



Mechanisms of Cooperation and Emotion Regulation among Young Children through Gobak Sodor

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the mechanisms through which the traditional game Gobak Sodor stimulates cooperation and emotion regulation among children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Cempaka Pakuan, Bandung. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, involving 16 children in group B, consisting of 11 girls and 5 boys, and the classroom teacher. Field observation was conducted on 19 May 2026 through field notes, learning documentation, and teacher confirmation. Data were analysed through reduction, thematic coding, data display, and verification. The findings reveal four main mechanisms: understanding rules and spatial boundaries, role distribution within teams, peer communication through verbal cues and verbal support, and emotion management when protesting, feeling disappointed, waiting for turns, winning, and losing. Gobak Sodor functions not merely as a physical activity but as a pedagogical mechanism that stimulates cooperation and emotion regulation through structured, social, and reflective play experiences.

Keywords: *cooperation; early childhood; emotion regulation; Gobak Sodor; traditional game.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan mekanisme stimulasi kerja sama dan regulasi emosi anak usia 5–6 tahun melalui permainan tradisional Gobak Sodor di PAUD Cempaka Pakuan, Kota Bandung. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan partisipan 16 anak kelompok B, terdiri atas 11 perempuan dan 5 laki-laki, serta guru kelas. Observasi lapangan dilakukan pada 19 Mei 2026 melalui catatan lapangan, dokumentasi pembelajaran, dan konfirmasi guru. Analisis data dilakukan melalui reduksi, pengodean tematik, penyajian data, dan verifikasi. Temuan menunjukkan empat mekanisme utama: pemahaman aturan dan batas ruang, pembagian peran dalam tim, komunikasi antaranak melalui aba-aba dan dukungan verbal, serta pengelolaan emosi saat protes, kecewa, menunggu giliran, menang, dan kalah. Gobak Sodor tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai aktivitas fisik, tetapi sebagai mekanisme pedagogis yang menstimulasi kerja sama dan regulasi emosi melalui pengalaman bermain yang terstruktur, sosial, dan reflektif.

Kata Kunci: *anak usia dini; Gobak Sodor; kerja sama; permainan tradisional; regulasi emosi*

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Introduction

Early childhood education is a fundamental phase for building children's readiness to interact, cooperate, understand rules, and manage emotions in everyday life. At the age of 5–6 years, children begin to show a stronger need to become part of a peer group, take roles, wait for turns, accept shared decisions, and adjust their emotional responses when facing success, failure, and differences in wishes with friends. Therefore, early childhood learning should not be directed only towards academic readiness, but should also provide concrete, enjoyable, safe, and play-centred socio-emotional experiences. Developmental literature affirms that the ability to regulate attention, emotions, and behaviour during the preschool years is associated with children's school readiness, social relationships, and early academic achievement (Blair & Raver, 2015; Liew, 2012; McClelland et al., 2007).

Play is the primary medium of early childhood learning because through play children directly experience processes of communication, negotiation, language use, bodily regulation, spatial awareness, and participation in social rules. Studies of child development show that socio-emotional competence is related to the ability to understand emotions, express emotions appropriately, build relationships with peers, and regulate behaviour in social contexts (Denham et al., 2012; Slot et al., 2017). Whitebread et al. (2009) also emphasise that children's self-regulation develops through collaborative situations and peer interaction, not solely through direct adult instruction. Studies on play-based learning show that play supports children's cognitive, social, emotional, language, and self-regulation development when play experiences remain enjoyable yet are pedagogically guided. In addition, the guided play approach positions the teacher as a companion who maintains children's play autonomy while directing learning goals through support that does not dominate the play process. Thus, play-based learning can become a strategic pedagogical space for stimulating children's cooperation and emotion regulation.

In the Indonesian context, traditional games have pedagogical potential because they contain cultural values, social rules, bodily movement, group strategy, communication, and emotional experience. Previous studies have shown that traditional games contribute to various aspects of early childhood development. Munawaroh (2017) shows that a learning model based on the traditional game Engklek can be used as a means of stimulating early childhood development. Ramadhani and Fauziah (2020) found that peer relationships and traditional games are associated with the social and emotional skills of children aged 5–6 years. Aulia and Sudaryanti (2023) affirm that traditional games can support peer interaction, cooperation, self-confidence, helping friends, and socialisation skills. In the motor domain, Darmawati and Widayarsi (2022) show that Engklek stimulates balance, strength, and agility. Other studies also link traditional games to language ability (Cendana & Suryana, 2021), creativity (Lucky & Muhid, 2025), character strengthening (Hajeni et al., 2023), problem solving through Gobak Sodor (Gustira et al., 2023), and the development of traditional games for broader aspects of child development (Khadijah & Wahyuni, 2024). Recent literature reviews also affirm that traditional games support motor coordination, social interaction, rule compliance, turn-taking ability, and cooperation in early childhood play contexts (Arifiyah & Formen, 2026; Dzakiyyah et al., 2024).

Although these studies demonstrate the benefits of traditional games, existing studies still tend to position traditional games as media for improving certain developmental aspects or as products of learning development. Development articles generally focus on the validity, feasibility, and effectiveness of game media, whereas classroom action research more often emphasises changes in developmental scores from one cycle to another. Such studies are important, but they do not fully explain how developmental stimulation occurs at the level of micro-interaction while children play. The guided play literature shows that the quality of play experiences is determined not only by the type of game, but also by the relationship among activity structure, child autonomy, teacher support, and the developmental goals to be facilitated (Skene et al., 2022; Weisberg et al., 2016; Zosh et al., 2018). In other words, research is still needed to describe the pedagogical mechanisms within games: how children learn to share roles, build group strategies, give signals, wait for turns, accept rules, manage disappointment, and resolve minor conflicts with peers.

The traditional game Gobak Sodor was selected because its characteristics contain elements of teamwork, role distribution, shared strategy, quick decision-making, compliance with spatial boundaries, and emotional experiences when winning and losing. Children who play Gobak Sodor do not merely move across or guard lines; they also learn to observe friends, give verbal cues, inhibit the impulse to move, listen to group decisions, accept turns, and manage emotions when touched by an opponent or when failing to cross a line. This character is in line with the view that physical activity play can carry social and developmental functions because children practise coordinating movement, space, rules, and peer relationships simultaneously (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). The structure of this game makes Gobak Sodor relevant for examining cooperation and emotion regulation together. In addition, studies of Gobak Sodor have shown its association with children's

cooperation, socio-emotional development, and problem-solving, yet there remains room to examine these stimulation mechanisms through a descriptive qualitative approach close to early childhood classroom situations (Anggraini & Nurhafizah, 2020; Gustira et al., 2023).

Based on this gap, this study aims to describe the mechanisms through which the traditional game Gobak Sodor stimulates cooperation and emotion regulation among children aged 5–6 years at PAUD Cempaka Pakuan, Bandung. The focus of the study is not placed on statistical influence or effectiveness, but on the play process: how the game is implemented, how children build cooperation, how children manage emotions, and how teachers facilitate play experiences so that they are safe, meaningful, and appropriate to the developmental characteristics of young children. The novelty of this study lies in positioning Gobak Sodor as a socio-emotional pedagogical mechanism, not merely as a physical activity or a medium for improving development. Its contribution is expected to strengthen traditional game-based learning strategies, clarify the teacher's role in scaffolding emotion and cooperation, and provide a practical foundation for early childhood teachers in designing play activities that are culturally aware, purposeful, and reflective (Angkur et al., 2025; Hafid et al., 2026; Iman & Diana, 2026).

Table 1. Map of Relevant Literature and Research Gaps

No	Source	Focused Findings	Relevance to This Manuscript	Remaining Gap
1	Ramadhani & Fauziah (2020)	Peer relationships and traditional games are associated with the socio-emotional skills of children aged 5–6 years.	Affirms that traditional games and peer interaction are relevant to socio-emotional development.	Does not yet examine the specific mechanisms of cooperation and emotion regulation within one particular game.
2	Aulia & Sudaryanti (2023)	Traditional games improve interaction, cooperation, self-confidence, and peer relationships.	Strengthens the argument that traditional games serve as a socio-emotional medium.	Still discusses the general role of traditional games; it has not closely examined micro-play processes in early childhood classrooms.
3	Darmawati & Widayarsi (2022)	Engklek stimulates gross motor skills through balance, strength, and agility.	Shows that traditional games can stimulate child development.	Focuses on motor skills; it has not explored emotion regulation and cooperation as mechanisms.
4	Hajeni et al. (2023)	Thematic Kola-Kola was developed to strengthen children's character.	Shows the importance of modifying traditional games.	Oriented towards R&D and product validation; children's interaction processes are not the centre of analysis.
5	Gustira et al. (2023)	Petualangan Gobak Sodor is associated with problem-solving ability.	Positions Gobak Sodor as a strategic game.	There remains room to examine cooperation and emotion regulation through a descriptive qualitative approach.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was selected because the purpose of the study was to describe in detail the mechanisms that stimulate children's cooperation and emotion regulation while participating in the traditional game Gobak Sodor, rather than to test the statistical effect of a treatment. A descriptive qualitative design is appropriate when research aims to present a comprehensive summary of an event, practice, or experience in language close to its empirical situation (Sandelowski, 2000). In this study, the observed event was the activity of playing Gobak Sodor as a learning practice in early childhood education.

The use of a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to capture details of peer interaction, forms of verbal and nonverbal communication, teacher strategies, children's emotional responses, and behavioural changes that emerged during the play process in its natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research quality was maintained by establishing systematic data collection procedures, explaining the research context, recording observable behaviour, applying technique triangulation, and verifying interpretation with the classroom teacher.

Research Site, Participants, and Selection Criteria

The study was conducted at PAUD Cempaka Pakuan, Bandung, in group B with children aged 5–6 years. Field observation was carried out over one day, on 19 May 2026, through three stages: preparation, observation, and confirmation. The participants consisted of 16 children, including 11 girls and 5 boys, and one classroom teacher who facilitated the game. Participants were selected purposively by considering three criteria: the children were aged 5–6 years, the children were involved in group play activities, and the institution had a space that allowed Gobak Sodor to be implemented safely. Children's identities were disguised using codes such as A1, A2, B1, B2, and so forth.

Object and Focus of Observation

The object of this study was the mechanism for stimulating cooperation and emotion regulation in the game Gobak Sodor. Cooperation was observed through children's behaviours in sharing roles, following group strategies, helping friends, giving signals, listening to peers' instructions, and agreeing on team decisions. Emotion regulation was observed through children's ability to wait for turns, accept game outcomes, control disappointment, continue following rules, accept correction, and re-engage after experiencing failure or minor conflict.

Table 2. Observation Focus of the Stimulation Mechanism

Aspect	Observed Indicator	Examples of Children's Behaviour	Data Source
Cooperation	Role distribution	Children agree who guards the front line, the middle line, and who attempts to cross the line.	Observation, field notes, documentation.
Cooperation	Team communication	Children give verbal cues, remind friends, or ask for help when a strategy fails.	Observation and field notes.
Cooperation	Care for friends	Children wait for friends, give support, or do not blame friends who fail.	Observation and teacher confirmation.
Emotion regulation	Waiting for turns	Children are able to restrain the impulse to enter before the rules allow it.	Observation.
Emotion regulation	Accepting winning and losing	Children do not cry excessively, do not mock others, and are willing to play again.	Observation, field notes, teacher confirmation.
Emotion regulation	Managing minor conflict	Children are willing to listen to the teacher's explanation when there is debate over whether someone has been touched or not.	Observation and field notes.
Teacher's role	Rule facilitation and reflection	The teacher explains the rules, mediates conflict, and invites children to reflect on play behaviours.	Observation and teacher confirmation.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out in one day through three stages. The preparation stage included coordination with the classroom teacher, determination of the play area, agreement on safety rules, and administrative permission from the institution and parents/guardians. The observation stage was conducted directly by following the implementation cycle of the Gobak Sodor game, from the teacher's introduction of the rules, group division, and the game process to the closing/reflection session. The confirmation stage was conducted through a brief structured conversation with the classroom teacher immediately after the play activity ended so that observation data could be validated directly without a lengthy procedural burden.

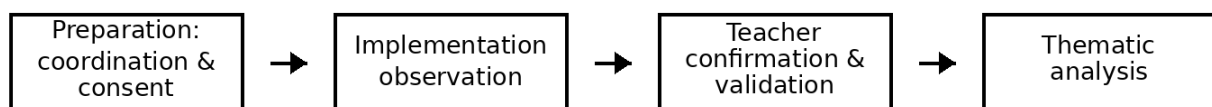


Figure 1. Flow of Research Data Collection and Analysis

During data collection, the researcher used non-participant or limited-participant observation. The researcher did not take over the teacher's role in organising the game, but remained around the play area to record children's behaviours, peer communication, emotional responses, teacher mediation, and important events that emerged during the game. The documentation collected consisted of learning materials, field notes,

and teacher notes. Documentation was carried out by considering institutional consent, parental/guardian permission, and the protection of children's identities.

Data Analysis

Data analysis used an interactive model consisting of data condensation or reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Data reduction was carried out by selecting notes directly related to cooperation, emotion regulation, peer communication, compliance with rules, and teacher facilitation. The data were then assigned initial codes, such as understanding rules, play enthusiasm, group protest, accepting roles, team task distribution, team communication, rule protest, managing disappointment, conflict regulation, verbal support, emotional reflection, normalising defeat, and evaluating group strategy. These codes were then grouped into broader themes: mechanisms of cooperation, mechanisms of emotion regulation, and the teacher's role as game facilitator.

Data trustworthiness was ensured through technique triangulation and interpretive verification with the teacher. Technique triangulation was carried out by comparing observation results, field notes, documentation, and teacher confirmation. Teacher verification was used to ensure that the behaviours observed were consistent with the children's characteristics in everyday learning. This study obtained approval from the early childhood education institution and observed ethical principles in early childhood research. Parental/guardian permission was obtained from the preparation stage by informing them of the planned activity and requesting verbal consent so that the children's play process could take place legally and ethically. Children's identities were disguised using codes, documentation did not display children's faces without permission, and the Gobak Sodor activity was designed to be safe and not to create psychological pressure for the children.

Results and Discussion

Table 3. Summary of Field Observation Data on Gobak Sodor at PAUD Cempaka Pakuan

Activity Stage	Field Data Excerpt	Initial Codes	Teacher Verification
Game opening	The teacher gathered 16 children on the field and explained the rules by pointing to the chalk lines. Child A1 asked, "If I'm touched, does that mean I'm dead, Ma'am?" The teacher corrected this by saying, "Not dead, dear, but changing roles to become part of the line-guarding team."	Understanding rules; play enthusiasm.	Most children were already familiar with the concept of role rotation, but physical visualisation was still needed.
Group division	Child A3 sulked because they were separated from Child A4. The teacher mediated by saying, "Today we are learning to help new friends, so in a team we must take care of one another." A3 eventually joined the group, although initially with a frown.	Group protest; accepting roles; team task distribution.	A3 tends to be egocentric in everyday classroom life, but their willingness to yield in this activity was considered positive.
Game implementation	Child B1 gave a cue, "Let's run together, the guard is looking to the right!" B2 protested, "I wasn't touched! I was fast!" After the teacher confirmed that a light touch had occurred, B2 frowned but walked to the side without crying. A5 reminded the team, "Don't move too far forward, or our middle line will be empty!"	Team communication; rule protest; managing disappointment; conflict regulation; verbal support.	The teacher considered this note to record B2's development in emotion regulation because B2 would usually cry or refuse to continue when feeling blamed.

Activity Stage	Field Data Excerpt	Initial Codes	Teacher Verification
Closing/reflection	The teacher asked, "How did you feel when your team lost earlier?" B2 answered, "I was upset, Ma'am, but it was fun because we could run together." When the teacher asked about the key to successfully guarding the line, A5 answered, "Because we always shouted to tell each other when the enemy was approaching."	Emotional reflection; normalising defeat; evaluating group strategy.	Reflective questions helped children become aware of social behaviour without feeling judged for losing or making mistakes during play.

Implementation of Gobak Sodor as a Cooperative Play Situation

The Gobak Sodor activity at PAUD Cempaka Pakuan began with the introduction of chalk lines, an explanation of the rules, and the alignment of children's understanding of the consequences of being touched by an opponent. Field notes showed that the children displayed enthusiasm from the beginning of the activity; several children jumped excitedly, while A1 asked, "If I'm touched, does that mean I'm dead, Ma'am?" This question shows that the child was trying to understand the rule using language close to their play experience. The teacher then corrected the term by saying, "Not dead, dear, but changing roles to become part of the line-guarding team." This correction is important because the teacher not only explained the technical rule, but also made the language of the game emotionally safer for young children.

This finding shows that Gobak Sodor can be read as a cooperative play situation, not merely as a physical game. The game structure helps children learn to understand spatial boundaries, role rotation, and the relationship between individual actions and the continuity of the team. Children assigned to guard the lines need to pay attention to the movements of friends and opponents, whereas children attempting to cross the lines need to read space, wait for opportunities, and coordinate with group members. This pattern is consistent with Ramadhani and Fauziah (2020), who show that traditional games with peers provide space for children to learn to interact, control emotions, and adjust to a group.

Unlike articles that focus on improving motor scores or media feasibility, the findings in this manuscript emphasise that the benefits of Gobak Sodor emerge through the play process itself. In other words, developmental stimulation does not only come from teacher instruction, but from play situations that require children to understand rules, wait for turns, accept boundaries, and respond to friends. This position extends the findings of Darmawati and Widyasari (2022), Fadjariyanti and Fathiyah (2022), Fitri and Imansari (2020), and Dzakiyyah et al. (2024), which more strongly position traditional games as motor stimulation. This finding is also consistent with Pellegrini and Smith (1998) and Zosh et al. (2018), who argue that games involving movement and rules can become spaces for social development when children interact in meaningful situations. The meaning of this finding is that socio-emotional stimulation in Gobak Sodor begins with children's concrete ability to understand rules, spatial boundaries, and the consequences of role rotation.

Mechanisms Stimulating Cooperation: Role Distribution, Communication, and Team Strategy

The cooperation mechanism appeared from the group division stage. Field notes showed that A3 initially sulked because they were separated from their close friend, A4. The teacher then mediated by saying, "Today we are learning to help new friends, so in a team we must take care of one another." After this mediation, A3 was willing to join the group, although initially with a frown. This event shows that cooperation does not always emerge immediately, but can begin with the process of managing personal wishes and accepting a group composition that does not fully match the child's preferences.

During the game, cooperation emerged through verbal cues, verbal support, and positional coordination. B1 gave instructions to the team: "Let's run together, the guard is looking to the right!" Meanwhile, A5 reminded a teammate, "Don't move too far forward, or our middle line will be empty!" These two quotations show that the children were not merely moving spontaneously, but were beginning to read the situation, observe opponents' positions, and direct their friends. Thus, Gobak Sodor provides a natural space for social communication. This finding is consistent with Aulia and Sudaryanti (2023), who state that traditional games can improve children's peer interaction, cooperation, self-confidence, helping behaviour, and socialisation skills. This finding also strengthens Cendana and Suryana (2021), who show that traditional games can support children's language ability through communication that emerges during play activities.

This manuscript differs from previous studies because it does not stop at the statement that cooperation increases. The discussion is directed towards the mechanism of cooperation: children learn to cooperate because the game rules make them interdependent. When a child moves too quickly without paying attention

to friends, the group strategy can fail. Conversely, when children wait for signals or follow group directions, team success becomes more possible. Therefore, Gobak Sodor functions as a space for social practice that requires children to manage personal wishes for the benefit of the group. This reading is supported by studies of guided play, which emphasise the importance of balancing children's freedom, activity structure, and adult support in building meaningful learning experiences (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Skene et al., 2022; Weisberg et al., 2016). The meaning of this finding is that cooperation stimulation in Gobak Sodor occurs because the game structure creates role interdependence among children.

Mechanisms of Emotion Regulation: Waiting for Turns, Accepting Outcomes, and Managing Minor Conflicts

Emotion regulation in Gobak Sodor appeared when children had to accept rules that were not always favourable to them. During the game, B2 tried to break through but their arm was touched by A2. B2 protested, "I wasn't touched! I was fast!" The teacher then approached and objectively confirmed that a light touch had occurred. B2 took a deep breath and frowned, but immediately walked to the side without crying to wait for the next turn. This event shows a transition from spontaneous emotional outburst towards rule acceptance through teacher mediation. Teacher verification strengthened this interpretation because B2 would usually cry or refuse to continue playing when feeling blamed, but in this activity was able to restrain themselves.

This finding is consistent with developmental studies that position emotion regulation as an ability that develops through social support and real experiences. Denham et al. (2012) explain that emotional competence is related to children's early social success, whereas Slot et al. (2026) show that cognitive and emotional regulation can be observed in naturalistic play situations. Other studies also show that emotion and behavioural regulation in early childhood is related to school readiness, social competence, and early academic success (Blair & Raver, 2015; Graziano et al., 2007; Liew, 2012; McClelland et al., 2007). Ramadhani and Fauziah (2020) show that traditional games and peer relationships provide opportunities for children to learn to control emotions so that they can be accepted within peer groups, whereas Hafid et al. (2026), Iman and Diana (2026), and Ambarita and Gampu (2025) affirm the importance of teacher support, media, and directed activities in strengthening young children's emotion regulation.

Minor conflicts in Gobak Sodor should not be treated as disturbances, but as part of the socio-emotional learning process. When children disagree about whether a body has been touched or not, the teacher helps children process the experience through mutually agreed rules. Emotion regulation does not simply mean that children are silent or not angry; rather, it means that children are able to process emotions through language, rules, and adult assistance. This reading extends the findings of Hidayah and Arbarini (2025), who show that traditional games instil cooperation and responsibility, while also facing challenges such as weak parental follow-up, communication, and the influence of technology. Arifiyah and Formen's (2026) findings on turn-taking also strengthen the view that structured activities such as traditional games can train children's patience, rule compliance, and prosocial interaction. The meaning of this finding is that emotion regulation stimulation emerges when children are given space to experience play-related tension, accept decisions, and re-engage safely.

The Teacher's Role as Facilitator, Mediator, and Provider of Reflection

The teacher's role is a determining factor in whether Gobak Sodor truly functions as developmental stimulation. In the observation, the teacher did not only explain the rules, but also modified the difficulty level of the game, divided children into heterogeneous groups, ensured that children understood role rotation, and kept the game safe. Teacher confirmation showed that the game became more appropriate for children aged 5–6 years when the field size was reduced, the number of guarding lines was simplified into three horizontal lines, and the function of the middle vertical line or "sodog" was removed at the beginning of the game so that children would not be confused. This finding is consistent with studies on the importance of spatial arrangement and learning facilities in supporting children's emotion regulation in early childhood education (Indhiraswari et al., 2026; Widiastuti & Habibi, 2026).

When minor conflicts emerged, the teacher acted as a neutral mediator. The teacher explained that when children disputed whether someone had been touched or not, she blew a small whistle to pause the game, listened to both sides' claims, made an objective and consistent decision, and then redirected children's focus back to the joy of playing with words such as, "It's okay, let's concentrate again." This mediation pattern shows that the teacher did not merely stop conflict, but transformed minor conflict into an opportunity to learn to accept decisions, delay emotional responses, and re-engage in the game. This role aligns with the idea of

guided play that teachers need to provide structure and scaffolding without taking over children's play experiences (Pyle & Danniels, 2017; Weisberg et al., 2016).

The teacher's reflective role was evident in the closing session. When the teacher asked, "How did you feel when your team lost earlier?", B2 answered, "I was upset, Ma'am, but it was fun because we could run together." This answer shows that the child was able to name a negative emotion while still viewing the play experience positively. When the teacher asked the winning team about the key to successfully guarding the line, A5 answered, "Because we always shouted to tell each other when the enemy was approaching." This reflection helped children conceptualise cooperation, rather than merely experiencing it spontaneously. This finding is consistent with Hidayah and Arbarini (2025), Angkur et al. (2025), and Hafid et al. (2026), who position the teacher's role as an important factor in character formation and young children's emotion regulation, while also extending Gustira et al. (2023), who position Gobak Sodor as a strategic game for problem solving. The meaning of this finding is that the teacher's role transforms Gobak Sodor from a spontaneous play activity into a directed socio-emotional learning experience.

In general, the findings of this manuscript are consistent with articles showing that traditional games contribute to early childhood development. Ramadhani and Fauziah (2020) affirm the relationship between traditional games, peer relationships, and children's socio-emotional skills. Aulia and Sudaryanti (2023) show that traditional games support social interaction, cooperation, and self-confidence. Sari et al. (2019) also show that West Sumatran traditional games can improve children's social behaviour. Dzakiyyah et al. (2024) extend the evidence that traditional games are not only related to gross motor skills, but also involve social interaction and cooperation; meanwhile, Arifiyah and Formen (2026) show that structured activities, including traditional games, are relevant for developing turn-taking ability. The main similarity between this manuscript and those studies lies in the view that traditional games have strong social value because they are played with peers.

Thus, the contribution of this discussion is to shift the focus from "traditional games as media" towards "traditional games as pedagogical mechanisms". In this position, Gobak Sodor is not only understood as a cultural activity or physical movement, but as a social structure that organises turns, roles, boundaries, decisions, conflicts, and emotions. This shift in focus is important because it strengthens the connection among learning strategies, socio-emotional development, educational play materials, and local culture-based innovation in early childhood education. This shift is also consistent with international literature that views play as a spectrum of learning experiences ranging from free play and guided play to structured games with adult support (Skene et al., 2022; Weisberg et al., 2016; Zosh et al., 2018). The meaning of this comparative finding is that the novelty of the manuscript lies not merely in claiming the benefits of traditional games, but in explaining the pedagogical processes that make those benefits emerge.

Based on thematic analysis, the mechanisms through which Gobak Sodor stimulates cooperation and emotion regulation can be summarised into five components. These five components show that stimulation does not occur in isolation, but through the relationship among game structure, children's responses, and the teacher's pedagogical intervention.

Table 4. Synthesis of Mechanisms Stimulating Cooperation and Emotion Regulation through Gobak Sodor

Game Component	Empirical Data Emerging	Mechanism Occurring	Aspect Stimulated	Pedagogical Implication
Line rules and spatial boundaries	A1 asked about the consequence of being touched; the teacher corrected the term "dead" into "changing roles".	Children understand boundaries, rules, and role rotation through concrete language.	Emotion regulation, self-control, rule understanding.	The teacher needs to use language that is emotionally safe and easy for children to understand.
Group and role distribution	A3 sulked because they were separated from A4, then accepted the group after teacher mediation.	Children learn to manage personal wishes and accept group decisions.	Cooperation, social flexibility, self-control.	The teacher needs to mediate group division without embarrassing children.
Attacking and guarding strategies	B1 gave cues to run together; A5 reminded friends so that the middle line would not be empty.	Children give signals, read opponents' positions, and coordinate the team.	Cooperation, communication, problem solving.	The teacher can invite children to reflect on team strategy after playing.

Game Component	Empirical Data Emerging	Mechanism Occurring	Aspect Stimulated	Pedagogical Implication
Protest and failure situations	B2 protested the decision that they had been touched, but then waited for the next turn without crying.	Children learn to accept objective decisions and re-engage in the game.	Emotion regulation, sportsmanship, rule acceptance.	The teacher needs to act as a consistent neutral mediator.
Win–lose reflection	B2 said, “I was upset, Ma’am, but it was fun”; A5 identified verbal cues as the key to guarding the line.	Children name emotions and connect success with cooperation.	Emotional awareness, social reflection, strategy evaluation.	The teacher needs to close the game with brief reflective questions.

Theoretically, the results of this discussion strengthen the view that early childhood socio-emotional development occurs through concrete interaction, not merely through advice or direct instruction. Gobak Sodor shows that cooperation and emotion regulation can emerge simultaneously when children encounter rules, peers, spatial boundaries, group strategies, and experiences of winning and losing. Thus, traditional games can be positioned as a learning ecology that integrates cultural, social, emotional, linguistic, and bodily dimensions. This position is consistent with play-based learning studies that emphasise that play supports socio-emotional development, self-regulation, executive function, and prosocial relationships when children have opportunities to interact actively with peers and are meaningfully accompanied by adults (Ginsburg, 2007; Skene et al., 2022; Yogman et al., 2018; Zosh et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The traditional game Gobak Sodor demonstrates mechanisms for stimulating young children’s cooperation and emotion regulation through game rules, spatial boundaries, role distribution, team communication, experiences of winning and losing, and reflection after play. Observation data show that children learn to understand rules, give verbal cues, accept group decisions, wait for turns, manage disappointment, and re-engage after experiencing minor conflict. These mechanisms do not emerge separately, but through the relationship among game structure, peer interaction, and teacher facilitation.

This finding affirms that Gobak Sodor should not only be understood as a physical activity or an effort to preserve traditional games, but also as a socio-emotional pedagogical mechanism that helps children experience cooperation and emotion regulation concretely. Compared with previous studies that largely position traditional games as media for improving development, this finding expands the discussion by showing the micro-processes through which socio-emotional stimulation occurs during the game. Therefore, early childhood teachers can use Gobak Sodor in a planned way by modifying rules according to children’s age, ensuring the safety of the play space, mediating conflicts neutrally, and closing the activity with brief reflection so that the play experience becomes more meaningful. Because this study was conducted in one early childhood education institution and one main observation session, the findings are better read as a contextual description that can serve as a basis for further research across broader contexts, games, and participant numbers.

The main limitation of this study lies in its context, which focuses on one early childhood education institution, PAUD Cempaka Pakuan in Bandung, involving 16 group B children and one main observation session on 19 May 2026. Therefore, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalised to all early childhood education institutions. The data are also stronger in classroom observation and teacher confirmation, and have not yet involved follow-up observation at home with parents. Future studies may compare several traditional games, involve parents as data sources, or use mixed methods designs to combine qualitative readings of mechanisms with more structured measurements of child development.

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