childhood education (ECE) setting, so the results may not be

generalizable to a broader context. Second, the involvement of teachers in designing and adapting traditional games greatly influences the success of the implementation, making the findings highly dependent on the competence and creativity of the respective teachers. Third, there was no analysis of the long-term impact on child development, such as problem-solving skills or creativity. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the context, extend the duration of the intervention, and measure the long-term outcomes of applying this approach.

Conclusion

This study confirms that the use of traditional games in early childhood education significantly enhances deep learning, which includes joyful, meaningful, and mindful learning experiences. Traditional games foster enjoyable environments that stimulate children's motivation, provide relevant and culturally grounded learning experiences that support character and social-emotional development, and encourage focus, discipline, and respect for rules. These findings underscore the educational and cultural value of traditional games as an effective approach to holistic child development. Their application can be expanded across various educational contexts to enrich classroom practices with local wisdom. Future research is encouraged to investigate the long-term effects of traditional games on children's creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities, highlighting their continued relevance in advancing early childhood education.

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