

Revitalizing Local Games as Culturally Responsive Learning Resources in Early Childhood Education: A Gioia Study of Kindergarten Teachers in Banten, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine how kindergarten educators in Banten, Indonesia, reconstruct, adapt, and sustain local games as culturally responsive learning resources amid changing play patterns, digital media exposure, and the increasing use of standardized educational materials. An exploratory qualitative design informed by the Gioia methodology was conducted across five kindergartens involving 10 informants, comprising eight classroom teachers and two school principals. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis and were analyzed iteratively through first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions, supported by triangulation across data sources. The findings identified three interrelated mechanisms of local-game revitalization. First, teachers reconstructed local games as culturally meaningful learning experiences connected to children's familiar social environments. Second, they pedagogically adapted the games by simplifying rules, modifying materials, and aligning play activities with curricular objectives while retaining essential cultural values. Third, the sustainability of these practices depended on their integration into broader school-family-community relationships and on continuous adaptation to social and digital change. These findings indicate that revitalizing local games involves not merely cultural preservation but also pedagogical translation, contextual adaptation, and institutional embedding. The study extends play-based learning scholarship by highlighting teacher agency and cultural context as key mechanisms for sustaining local games in early childhood education. Its qualitative and geographically bounded design limits broader generalization; therefore, future studies should examine these mechanisms across more diverse cultural and institutional settings.

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Introduction

Play is widely regarded as a central mode through which young children explore ideas, negotiate relationships, exercise agency, and connect emerging knowledge with lived experience. Contemporary evidence also shows that the educational value of play depends not simply on the presence of playful activity but on the quality of interaction, guidance, and meaning available within the learning environment (McInnes, 2019; Skene et al., 2022; Yogman et al., 2018). At the same time, early childhood education is increasingly shaped by pressures for visible academic outcomes, curricular accountability, and the normalization of digital media in children's everyday lives, all of which can alter how teachers conceptualize and organize play (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Hesterman & Targowska, 2020; Walsh & Fallon, 2021). Systematic and synthesis research further suggests that digital play is now embedded within the contemporary ecology of childhood and that

educators' beliefs strongly influence whether digital technologies are understood as complementary resources, competing priorities, or sources of pedagogical tension (Boysen et al., 2022; Chu et al., 2024; Mertala, 2019). These shifts make it important to examine not only whether children play, but also which forms of play remain educationally visible, how teachers assign value to them, and how culturally rooted practices can remain meaningful within changing institutional conditions.

This issue is especially salient for local and traditional games because such games are simultaneously cultural practices, social routines, and potential pedagogical resources. Culturally responsive early childhood education emphasizes that learning becomes more meaningful when curriculum recognizes children's communities, languages, histories, and familiar cultural practices rather than treating knowledge as culturally neutral (Bennett et al., 2022; Shih, 2022; Suri & Chandra, 2021). Community co-design research similarly indicates that culturally informed learning environments can create stronger connections among children's everyday experiences, social participation, and educational opportunities, while recent work on culturally and linguistically diverse early childhood contexts highlights the need for teachers to possess pedagogical knowledge that is responsive to children's cultural repertoires (Pesch et al., 2022; Shih, 2022; Veliz et al., 2025). Within Indonesia, traditional games have been discussed as vehicles for character formation, social interaction, local identity, and the transmission of community values, suggesting that their educational significance extends beyond entertainment or heritage display (Hidayati, 2020; Husain & Walangadi, 2021; Lukmanulhakim, 2022). From this perspective, local games can be understood as cultural tools through which children participate in rule-governed interaction, embodied activity, cooperation, communication, and shared meaning-making.

Empirical studies have reported developmental and instructional possibilities associated with traditional games, although the evidence has typically been organized around specific outcomes or particular games. Indonesian studies have linked traditional games with motor learning, social-emotional development, problem solving, and character education (Fitri et al., 2022; Iswinarti & Suminar, 2019; Ramadhani & Fauziah, 2020; Suherman et al., 2019), while other work has examined the use of traditional games for language learning, culturally grounded activities, and the preservation of local play during changing social conditions (Novitawati et al., 2022; Pramudyani, 2020; Sulastri, 2020). These findings are important because they demonstrate the practical versatility of local games, but they also reveal a dominant research orientation: games are frequently treated as instructional interventions whose value is inferred from outcomes, rather than as pedagogical practices that must be interpreted, redesigned, legitimized, and sustained by teachers. Studies of play more broadly show that this distinction matters because teachers' beliefs and pedagogical decisions influence how play is structured, how curricular goals are introduced, and how children's agency is balanced with intentional teaching (Grieshaber et al., 2021; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Lewis et al., 2019). Research on assessment and guided play further indicates that purposeful teacher mediation can support learning without collapsing play into direct instruction, although teachers often require sophisticated professional judgment to maintain that balance (Guarrella et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Skene et al., 2022).

Teacher agency is therefore central to understanding whether local games become meaningful learning resources or remain occasional cultural activities. Studies of kindergarten play-based pedagogy have documented persistent variations in educators' conceptions of play and learning, including tensions between child-directed activity and adult-defined academic goals

(Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Pyle et al., 2018; Walsh & Fallon, 2021). Research on guided and intentional play suggests that effective practice involves a relational and responsive form of mediation in which teachers draw on children's interests while also using pedagogical knowledge to extend thinking, language, numeracy, or other curricular aims (Eason & Ramani, 2020; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Yu et al., 2018). In culturally grounded contexts, this mediation has an additional dimension because teachers must decide which cultural meanings are essential, which rules or materials can be modified, and how a community practice can be translated into formal educational routines without stripping it of cultural significance (Pesch et al., 2022; Shih, 2022; Suri & Chandra, 2021). Accordingly, the revitalization of local games should be conceptualized not as the direct transfer of heritage into the classroom but as a process of pedagogical and cultural translation.

Recent studies provide several points of comparison but leave this process insufficiently explained. Adi et al. (2022) examined teachers' perspectives on motor learning through traditional games and showed that educators varied in their understanding and implementation of such activities. Pramudyani (2020) explored teachers' views of a specific traditional game, Ular Naga, and identified perceived developmental benefits, whereas Sulastri (2020) catalogued traditional Sasak games and their potential use during the pandemic. More recent studies of play-based learning in Yogyakarta found that teachers generally valued play but displayed uneven conceptual alignment and practical understanding of play-based pedagogy (Amir et al., 2024; Ermiyati et al., 2024). Shih (2022), from a different national context, demonstrated how a preschool could develop a local-culture curriculum through community-connected culturally responsive strategies. Collectively, these studies establish the importance of teacher beliefs, local culture, and pedagogical adaptation, but they do not yet explain, as a process, how teachers reconstruct the meaning of local games, translate them into curricular experiences, and mobilize institutional and social conditions that enable the practices to persist. They also provide limited process-oriented theorization of how cultural preservation is negotiated alongside contemporary changes in children's play environments, including the growing presence of digital media (Chu et al., 2024; Mertala, 2019; Pesch et al., 2022).

Addressing this niche requires an analytical approach capable of moving from educators' first-hand accounts toward a grounded conceptual explanation of practice. The Gioia methodology is particularly appropriate for this purpose because it preserves informant-centered concepts in the early stages of analysis while supporting the development of theoretically meaningful themes and aggregate dimensions (Gioia, 2021; Gioia et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2018). Rather than asking whether local games are effective as a discrete intervention, the present study investigates how revitalization is produced through educators' interpretations and actions. Specifically, the study aims to explain how kindergarten teachers in Banten interpret the pedagogical and cultural value of local games, how they adapt and integrate these games into early childhood learning, and how institutional, family, community, and contemporary social conditions shape the sustainability of those practices. By occupying this research space, the study seeks to contribute a process model that connects cultural meaning reconstruction, pedagogical transformation, and ecosystem embedding, thereby extending play-based learning scholarship beyond universalized accounts of play toward a culturally situated explanation of how local learning resources remain educationally relevant.

Method

This study used an exploratory qualitative design informed by the Gioia methodology to investigate how local games were interpreted, adapted, and sustained as learning resources in early childhood education. A qualitative design was appropriate because the research question concerned meaning construction, professional judgment, and the development of practice rather than the estimation of a population parameter or the testing of a predetermined causal effect. The Gioia approach was selected because it offers a transparent route from informant-centered accounts to increasingly abstract conceptual categories while maintaining a visible chain between empirical material and theoretical interpretation (Gioia, 2021; Gioia et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2018). Consistent with recommendations for transparent qualitative reporting, the revised account specifies the study context, sampling logic, data sources, analytic progression, and trustworthiness strategies so that readers can evaluate the coherence between the research question, evidence, and claims (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2021; Levitt et al., 2018).

The research was conducted in five kindergartens in Banten Province, Indonesia. Sites were purposively selected because they provided information-rich settings in which local or traditional games had been incorporated into learning activities and because the selected schools represented urban and semi-urban contexts. The final participant group comprised 10 female informants: eight classroom teachers (G1-G8) and two school principals (KS1-KS2). Teaching and leadership experience ranged from 6 to 18 years. Classroom teachers served as the primary informants because they directly designed and facilitated play activities, while principals contributed an institutional perspective on school support and culturally based programming. Purposive sampling is consistent with qualitative inquiry when participants are selected for direct experience of the focal phenomenon; however, sample adequacy should be justified through information richness and analytic sufficiency rather than through numerical representativeness alone (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Recruitment concluded with 10 informants, reflecting the sample reported in the source manuscript. The study did not seek statistical generalization, and the participant profile was treated as a bounded, context-specific source of process knowledge. To meet contemporary qualitative reporting standards, the operational basis for concluding recruitment should be made explicit because different forms of saturation and information sufficiency depend on the specificity of the sample, the scope of the research question, and the depth of the data corpus (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Levitt et al., 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018).

Data were generated through three complementary sources: in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentary materials. Interviews explored educators' experiences selecting local games, reasons for choosing particular games, interpretations of educational and cultural value, adaptations made to rules and materials, links between games and learning objectives, perceived challenges, and conditions that supported continuity. Classroom observations focused on how games were enacted in practice, including teacher-child interaction, peer participation, rule negotiation, the use of materials, and teacher mediation. Documentary evidence included lesson plans, activity photographs, and school records relevant to the positioning of local games within educational activities. Using multiple sources allowed the analysis to compare what participants said with what could be observed or documented in practice, a strategy that strengthens interpretive credibility

when the purpose is to understand complex educational processes (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Gioia, 2021; Levitt et al., 2018).

Interview, observation, and documentary materials were analyzed iteratively. First, the researchers generated first-order concepts using language that remained close to participants' expressions and the observable features of practice. Next, conceptually related first-order codes were compared and clustered into second-order themes that captured more abstract patterns, including the connection between games and children's everyday lives, pedagogical adaptation, curriculum integration, institutional legitimacy, and the negotiation of contemporary play conditions. Finally, the second-order themes were organized into aggregate dimensions that explained the process of revitalization. Throughout the analysis, evidence was compared across informants, schools, and data sources, and the developing data structure was repeatedly checked against the empirical material. This movement from first-order concepts to second-order themes and aggregate dimensions is central to the Gioia methodology and helps make the analytical logic visible rather than presenting themes as if they emerged automatically from the data (Gioia, 2021; Gioia et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2018).

Trustworthiness was addressed through source and method triangulation, reflexive attention to the researchers' interpretive role, and the construction of an explicit Gioia data structure linking evidence with conceptual claims. Interview accounts were compared with classroom observations and documentary materials, while contradictory or context-dependent patterns were retained during interpretation rather than being forced into uniform categories. Reflexive qualitative practice is important because coding and interpretation are analytic acts undertaken by researchers, and transparency about those acts strengthens rather than weakens qualitative rigor (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Gioia, 2021; Levitt et al., 2018). The resulting analysis therefore emphasizes conceptual transferability and process explanation within the Banten kindergarten context rather than statistical generalizability.

Result and Discussion

Research Context and Participant Profile

The study involved five kindergartens in Banten Province that varied in geographical setting and institutional emphasis on culturally based activities. Eight classroom teachers and two principals participated. As shown in Table 1, all informants were female and had between 6 and 18 years of teaching or leadership experience. The participant distribution provided classroom-level accounts of game implementation together with institutional perspectives on the conditions that supported or constrained local-game use.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Code	Role	Gender	Experience	Kindergarten context
G1	Teacher, Group B	Female	14 years	Urban; local cultural program
G2	Teacher, Group A	Female	9 years	Community-based private kindergarten
G3	Teacher, Group B	Female	11 years	Regular traditional-game activities
G4	Teacher, Group A	Female	7 years	Semi-urban kindergarten
G5	Teacher, Group B	Female	16 years	Local-culture strengthening program
G6	Teacher, Group A	Female	8 years	General private kindergarten
G7	Teacher, Group B	Female	13 years	Community-based kindergarten

G8	Teacher, Group A	Female	6 years	Urban kindergarten
KS1	School principal	Female	18 years	Early childhood institution manager
KS2	School principal	Female	15 years	Developer of culturally based programs

Theme 1: Reconstructing Local Games as Culturally Meaningful Learning

Interview and observation data showed that educators did not describe local games merely as recreational activities. They interpreted them as familiar cultural practices that connected school learning with children's experiences in families and communities. Teachers reported that familiarity with a game reduced the need for lengthy explanations and supported children's willingness to participate. During observations, children communicated with peers, followed shared rules, waited for turns, and negotiated minor disagreements while teachers intervened selectively rather than directing every action.

G1 emphasized the connection between familiarity and participation:

"When children play games that they have already seen at home, they understand the rules more quickly. They do not feel that they are learning, even though many abilities are actually developing, such as communication, cooperation, and learning how to follow the rules of the game." (G1)

G3 similarly framed the games as carriers of social values:

"Local games carry values that are not always visible. For example, when children play together, they learn patience in waiting for their turn and accepting when their friends win." (G3)

The first-order concepts generated from these accounts - including familiarity with games from home, learning through direct participation, and the social values embedded in play - were grouped into second-order themes concerning everyday-life connections, meaningful play experiences, and socially embedded learning. Together, these themes formed the aggregate dimension of meaning reconstruction: teachers actively reinterpreted local games as culturally meaningful learning resources rather than treating them as remnants of tradition.

Theme 2: Pedagogical Adaptation and Curriculum Integration

Teachers reported that local games were rarely transferred into the classroom in completely unchanged form. Instead, they simplified rules, adjusted materials, reorganized group size, and connected game activities with curricular intentions. These adaptations were especially visible when teachers judged community versions of games to be too complex for young children or when available space and materials required modification.

G2 described rule simplification as a deliberate pedagogical decision:

"I usually simplify traditional games first. For example, I reduce the number of rules so children do not become confused. The important thing is that the values within the game remain." (G2)

G5 described how the game was connected to a learning theme rather than used as an isolated activity:

"I do not only ask children to play, but I connect the games with learning themes. For example, games involving numbers can be used to introduce early counting concepts." (G5)

Classroom observations supported these accounts. Engklek was used through simplified movement paths and turn-taking rules; a simple form of congklak was linked to counting; group games were organized to provide opportunities for cooperation and communication; and

environment-based games used locally available materials. As summarized in Table 2, teacher mediation varied from clarifying rules and organizing participation to prompting counting or facilitating exploration. The data therefore indicated that adaptation was not incidental but constituted a central mechanism through which cultural practices were translated into developmentally appropriate and curriculum-relevant learning experiences.

Table 2. Observed Local-Game Learning Practices

Game/activity	Observed activity	Observed child behavior	Teacher mediation
Engklek	Children followed simplified movement paths and shared rules.	Balanced/hopped along the path, waited for turns, and followed rules.	Clarified rules and scaffolded participation when needed.
Simple congklak	Children moved counters in turns.	Counted or matched counters, waited for turns, and verbalized simple strategies.	Linked moves to early counting and prompted children selectively.
Group games	Children participated in small groups.	Cooperated, communicated, negotiated turn taking, and resolved minor disagreements.	Observed interaction, organized groups, and provided reinforcement.
Environment-based games	Children used surrounding materials as play resources.	Explored materials, proposed uses, and participated in shared construction or play.	Facilitated exploration and helped maintain safe participation.

Theme 3: Embedding Local Games in a Supportive Learning Ecosystem

The analysis also showed that teacher creativity alone did not fully explain whether local games could be sustained. Institutional legitimacy, principal support, parental involvement, community perceptions, and changes in children's play patterns formed a wider set of conditions surrounding classroom practice. Principal support gave teachers greater space to incorporate culturally based activities, while family and community familiarity with games reinforced their social recognizability. At the same time, informants identified the growing prominence of digital entertainment and changing perceptions of what counts as modern learning as challenges that required continuous adaptation rather than simple preservation.

These patterns were integrated into the aggregate dimension of ecosystem embedding and sustainability. In this dimension, local-game continuity depended on the interaction of school support, social recognition, and educators' capacity to negotiate contemporary conditions. Table 3 presents the Gioia data structure and shows how the first-order concepts were developed into second-order themes and the three aggregate dimensions used in the final process explanation.

Table 3. Gioia Data Structure

First-order concepts	Second-order themes	Aggregate dimension
Games recognized from family/community experience	Connection to children's everyday lives	Meaning reconstruction
Children learn through direct participation	Play as a meaningful learning process	Meaning reconstruction
Games contain cooperation, patience, and communication values	Social values embedded in local play	Meaning reconstruction
Teachers simplify or modify game rules	Developmentally responsive adaptation	Pedagogical transformation

Teachers connect games with learning objectives	Curriculum integration	Pedagogical transformation
Teachers create material and activity variations	Pedagogical creativity	Pedagogical transformation
School principal support legitimizes local-game use	Institutional support	Ecosystem embedding and sustainability
Parents and community recognize or support local games	Social support and cultural recognition	Ecosystem embedding and sustainability
Digital entertainment changes children's play patterns	Negotiating contemporary play conditions	Ecosystem embedding and sustainability
Community perceptions shape acceptance of play-based learning	Negotiating the educational value of play	Ecosystem embedding and sustainability

Gioia Data Structure and Process Model

The final data structure organized the findings into three interrelated dimensions: meaning reconstruction, pedagogical transformation, and ecosystem embedding and sustainability. These dimensions were sequentially related but not strictly linear. Teachers' interpretations shaped how games were adapted; classroom enactment generated new understandings of children's responses; and institutional or social support influenced whether successful adaptations were repeated, modified, or discontinued. Figure 1 synthesizes this process as an iterative model in which cultural heritage and children's familiar play enter formal education through teacher interpretation, pedagogical adaptation, meaningful participation, and wider ecosystem support, with sustained relevance feeding back into future practice.



Figure 1. Process model of local-game revitalization in early childhood education

Discussion

The findings indicate that the revitalization of local games in early childhood education is best understood as a process of cultural and pedagogical reconstruction rather than as the preservation of fixed forms. Teachers first interpreted games through their knowledge of children, community values, and educational purposes; they then translated those interpretations into classroom practices. This finding is consistent with culturally responsive approaches that position children's community experiences as legitimate curricular resources and emphasize the role of educators in

connecting formal learning with cultural identity (Pesch et al., 2022; Shih, 2022; Suri & Chandra, 2021). It also extends this literature by showing that cultural responsiveness in play is not achieved merely by inserting a local object or activity into the curriculum. Instead, it depends on a meaning-making process in which teachers decide what cultural elements should be retained, what can be adapted, and how the activity can support participation and learning. This process-oriented explanation is especially relevant to local games because their cultural value is enacted through rules, relationships, language, embodied routines, and shared histories rather than through material artifacts alone (Bennett et al., 2022; Hidayati, 2020; Husain & Walangadi, 2021).

The first aggregate dimension, meaning reconstruction, helps clarify why local games can function differently across educational settings even when the nominal game is the same. Prior Indonesian studies have documented perceived developmental benefits or catalogued suitable traditional games, including Ular Naga, Sasak games, and traditional games used for character or social-emotional learning (Fitri et al., 2022; Pramudyani, 2020; Sulastri, 2020). Such studies establish the educational potential of traditional play, but the present findings place greater analytical emphasis on the interpretive work through which teachers recognize that potential. This emphasis also resonates with research showing that educators' beliefs about play strongly influence what they regard as legitimate learning and how they position themselves during children's play (Bubikova-Moan et al., 2019; Hesterman & Targowska, 2020; Walsh & Fallon, 2021). The Banten data suggest that cultural familiarity gave teachers a starting point, but it was their professional interpretation - linking familiarity, social values, and curricular purpose - that transformed a community game into an educational resource.

The second dimension, pedagogical transformation, showed that teachers sustained local games by adapting rather than reproducing them unchanged. Rule simplification, material substitution, changes in grouping, and links to counting or thematic learning represented forms of intentional mediation. This result aligns with research arguing that high-quality play-based pedagogy requires active professional judgment and a flexible relationship between child agency and educator intention (Grieshaber et al., 2021; Hedges & Cooper, 2018; Lewis et al., 2019). It is also compatible with evidence from guided-play research showing that adult guidance can support learning when it preserves meaningful child engagement instead of converting play into highly directive instruction (Eason & Ramani, 2020; Skene et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2018). The observed adaptations therefore should not be interpreted as dilution of cultural authenticity by default. In this study, adaptation was the mechanism through which teachers sought to retain core social and cultural meanings while making the games accessible to young children and responsive to classroom conditions.

This interpretation is particularly important when the findings are compared with recent research on teachers' understanding of play-based learning. Adi et al. (2022) reported variation in kindergarten teachers' understanding and implementation of traditional games for motor learning, while Amir et al. (2024) and Ermiyati et al. (2024) identified uneven or incomplete alignment between teachers' positive attitudes toward play-based learning and their conceptual or practical understanding of it. The present study does not contradict those findings; rather, it illustrates what more developed pedagogical translation can look like in practice. Teachers in the Banten sites described not only that games were useful, but how they modified rules, materials, and curricular connections. At the same time, the data should not be used to claim that all adaptations were equally effective. Research on playful assessment and teacher beliefs demonstrates that educator intention

can remain inconsistent even in settings that explicitly value play (Guarrella et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2021; Pyle et al., 2018). The contribution here is therefore explanatory rather than evaluative: the study identifies adaptation as a mechanism that requires professional knowledge, not as automatic evidence of instructional quality.

The observed child behaviors - participation, turn taking, communication, rule following, counting, and simple conflict negotiation - were consistent with developmental possibilities reported in prior traditional-game research, including studies of social-emotional development, problem solving, motor learning, and language-related learning (Fitri et al., 2022; Iswinarti & Suminar, 2019; Novitawati et al., 2022). Similar arguments have been made for traditional games as contexts for character development and embodied participation (Hidayati, 2020; Srikandi et al., 2020; Suherman et al., 2019). However, the qualitative design of the present study did not test causal effects on children's developmental outcomes. The findings therefore support the interpretation that local games created observable opportunities for these behaviors, not that the games independently produced measurable developmental gains. Maintaining this distinction strengthens the study's contribution because it avoids converting qualitative observations into claims that would require experimental, longitudinal, or validated outcome measures.

The third dimension, ecosystem embedding and sustainability, expands the analysis beyond the individual teacher. School leadership, parental involvement, community recognition, and broader social change influenced whether local-game practices could be repeated and normalized. This finding is compatible with research showing that play-based learning implementation is shaped by institutional structures, teacher support, curriculum expectations, and wider cultural beliefs rather than by classroom technique alone (Boysen et al., 2022; Keung & Cheung, 2019; Veliz et al., 2025). It also echoes community-oriented culturally responsive research in which meaningful educational innovation depends on relationships among schools, families, and local resources (Pesch et al., 2022; Shih, 2022; Suri & Chandra, 2021). The conceptual implication is that sustainability should be treated as an ecological accomplishment. A culturally grounded practice becomes durable when it is pedagogically workable, institutionally legitimate, and socially recognizable at the same time.

The role of digital change further illustrates this ecological argument. Participants treated the growing presence of digital entertainment as a challenge to the visibility of local games, but the data did not support a simple opposition between technology and culture. Contemporary reviews show that digital play has become a substantive part of young children's play worlds, while educators' technology beliefs are themselves shaped by educational, socialization, and care-related considerations (Chu et al., 2024; Mertala, 2019; Yogman et al., 2018). Accordingly, the educational question is not whether schools should choose traditional games instead of digital resources. A more productive interpretation is that teachers need a broad repertoire that allows cultural and digital forms of play to coexist where each serves a defensible pedagogical purpose (Boysen et al., 2022; Chu et al., 2024; Mertala, 2019). In this study, sustainability was associated with adaptability: local games remained relevant when teachers could redesign participation without treating tradition as static.

The study's main theoretical contribution is the three-mechanism process model linking meaning reconstruction, pedagogical transformation, and ecosystem embedding. Previous research has examined teacher perspectives, particular traditional games, specific developmental outcomes, or local-culture curriculum design (Adi et al., 2022; Pramudyani, 2020; Shih, 2022), but these strands have rarely been integrated into a single process explanation of how local games move from

community familiarity to sustained classroom practice. The Gioia analysis adds this process vocabulary by showing that teacher agency operates at multiple levels: interpretive agency determines what a game means educationally, design agency determines how it is transformed for children, and relational or institutional agency helps secure the support needed for continuity. Methodologically, the use of an explicit data structure also makes the path from participant-centered concepts to the proposed model more visible, which is consistent with calls for transparency and conceptual grounding in inductive qualitative research (Aguinis & Solarino, 2019; Gioia, 2021; Gioia et al., 2013).

Practically, the findings imply that teacher professional development should go beyond compiling lists of traditional games. Training can instead engage educators in identifying the cultural meanings of local play, mapping these meanings onto developmental and curricular purposes, testing age-appropriate adaptations, documenting children's responses, and reflecting on which elements should remain stable across adaptations. Such an approach is consistent with research that frames intentional teaching as informed, responsive participation rather than the replacement of play with direct instruction (Grieshaber et al., 2021; Guarrella et al., 2023; Hedges & Cooper, 2018). Schools can also strengthen sustainability by involving families and community members in documenting local games, validating culturally significant rules or stories, and co-designing safe adaptations for contemporary settings, practices supported by research on community co-design and culturally responsive early childhood curriculum (Pesch et al., 2022; Shih, 2022; Suri & Chandra, 2021).

Several limitations define the boundaries of these conclusions. The study was conducted in five purposively selected kindergartens in one Indonesian province and involved only 10 adult informants, all of whom were women; consequently, the process model should be treated as analytically transferable rather than statistically representative. The sites were selected because they had experience with local-game practices, which may have produced a more supportive picture than would be found in schools where such practices are absent or contested. Children and parents were not interviewed directly, and the observational material was used to understand enactment rather than to measure developmental outcomes. These limitations point to several directions for future research. Multi-province studies could examine whether the three mechanisms recur across different cultural traditions; comparative studies could include schools with weak and strong institutional support; and longitudinal or mixed-methods designs could connect the process model with changes in child engagement, social interaction, motor competence, language, or early numeracy. Future studies should also incorporate children's and families' perspectives and investigate how local and digital forms of play can be designed as complementary rather than competing learning resources (Chu et al., 2024; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Veliz et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study examined how local games are revitalized as educational resources in five kindergartens in Banten, Indonesia, with particular attention to the ways educators interpret, adapt, and sustain culturally rooted play within contemporary early childhood education. The findings identify three interrelated mechanisms that collectively explain this process. First, through meaning reconstruction, teachers repositioned familiar local games as culturally significant learning experiences connected to children's everyday social environments. Second, through pedagogical transformation, educators modified rules, materials, grouping arrangements, and curricular connections to accommodate children's developmental needs while preserving the essential cultural meanings embedded in the

games. Third, through ecosystem embedding, the continuity of local-game practices was shaped by the interaction among teacher agency, school leadership, family participation, community recognition, and ongoing responses to social and digital change. These findings answer the study's central inquiry by demonstrating that the revitalization of local games is not merely an act of preserving cultural heritage, but a dynamic educational process involving cultural interpretation, pedagogical adaptation, and institutional sustainability.

Theoretically, the study advances play-based learning scholarship by proposing a process-oriented understanding of local-game revitalization in which teacher agency, cultural context, and institutional support operate as interconnected mechanisms rather than isolated influences. Practically, the findings suggest that early childhood teacher development should integrate local cultural knowledge with intentional play pedagogy, adaptive instructional design, and stronger collaboration among schools, families, and communities. Methodologically, the Gioia-informed analysis provides a systematic framework for tracing how educators construct meaning and translate culturally embedded practices into formal educational settings. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its qualitative design, relatively small number of informants, and concentration within five kindergartens in a single Indonesian province, which restricts the transferability of the findings beyond comparable contexts. Future research should therefore examine the proposed process model across culturally and institutionally diverse settings, incorporate longitudinal and mixed-method designs, and investigate how different forms of local-game revitalization relate to children's participation, learning experiences, and cultural engagement over time. Such inquiry will strengthen the empirical foundation for culturally responsive play-based education and clarify how local traditions can remain educationally meaningful within rapidly changing childhood environments.

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