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# Integration Of Small Games In Physical Education Learning: A Literature Review On Character Formation And Student Self-Efficacy

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**Abstract**
Physical Education often emphasizes technical drills and motor achievement, so character formation and students' self-efficacy are not always designed as explicit learning outcomes. This article aims to analyze the integration of small games in Physical Education learning for character formation and the improvement of students' self-efficacy. This study used a narrative literature review with a thematic approach. Nine main articles were analyzed based on author, title, index, main findings, and relevance to the research focus. The findings show that small games, traditional games, small-sided games, student-centered learning, self-regulated learning, and game-based physical activities contribute to active engagement, motivation, cooperation, responsibility, discipline, sportsmanship, and self-efficacy. The review also indicates that character formation does not occur automatically through play. Teachers need to design explicit character objectives, modify games, provide feedback, and facilitate reflection. This study concludes that small games can serve as a relevant pedagogical strategy in Physical Education when they are designed systematically, inclusively, and based on active learning principles.

***Keywords:*** *Small Games, Physical Education, Character Education, Self-Efficacy, Active Learning*

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## INTRODUCTION

Physical Education, Sports, and Health (PJOK) not only aims to improve students' motor skills. It also develops knowledge, attitudes, social values, emotions, and active lifestyle habits. Bailey et al., (2009) explain that school physical education and sports provide benefits in the physical, social, affective, and cognitive domains. Gustian et al., (2024) also emphasize that PJOK places body movement as a learning principle with outcomes that encompass cognitive, motor, affective, and social aspects.

Problems that persist in physical education (PE) practice include teacher-centered learning, technical drills, and direct instruction. This pattern can limit student involvement in decision-making, social interaction, and self-reflection. Cereda (2023) explains that the development of PE pedagogy is moving toward student-centered models, such as Teaching Games for Understanding, cooperative learning, sports education, and Teaching Personal and

Social Responsibility. These models provide space for students to learn through meaningful movement experiences.

Small-sided games are a relevant strategy for addressing this issue. Small-sided games can take the form of simple games, traditional games, small-sided games, modified games, or warm-up games tailored to learning objectives. Putri (2024) found that implementing small-sided games in 10th-grade Physical Education (PJOK) influenced students' learning motivation. Clemente (2025) also explained that small-sided games can provide enjoyment, which is essential for student engagement in physical activity.

The pedagogical value of small-scale games lies in their design flexibility. Teachers can change the rules, number of players, field size, equipment, duration, and difficulty level to suit the classroom. These adjustments make activities more inclusive. Louth & Jamieson-Proctor (2019) demonstrated that traditional Indigenous games can increase inclusion, engagement, and physical self-efficacy. Madondo & Tsikira (2022) also demonstrated that traditional children's games are relevant for the holistic development of early childhood skills.

In the Indonesian context, traditional games hold a crucial position because they contain cultural and social values. Fitri et al., (2020) explain that traditional Indonesian games embody the values of togetherness, cooperation, and solidarity. Nur et al., (2020) show that traditional games are related to the social behavior of the younger generation. Febriza et al., (2025) also document traditional Kerinci games as a cultural heritage containing social, educational, and ecological values.

Small games are also related to character education. McGrath et al., (2022) view character education as the development of moral, social, performance, and intellectual virtues. In Physical Education (PJOK), character values emerge through game rules, cooperation, sportsmanship, responsibility, discipline, and reflection. Febriza et al., (2024) demonstrate that PJOK can be used to implement character education in elementary schools. Suryadi et al., (2024) reinforce the importance of play models as a stimulus for movement development and meaningful learning in early childhood and elementary school students.

In addition to character, small games can support students' self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) explains that self-efficacy is formed through successful experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states. In small games, students can experience gradual success, observe the success of their peers, receive teacher support, and manage emotions during play. These conditions make small games potentially strengthen students' confidence in their abilities in physical education activities.

Self-efficacy is also related to learning motivation. Deci & Ryan (2000) emphasized three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and social connectedness. Ntoumanis (2001) and Ntoumanis & Standage (2009) demonstrated that this theory is relevant to understanding student motivation in physical education. Lonsdale et al., (2009) added that self-efficacy motivation is related to students' physical activity during physical education and free time.

Based on the state of the art, the research gap lies in the limited synthesis that specifically links mini-games, character building, and student self-efficacy in Physical Education (PJOK) learning. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the integration of mini-games in PJOK learning for character building and improving student self-efficacy. This study is important because mini-games are often used in learning, but character and self-efficacy goals are not always designed as measurable outcomes.

## METHOD

This study employed a narrative literature review with a thematic approach. This method was chosen because the literature analyzed varied in design, context, and focus, allowing for conceptual and empirical synthesis related to small games, character building, and self-efficacy in Physical Education, Sports, and Health (PJOK) learning. The literature search was conducted in several scientific databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, SINTA, and Garuda. Google Scholar was used as a supplementary source to supplement literature not indexed in the main databases. The search used English keywords such as "small games," "small-sided games," "traditional games," "physical education," "character education," "self-efficacy," "student-centered learning," and "self-regulated learning," as well as Indonesian keywords such as "small games," "traditional games," "character education," "self-efficacy," and "PJOK learning." These keywords were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR.

The publication year range used was 2018 to 2025 to ensure that the literature analyzed represented the most recent research relevant to the development of game-based learning, character, and self-efficacy. Some classic literature was still used to strengthen the theoretical foundation, particularly regarding the concepts of self-efficacy and motivation. The article selection process involved four stages: initial identification based on keywords, title and abstract screening, full-text assessment, and determining articles that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria included articles discussing physical education (PJOK), small games, traditional games, physical activity-based learning, character education, and self-

efficacy, and published in reputable scientific journals in Indonesian or English. Exclusion criteria included articles irrelevant to PJOK, non-scientific sources, and duplicate articles.

The unit of analysis for this study was scientific articles relevant to PJOK, small games, traditional games, game-based learning, character education, self-efficacy, and physical activity-based learning. A total of nine primary articles were used as sources for analysis. The data were analyzed through three stages: identifying the content of the articles, coding themes such as small games, character, self-efficacy, motivation, self-regulation, and student-centered learning, and thematic synthesis to see the relationship between concepts. The results of the synthesis produced five main themes: expanding the scope of PJOK, student-centered learning and self-regulation, small games, traditional games and character education, and self-efficacy in PJOK learning.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

The study results indicate that the nine main articles can be grouped into five themes. The first theme is the holistic expansion of the scope of Physical Education and Health. The second theme is student-centered learning and self-regulation. The third theme is small-sided games. The fourth theme is traditional games and character education. The fifth theme is self-efficacy in physical activity and Physical Education and Health learning.

A summary of the main articles is presented in Table 1. This table contains the author's name, article title, article index, main results, and relevance to this study.

The findings in Table 1 indicate that mini-games have a broader pedagogical function than warm-up activities. Mini-games can provide a learning context for decision-making, cooperation, emotional control, responsibility, and successful experiences. These functions emerge because students learn through concrete, repetitive movement situations.

**Table. 1.** Literature Review of Nine Main Articles

| No | Name | Article Title and Year | Aticle Index | Key Results | Relation to This Research |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Gustian et al., (2024) | Physical Education and Its Scope: A Literature Review of Empirical Studies with a Holistic Perspective Teaching Practices in Indonesia (2024) | Sinta 2 | Physical education and health research in Indonesia still focuses predominantly on physical, cognitive, and affective aspects. Social aspects and game approaches are not yet optimal. | It is the basis that PJOK requires a game approach to achieve motoric, cognitive, social and affective outcomes in a balanced manner. |
| 2 | Duivenvoorden et al., (2021) | Self-Regulated Learning Strategies During Self-Controlled Practice in Physical Education (2021) | Q3 | There are three groups of practice strategies. Self-regulated learning behavior can be directly observed in practice. | Supports the concepts of learning control, decision making, self-regulation, and student self- |

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| | | | | | confidence in small games. |
| 3 | Nicolosi et al., (2024) | The Effects of a 12-Week Interdisciplinary Physical Education Program on Gross Motor Skills and Perceived Motor Competence in Primary School Children (2024) | Q3 | Interdisciplinary programs are more effective than drill-oriented teaching on object and locomotor skills. | Supports active, creative activities and small-sided games to improve motor competencies that are close to movement confidence. |
| 4 | Susaki (2021) | Self-Regulated Learning and Motor Skills: Effects of a Physical Education Intervention Program on Japanese College Students (2021) | Q3 | The intervention group improved in dribbling, effort, and evaluation. Self-efficacy increased in both groups. | Supports game-based learning based on self-regulation, effort, self-evaluation, learning responsibility, and self-efficacy. |
| 5 | Cereda (2023) | Methods and Models in the Context of Physical Activity and Physical Education: Strength, Weakness and Gaps (2023) | Q3 | The sports education, cooperative learning, TGfU, TPSR, and hybrid models can strengthen the PJOK learning experience. | Provides a foundation for student-centered PJOK models, such as TGfU, cooperative learning, TPSR, and game-based learning. |
| 6 | Carrasco et al., (2018) | Motivacion autodeterminada y estado de flow en un programa extraescolar de Small Sided Games (2018) | Q3 | Small-sided games programs have a positive impact on intrinsic motivation and several dimensions of flow. | Support small-sided games as activities that increase motivation, engagement, and successful experiences. |
| 7 | Fitri et al., (2020) | The Commemoration of Independence Day: Recalling Indonesian Traditional Games (2020) | Q2 | Traditional games preserve culture and build togetherness, cooperation and solidarity. | Showing traditional games as a form of small games that contain cooperation, solidarity, nationalism, and togetherness. |
| 8 | Zulkifli & Kulinna (2018) | Self-Efficacy, Soccer Skills and the Influence on Students' Learning Experience (2018) | Q3 | Self-efficacy increased significantly. Soccer skills improved to a limited extent. | Supporting student-centered learning, peer teaching, collaboration, and increased self-efficacy in modified soccer. |
| 9 | Topaz Demirci & Demirci (2018) | The Effects of Game and Physical Activity Lessons in Children with Learning Disabilities (2018) | Q3 | Game and physical activity lessons significantly increase exercise self-efficacy and academic achievement. | Supporting adaptive play and physical activity in PJOK to increase exercise self-efficacy and inclusive participation. |

## Discussion

The findings also indicate that mini-games need to be designed with clear learning objectives. Play activities won't necessarily develop character and self-efficacy if teachers don't

connect the game to values, feedback, and reflection. Therefore, the study's findings position teachers as designers of learning experiences, not simply providers of game instructions.

Mini-games can transform physical education (PE) learning from isolated technique drills into active learning experiences. In mini-games, students move, read situations, choose strategies, communicate with peers, and evaluate the results of their actions. This is in line with game-centered approaches, which place games as the primary context for learning tactics, decision-making, and movement skills (Harvey & Jarrett, 2014).

The findings of Gustian et al., (2024) indicate that physical education in Indonesia still needs to strengthen approaches that balance motor, cognitive, social, and affective learning outcomes. Small-scale games can address this need because the activities are flexible and closely related to students' experiences. Teachers can implement mini-handball, mini-soccer, modified baseball, throw-and-catch, gobak-sodor, fortification, ball relay, or simple tactical games according to learning objectives.

Character building in Physical Education occurs when teachers connect movement activities with the values they wish to develop. Values such as discipline, cooperation, responsibility, honesty, sportsmanship, leadership, and social awareness can emerge in small games. However, these values don't emerge automatically. Teachers need to state the target values, observe student behavior, provide feedback, and conclude the activity with reflection.

Traditional games make a special contribution to character education because they incorporate social and cultural practices. Fitri et al., (2020) emphasize the values of togetherness, cooperation, and solidarity in traditional Indonesian games. Nur et al., (2020) also show that traditional games are related to the social behavior of the younger generation. For example, after a game of gobak sodor, teachers can ask students to explain the forms of honesty, cooperation, and responsibility that emerged during the game.

The findings of Pozo et al., (2018) on Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility and Casey & Goodyear (2015) on cooperative learning reinforce the importance of learning structure. Small games need to be designed as cooperative and reflective activities. If games are solely focused on winning or losing, character values can be reduced to mere competition.

Students' self-efficacy grows when they believe they are capable of completing a specific motor task. Bandura (1977) explains that successful experiences are a primary source of self-efficacy. Small-scale games support this experience because teachers can adjust the level of difficulty. Students who lack confidence can start with simple tasks, such as catching a ball from a short distance, throwing at a large target, or playing games with easier rules.

Zulkifli & Kulinna (2018) demonstrated that a student-centered approach to soccer can improve students' self-efficacy. Duivenvoorden et al., (2021) and Susaki (2021) reinforced the importance of self-regulation, effort, and self-evaluation in PE practice. Findings by Topas Demirci & Demirci (2018) expand the relevance of games to students with learning disabilities. With appropriate modifications, small-scale games can support inclusive PE learning.

Psychologically, self-efficacy in small-scale games doesn't just stem from individual success. Self-confidence also grows through peer support, observing successful peers, and verbal persuasion from teachers. Deci & Ryan (2000) explain that motivation develops when students feel autonomous, competent, and socially connected. Small-scale games can fulfill these three needs because students are actively engaged, have the space to make decisions, and work in groups.

The relationship between small games, characters, and self-efficacy can be explained in stages. First, small games create active and challenging learning situations. Second, game situations require students to follow rules and interact with peers. Third, successful experiences boost self-confidence. Fourth, reflection helps students understand the meaning of characters and develop their own abilities. Without reflection, small games risk becoming mere physical activities. With reflection, small games become holistic learning experiences.

This study identified five research gaps. First, research examining the influence of small games on character and self-efficacy simultaneously is still limited. Second, research on traditional games in Indonesia still focuses largely on preserving culture and social values. Third, character measurement instruments in game-based physical education (PE) need broader validation. Fourth, long-term research is still limited. Fifth, research on students with special needs needs to be expanded.

Practical implications: Physical Education teachers need to establish learning objectives that encompass movement skills, character, and self-efficacy. Teachers also need to select games appropriate to the age, ability, and school facilities of the students. Modifications can be made to the field size, number of players, equipment, duration, rules, and difficulty level. Student roles such as captain, rules observer, scorekeeper, or reflection leader can be used to cultivate responsibility and leadership.

Teacher feedback should focus on effort, strategy, collaboration, and courage to try. Reflective questions can be used at the end of the lesson. For example, what values emerged in the game, how the team worked together, when students felt capable, what motivated them to try, and what they would improve in the next session. Questions like these help students connect the play experience to their character and self-efficacy.

## CONCLUSION

The integration of small-scale games into physical education (PJOK) learning has strong potential to shape character and enhance student self-efficacy. Small-scale games provide active, social, challenging, and enjoyable learning experiences. Through small-scale games, students can learn cooperation, discipline, honesty, responsibility, sportsmanship, and self-confidence.

Evidence from the main article suggests that game approaches, traditional games, small-sided games, student-centered learning, self-regulated learning, and game and physical activity lessons support motor development, motivation, character, and self-efficacy. Their effectiveness depends on the teacher's instructional design. Teachers need to set character goals, modify games, provide feedback, and guide reflection.

Further research needs to empirically test the model of integrating small games into PJOK with experimental designs, broader samples, valid character instruments, and self-efficacy measurements specific to PJOK activities.

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