

Traditional Game “Pukang” as a Medium for Social Interaction: A Case Study in Balerejo Village, Lampung

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ABSTRACT

Purpose –This study explores the role of Pukang, a traditional spinning game from Lampung, as a medium for social interaction and cultural preservation within the multicultural community of Balerejo Village, East Lampung. It addresses the declining presence of traditional games due to digital entertainment and emphasizes their continued social and educational relevance.

Design/methods/approach – Using a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with three key informants, direct observation of social interactions during Pukang play, and supporting documentation. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s interactive model to interpret the social meaning embedded in the game.

Findings – The findings reveal that Pukang serves as a platform for intergenerational and cross-status social interaction, fosters healthy competition while nurturing social solidarity, and functions as an instrument for preserving local cultural heritage imbued with educational and social character values. Despite challenges posed by modernization and digital entertainment, Pukang remains relevant as an effective medium for social bonding and offers significant potential for integration into social education curricula that emphasize local wisdom and community engagement.

Research implications/limitations – While offering insight into local wisdom-based education, the study is limited to one village and a small sample. Broader studies are recommended to assess the game's integration into formal education and its appeal to younger digital-native generations.

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Introduction

Traditional games have long been an inseparable part of Indonesian culture, serving not merely as entertainment but also as vehicles for the transmission of social, cultural, and moral values across generations. Historically, various forms of traditional games have flourished in every region, reflecting the richness of cultural diversity and local wisdom. Traditional games such as Congklak, Long Se, and Marjalangkat have been shown not only to stimulate children's cognitive abilities and motor skills but also to function as tools for instilling values of cooperation, sportsmanship, honesty, and nationalism (Apandi & Mappanyukki, 2024; Astika et al., 2023; Firmansyah et al., 2023). However, in the wake of globalization and the massive penetration of digital technology, the existence of traditional games has begun to erode. The dominance of instant digital entertainment has shifted patterns of social interaction within communities, causing many traditional games to become mere stories of the past or activities reserved for special occasions (Supriyanto et al., 2022). This phenomenon poses a serious threat not only to the preservation of cultural values but also to the weakening of social bonds within society.

Within this context, the traditional game Pukang, also known as the spinning top in Lampung, holds significant importance not only as a form of popular entertainment but also as a medium of social interaction rich in cultural meaning. This game has a long history, believed to have existed for more than 150 years, and has served as a communal gathering activity, especially during harvest seasons, fostering social relations across age groups and social strata (Aulia & Fuadah Z., 2020; Saprima et al., 2020). Alongside the history of Javanese transmigration to Lampung, which began during the Dutch colonial era, Pukang became one of the mediums that brought together migrants and indigenous populations, cultivating harmonious social interactions within a multicultural community (Asri, 2022; Karsiwan & Pujiati, 2018). Despite its high cultural value, however, scientific studies specifically examining Pukang as a medium for social interaction within the context of East Lampung society remain relatively limited, especially in relation to contemporary social dynamics.

Meanwhile, recent literature indicates that traditional games hold an important role in the context of social education, functioning not only as cultural content but also as effective learning strategies. Research by Djuwita & Fakhri (n.d.), for example, reveals that traditional games can develop children's multiple intelligences, including social-emotional intelligence. Traditional games have also been shown to be effective for character education, strengthening social interactions, and facilitating collaborative learning imbued with sustainability values (Asriasnyah, 2018; Carmona-Medeiro & Domingo, 2021). In physical education, traditional games such as Jaring Laba-laba (Spider Web) in Bali have proven effective in enhancing motor skills while reinforcing social bonds among students (Asriningpuri, 2022; Mahaardhika, 2021). Nevertheless, research that specifically explores how particular traditional games like Pukang function as structured media for

social interaction, particularly within multicultural communities, remains scarce in both national and international literature. This creates a research gap that needs to be addressed.

Beyond traditional games, social interaction itself is a broad concept spanning various academic fields. From education and the arts to digital technology, social interaction is understood as a dynamic process connecting individuals, groups, and communities across diverse contexts (Koentjaraningrat, 2015; Liliweri, 2003). Various studies have shown that media for social interaction can be highly contextual, ranging from cultural rituals such as *sedekah bumi* (earth alms) in Kalimangli Village, which strengthens interfaith social cohesion (Suwartiningsih et al., 2023), to public spaces like *angkringan* in Bogor or *lapo tuak* in Batak Toba communities, which serve as venues for information exchange, cultural identity affirmation, and communal bonding (Kusumastuti & Kusuma, 2022; Simatupang & Tampake, 2024). Even modern technologies like augmented reality (AR) have emerged as new mediums of social interaction, transcending spatial and temporal boundaries (Wenlong & Lingbo, 2017). These findings collectively highlight the importance of various social mediums, including traditional games, as key instruments in fostering social cohesion and shaping societal character. However, specific local contexts such as the social interactions cultivated through Pukang in East Lampung remain largely unexplored in a comprehensive manner.

Based on this research gap, the present study aims to provide an in-depth description of the role of the traditional game Pukang as a medium for social interaction in Balerejo Village, East Lampung. The research seeks to uncover how Pukang functions in facilitating communication, fostering togetherness, and building social solidarity among community members amid the pressures of modern cultural shifts. This study is significant not only for cultural preservation efforts but also as a contribution to the field of social education, particularly in integrating traditional games as contextual and meaningful learning methods. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, this study is expected to offer new perspectives on how traditional games remain relevant as social instruments and vehicles for imparting social values within multicultural societies. The research aspires to lay a foundation for developing social education curricula rooted in local wisdom, while enriching academic discourse on culturally-based social interactions in Indonesia.

Methods

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design, as the focus of the study lies in an in-depth understanding of the social meanings and interaction processes that occur through the traditional game Pukang within the context of the community in Balerejo Village, East Lampung. A qualitative approach was deemed most suitable for exploring complex and contextual social phenomena, allowing the researcher

to capture experiences, perceptions, and cultural symbols inherent in the practice of traditional games (Miles et al., 2014; Sugiyono, 2019). Balerejo Village was selected as the research site due to its long social history as a transmigration area for Javanese communities since the Dutch colonial period, and for maintaining local cultural practices, including the Pukang game, which serves as a medium of social interaction within its multicultural society.

Data were collected using multiple techniques, namely in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three key informants: Mr. Sudaryanto (*the Village Secretary*), who provided information on the village's social and cultural history; Mr. Kaulan, who has personal experience playing Pukang during the 1980s; and Mr. Dika Alfian, who participated in Pukang games between 2003 and 2009. The observation technique was employed to directly examine how social interactions unfolded around the Pukang activity, including patterns of communication, community participation, and the social atmosphere present during the games. In addition, documentation in the form of photographs, field notes, and local literature references was collected to enrich the research data (Flick, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis approach proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The reduction process was carried out by selecting relevant data related to the social meanings of Pukang and the social interactions arising from its activities. The data were then presented in thematic narrative form, integrating findings from interviews, observations, and documentation, before conclusions were drawn and verified through data triangulation. From a research ethics perspective, the researcher obtained verbal consent from each informant after explaining the purpose and objectives of the study. The confidentiality of informants' identities was maintained, and any personal data considered sensitive was not disclosed in the scientific publication to uphold principles of confidentiality and social research ethics (Miles et al., 2014; Nasution, 2023). This approach is expected to yield profound insights into the role of Pukang as a medium of social interaction and contribute to the development of social studies learning based on local wisdom.

Result

This study reveals several important findings regarding the role of the traditional game Pukang as a medium for social interaction in Balerejo Village, East Lampung. These findings are systematically presented as follows:

1. Socio-Cultural Profile of Balerejo Village

The research findings indicate that Balerejo Village is one of the 17 villages located in Batanghari Subdistrict, East Lampung Regency. The village is situated approximately 3 kilometers north of the subdistrict center and spans an area of 368 hectares. Based on accounts from village elders as compiled by MR Putri and Karsiwan (2025), Balerejo was officially established by the Dutch colonial government in 1940. The settlement was initiated by a Javanese figure named M. Ridjan, who brought settlers from various regions in East Java, such as Tulungagung, Trenggalek, Pacitan, Madiun, Banyuwangi, as well as Purbalingga and Magelang. Initially, Balerejo comprised a single settlement unit, later divided into three hamlets: Balerejo 40A, Balerejo 40 Polos, and Balerejo 40C. These hamlets developed into five community neighborhoods: Ngudi Karya, Ngudi Makmur, Gunantoro, Rowo Tanggal, and Candirejo. Administratively, the village now consists of 5 neighborhood associations (RW) and 18 neighborhood units (RT), with a population of approximately 3,400 residents or about 1,040 households. The population comprises 1,687 males and 1,579 females. In terms of religion, the majority are Muslims (3,386), followed by Catholics (91) and Buddhists (25). Geographically, Balerejo borders Adijaya Village (Pekalongan Subdistrict) to the north, Batangharjo Village to the south, Bumiemas Village to the east, and Bumiharjo Village to the west.

Besides its rich migratory history, the people of Balerejo are known for their strong social character in maintaining harmony despite their diverse ethnic backgrounds. Social interaction is reflected in communal activities such as mutual cooperation, religious gatherings, cultural celebrations, and public entertainment. Traditional games like Pukang symbolize communal bonds and are fondly remembered, though not as frequently played today. Mr. Sudaryanto, the village secretary, stated: *"Balerejo is a blend of people from many regions, but everyone lives in harmony. Traditional games like Pukang used to bring people together—not just children but also adults who watched or played along"* (Interview, 2024). The multicultural and harmonious environment in Balerejo provides a vital foundation for the sustainability of traditional games, making Pukang more than mere entertainment—it is a medium that strengthens social ties. This explains why Pukang retains its social and cultural significance, despite the threats posed by modernization and digital technology.

2. Pukang as a Medium for Intergenerational and Cross-Status Social Interaction

In the multicultural and cohesive socio-cultural setting of Balerejo, Pukang serves as a unifying social medium across social groups. The study shows that Pukang is played not only by children but also by adolescents and adults, regardless of ethnic origin or social status. Mr. Kaulan, who played Pukang in the 1980s, shared that children would gather after school to play in open spaces, often observed or joined by adults. *"Back then, almost every afternoon, children played Pukang. Adults would sit and watch while chatting—it wasn't just the kids involved,"* he recalled (Interview, 2024). This illustrates how Pukang functioned

as a social arena where people from different generations interacted and built relationships.

Furthermore, Pukang fostered an inclusive and egalitarian space where the children of farmers, village officials, and merchants could play together without social barriers. The interactions were natural, warm, and involved intense two-way communication. Mr. Dika Alfian added, *"When playing, no one cared whose child you were. Everyone was equal. Sometimes the older kids taught the younger ones or lent their Pukang if someone didn't have one"* (Interview, 2024). This phenomenon underscores Pukang's effectiveness in strengthening intergenerational social interaction and reinforcing the communal values characteristic of Balerejo's society—values like harmony, togetherness, and solidarity, also reflected in mutual cooperation and collective activities.

3. Social Dynamics in Pukang: Competition and Solidarity

In a society that embraces healthy competition and high solidarity, Pukang embodies these social dynamics. Research observations show that competitive spirit naturally arises among players, including both children and adults. Competitions revolve around spinning techniques, duration, and the ability to knock out an opponent's top, all of which are sources of pride. Mr. Kaulan noted, *"If your Pukang could spin the longest, people would applaud. Sometimes we battled to see who could knock down another's top. It felt great to win"* (Interview, 2025). Despite the competitive nature, the games never led to serious conflict and instead served as communal entertainment that strengthened social ties.



Figure 1. Children Playing the Traditional Game Pukang

Interestingly, even with its competitive aspects, Pukang also facilitated social solidarity. Occasional betting did not lead to discord but highlighted camaraderie and mutual support. Mr. Dika Alfian shared, *"We used to bet our Pukang, but no one ever fought. If you lost, you'd be sad briefly, then play again together"* (Interview, 2024). This aligns with

Balerejo's social ethos of unity and respect for diversity rooted in its migratory and multiethnic origins. Pukang thus created an inclusive social space that combined competitive spirit with solidarity, ultimately reinforcing social cohesion in everyday village life.

4. Preserving Social Relations through the Cultural Practice of Playing Pukang

In a community shaped by diverse ethnicities, Pukang has become a crucial tool for maintaining social bonds and preserving local culture. Although its frequency has declined due to technological advances and shifting youth interests, the symbolic value of Pukang remains in collective memory. Mr. Kaulan, recalling the game's heyday, stated, "Kids rarely play Pukang now. Most are on their phones. But back then, Pukang brought us closer. It was fun, we felt proud, especially when we won" (Interview, 2025). This collective memory represents a form of social bond that is actively maintained in Balerejo's community.

Beyond cultural memory, Pukang serves as a means to transmit social values to the younger generation. Elders or community leaders often teach the game while imparting social ethics such as respect for opponents, sportsmanship, and humility in defeat. Pukang often features in village events or harvest celebrations as folk entertainment that unites residents and strengthens the village's cultural identity. Mr. Sudaryanto emphasized, "Pukang is not just a toy—it's our culture. During village events, people still play Pukang to introduce tradition to the children" (Interview, 2025). This demonstrates that while Pukang is less frequently played, it continues to play a strategic role in nurturing social relations and preserving the cultural identity of Balerejo's harmonious and multicultural society.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that the traditional game Pukang is not merely a form of local entertainment but rather a highly relevant medium of social interaction, essential in shaping, strengthening, and maintaining social relationships among community members. Within the context of Balerejo Village—a multicultural society forged through a long history of migration—Pukang serves as an inclusive, egalitarian, and non-discriminatory interactive space. These results reinforce the perspective of Supriyanto et al. (2022), who assert that traditional games are an integral part of cultural heritage, laden with social, symbolic, and spiritual meanings, and functioning as vehicles for intergenerational value transmission. Pukang exemplifies the social function of traditional games similarly observed in the Baduy community, where such practices strengthen identity, bind collective values, and cultivate cooperative behavior that enhances social cohesion.

Moreover, Pukang has proven to be a platform for intergenerational and cross-status social interaction in Balerejo Village. This finding aligns with the concept of social interaction as a process creating reciprocal relationships among individuals and groups across various social strata (Koentjaraningrat, 2015). The participation of children, adolescents, and adults within the same playing space illustrates a natural and sustainable social cohesion. This phenomenon resembles the practice of the *Jaring Laba-laba* (Spider Web) game in Bali, used to promote cooperation and social engagement among students (Asriningpuri, 2022; Mahaardhika, 2021). The interactions fostered through Pukang generate not only positive social experiences but also informally instill character education values—such as cooperation, sportsmanship, and respect for diversity—that are highly relevant for integration into social education curricula in schools.

Beyond this, the dynamics of Pukang reveal how competition and solidarity can harmoniously coexist. The competitive spirit inherent in the game does not erode the sense of togetherness but rather serves as a positive stimulant that further solidifies social relations. This aligns with the observations of Djuwita & Fakhri (n.d.), who found that traditional games like Congklak and Long Se simultaneously foster socio-emotional and cognitive intelligence. Although the element of betting occasionally arises in Pukang, which might theoretically carry potential for conflict, in practice it strengthens values of sportsmanship and tolerance among players, as evidenced by informants describing an open-minded and gracious attitude toward losing. In a community like Balerejo, where the spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) is highly valued, the game serves as a reflection of the collective norms embedded in daily life. Thus, Pukang functions as a form of social simulation, bringing individuals together through cultural practice that fosters social bonds rather than division.

From a scientific contribution perspective, this research provides new insights into the significance of understanding traditional games as part of social education strategies rooted in local wisdom. Compared to character education approaches that are typically formal and normative, approaches based on traditional games offer a contextual, engaging, and culturally grounded learning experience. This aligns with the ideas of Suryawan (2020) and Asriasnyah (2018), who argue that traditional games can be integrated into physical and social education curricula to instill values such as cooperation, discipline, and responsibility. These findings not only underscore the urgency of preserving traditional games but also illustrate that effective social education must consider cultural realities and local community practices. Consequently, Pukang is not merely cultural heritage but also a pedagogical tool with significant potential for experiential learning in the Indonesian context.

Nonetheless, this study has several limitations worth noting. First, the scope of analysis was confined to a single village and three primary informants, warranting caution

in generalizing the findings. Second, the research has not yet explored in depth the perceptions of children or younger generations living within a digital ecosystem toward traditional games like Pukang. Third, there has been no investigation into the systematic integration of such games into formal educational systems. Therefore, future research is recommended to involve a broader range of participants across age groups—including Generation Z and Generation Alpha—and to develop participatory action approaches in schools that enable the integration of traditional games into thematic learning. Practically, village governments and educational institutions could design culture-based preservation programs anchored in schools and communities, positioning traditional games as both social instruments and dynamic cultural curricula relevant for contemporary society.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the traditional game Pukang holds significant importance as a medium for social interaction in Balerejo Village, East Lampung. It functions not merely as community entertainment but also as a vehicle for strengthening social relationships across generations and social strata, fostering solidarity amidst competitive dynamics, and serving as an instrument for preserving local cultural heritage imbued with educational and social character values. These findings address the research objectives by demonstrating how Pukang continues to maintain its social function within a multicultural society, despite facing challenges from modernization and the dominance of digital entertainment. This research contributes to the development of social education science by enriching perspectives on the importance of integrating traditional games into local wisdom-based learning strategies to reinforce values of togetherness, tolerance, and social cohesion. Accordingly, future studies are recommended to involve more participants across age groups and to examine directly the application of traditional games like Pukang within formal education settings, while also encouraging more structured cultural preservation policies through collaboration among communities, schools, and local governments.

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