



## The Impact of Traditional Children's Games on Secondary School Students

Kadir TİRYAKI<sup>1</sup>, Mahmut Can YİĞİT<sup>2</sup>, Emre YAVUZ<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Düzce University, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Düzce, Türkiye

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4808-6002>

<sup>2</sup>Ministry of National Education, Teacher, Şahinbey, Gaziantep, Türkiye

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7587-652X>

<sup>3</sup>Gaziantep University, Institute of Health Sciences, Şehitkamil, Gaziantep, Türkiye

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9524-7003>

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Original Article

### Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of traditional children's games on the developmental outcomes of middle school students. Specifically, it investigates changes in students' school motivation and self-esteem resulting from participation in traditional games and evaluates the relationship between these two variables. The study group consisted of 60 eighth-grade students (30 girls and 30 boys) enrolled at Mehmet Şimşek Middle School in Gaziantep during the 2025–2026 academic year. The experimental group included 15 girls and 15 boys, and the control group comprised an equal number of students. School motivation levels were measured using the *School Motivation Scale for Middle School Students* developed by Kaynak et al. (2017), and self-esteem levels were assessed using the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (Rosenberg, 1965). Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS 27. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare pre-test and post-test scores between groups, and Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the variables. The significance level was set at  $p < .05$ . The findings revealed statistically significant differences between pre-test and post-test scores for both school motivation and self-esteem. Additionally, a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation was identified between school motivation and self-esteem. The study concludes that traditional children's games have a positive effect on middle school students' self-esteem and school motivation. Furthermore, the results demonstrate a significant positive relationship between school motivation and self-esteem.

**Keywords:** *Traditional childrens, games middle school students, School motivation, Self-esteem.*

## Geleneksel Çocuk Oyunlarının Ortaokul Öğrencileri Üzerindeki Etkisi

Kadir TİRYAKI<sup>1</sup>, Mahmut Can YİĞİT<sup>2</sup>, Emre YAVUZ<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Düzce Üniversitesi, Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi, Düzce, Türkiye

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4808-6002>

<sup>2</sup>Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı, Öğretmen, Şahinbey, Gaziantep, Türkiye

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7587-652X>

<sup>3</sup>Gaziantep Üniversitesi, Sağlık Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Şehitkamil, Gaziantep, Türkiye

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9524-7003>

### Özet

Bu araştırmanın amacı, geleneksel çocuk oyunlarının ortaokul öğrencileri üzerindeki etkisini incelemektir. Bu kapsamda, geleneksel oyunların öğrencilerin okul motivasyonu ve benlik algıları üzerindeki değişimleri ile bu iki değişken arasındaki ilişki değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu, 2025-2026 eğitim-öğretim yılında Gaziantep ili Mehmet Şimşek Ortaokulunda öğrenim gören, 30'u kız ve 30'u erkek olmak üzere toplam 60 sekizinci sınıf öğrencisi oluşturmaktadır. Deney grubunda 15 kız ve 15 erkek; kontrol grubunda ise yine 15 kız ve 15 erkek öğrenci yer almıştır. Yarı deneysel desen kullanılan çalışmada katılımcıların okul motivasyon düzeylerini ölçmek için Kaynak ve arkadaşları (2017) tarafından geliştirilen *Ortaokul Öğrencileri İçin Okul Motivasyonu Ölçeği*, benlik saygısı düzeylerini belirlemek için ise Rosenberg (1965) tarafından geliştirilen *Benlik Saygısı Ölçeği* kullanılmıştır. Araştırmada elde edilen nicel veriler SPSS 27 paket programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Ön test–son test puanları ile deney ve kontrol grupları arasındaki farkları incelemek için bağımsız örneklem t-testi uygulanmış, değişkenler arasındaki ilişki Pearson korelasyon testi ile değerlendirilmiştir. Anlamlılık düzeyi  $p < .05$  olarak alınmıştır. Bulgular incelendiğinde, okul motivasyonu ve benlik saygısı düzeylerinin ön test ve son test puanları arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farklılıklar olduğu görülmüştür. Ayrıca okul motivasyonu ile benlik saygısı arasındaki puanlar arasında orta düzeyde, pozitif ve anlamlı bir ilişki saptanmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları, geleneksel çocuk oyunlarının ortaokul öğrencilerinin benlik saygısı ve okul motivasyon düzeyleri üzerinde olumlu etkiler yarattığını göstermektedir. Bunun yanında, okul motivasyonu ve benlik saygısı arasında pozitif yönde anlamlı bir ilişkinin bulunduğu belirlenmiştir.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Geleneksel çocuk oyunları, Ortaokul öğrencileri, Okul motivasyonu, Benlik saygısı.

## Introduction

Children's games have emerged alongside human history and, although they differ across cultures as well as in the tools and materials used to produce toys, they have consistently played an important role in human development (Kahya Canlı & Demirarslan, 2020). While adults often view games merely as recreational activities that help children pass the time, they in fact reflect children's inner worlds. These games support children's sensory and motor skills and also contribute to the acquisition of essential social behaviors. (Başal, 2007).

Children's games foster physical development as well as cognitive, social, and emotional growth. Traditional games, in particular, have been transmitted from past to present as a form of cultural heritage. Culture is one of the primary ways societies express themselves, and children mirror this expression through age-appropriate games. Traditional games extend beyond entertainment; they promote cooperation, empathy, rule-following, and communication skills. Moreover, some games require children to anticipate opponents' actions, reason strategically, and develop cognitive abilities such as curiosity, creativity, perception, and problem-solving. However, the widespread use of technology and the rise of digital addiction have increasingly distanced children from physical activities. Traditional games help counteract these effects by encouraging active participation (Fırat, 2013; Küçükbiş et al., 2022; Sallabaş, 2020; Sümbüllü & Altınışik, 2016; Temel et al., 2024; Turan et al., 2020). Indeed, frequent engagement in digital games has been shown to reduce children's involvement in physical play (Kolçak & Çakır, 2022).

In Turkish culture, games serve as social activities that bring individuals together to have fun and learn within defined rules. Examples include dodgeball, bouncing ball, *bezirganbaşı*, and handkerchief tag (Sallabaş, 2020). Regional variations in these games reflect the diversity, creativity, and cultural richness of Turkish society (Gökşen, 2014). A shared characteristic of many traditional games across different regions is that they are typically played outdoors, in spacious areas, and with large groups of participants (Başal, 2007). Games, which have held an important place throughout Turkish history, are defined as enjoyable activities structured around specific rules. Traditional children's games are mentioned in numerous historical works and are seen across a wide geographical area inhabited by Turkish communities (Serbest, 2019; Türkteş, 1999).

Games used in educational contexts function as effective tools for enhancing children's motivation. Play serves as a natural medium for exploration and learning, thereby supporting students' educational experiences (Elçi & Elçi, 2022). Motivation is the driving force that leads individuals to initiate or sustain an action. In the school context, motivation encompasses adhering to school rules, regular attendance, and fulfilling responsibilities. However, motivation varies among individuals and is influenced by multiple factors. School motivation consists of three dimensions: school attachment, school performance, and goals. School attachment relates to students' feelings of belonging and affection toward school. School performance involves completing responsibilities and assigned tasks. Goals are divided into academic and social; academic goals include cognitive processes such as acquiring new

knowledge, while social goals refer to elements such as having fun, forming friendships, and gaining status (Kaynak et al., 2017).

Today, children's increasing tendency to engage in digital games has led to issues such as physical inactivity, attention problems, and reduced social interaction. In this context, integrating traditional children's games into educational environments may contribute to students' multidimensional development. These games also play a role in transmitting cultural values and preserving traditional play for future generations (Azlan et al., 2021; Büyükokutan Töret & Özdemir, 2021; Sümbüllü & Altınışik, 2016). Although new games have emerged with technological advances, traditional games continue to be protected in many countries as part of their intangible cultural heritage. Research also indicates that traditional children's games are rapidly disappearing and underscores the need for protective efforts (Başal, 2007). Furthermore, studies show that traditional games positively influence students' school belonging, motivation, and sportsmanship behaviors (Aliriad et al., 2024; Temel et al., 2024; Trajkovik et al., 2018).

This study aims to explore how traditional children's games influence middle school students. In this context, changes in students' school motivation and self-esteem resulting from participation in traditional games were examined. Based on the main aim of the study, the following research questions were addressed:

- Do traditional children's games affect middle school students' school motivation?
- Do traditional children's games affect middle school students' self-esteem?
- Is there a relationship between middle school students' school motivation and self-esteem in the context of traditional children's games?

## Method

### *Research Model*

A quasi-experimental approach was used in this study, which is classified as a quantitative research method. A pre-test–post-test control group design was applied, where the experimental group engaged in eight traditional children's games, whereas the control group did not receive any treatment. In quasi-experimental designs, groups are formed without random assignment, and the effects of the independent variable are examined by comparing differences between these groups (Campbell & Stanley, 2015). To assess changes over time, the *School Motivation Scale for Middle School Students* (Kaynak et al., 2017) and the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (Rosenberg, 1965) were administered to both groups before and after the intervention. This design enabled the evaluation of the impact of traditional children's games on middle school students' school motivation and self-esteem.

### *Study Group*

In the 2025–2026 academic year, a total of 60 students (30 girls and 30 boys) attending the eighth grade at Mehmet Şimşek Middle School in Gaziantep participated in the research. The experimental group included 30 students (15 girls and 15 boys), and the control group likewise consisted of 30 students (15 girls and 15 boys). The groups were formed to ensure equal gender distribution, and students were assigned to the experimental and control groups based on

classroom placement rather than full randomization, in accordance with the quasi-experimental design.

### **Data Collection Process and Data Collection**

The data collection tools used in this study were the *Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (Rosenberg, 1965) and the *School Motivation Scale for Middle School Students* developed by Kaynak et al. (2017). The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale consists of 10 items rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale. The School Motivation Scale is composed of 10 items structured on a 5-point Likert scale and includes three sub-dimensions: goals, performance, and school commitment.

**1. Traditional Dodgeball Game:** In this game, which is played by mixed groups of male and female students, two teams are formed. One team stands inside a designated playing area, while the opposing team attempts to eliminate players by throwing a ball at them. Players who are hit are taken out of the activity, and play proceeds until a single participant is left within the area. When the final player is left, the “counting” phase begins. During this phase, twelve throws are made toward the player, and if the player avoids being hit, they win the game (Akay, 2017; Demirtöz & Alpkaya, 2016). In the implementation of this study, the rules of the game were explained to the experimental group, teams were formed using the rock–paper–scissors method, the playing area was marked with boundary lines, and the game was played with periodic reminders of the rules.

**2. Stop Ball:** The activity starts with the students standing in a circle, where one participant is assigned the role of “it,” who then tosses the ball upward and announces the name of a peer. The student whose name is called attempts to catch the ball before it touches the ground. If successful, they throw the ball up again and call another student’s name. If the ball hits the ground, the student who retrieves it says “istop,” signaling other students to stop moving. At this stage, students attempt to locate a predetermined color or object. Students who find the specified object or color are safe from being hit by the tagger. The tagger then tries to hit students who have not found the object or color. If the tagger fails, they remain the tagger in the next round (Irmak, 2016; Meral & Özkan, 2025). During the implementation phase of this study, the playing area was prepared, the rules were explained to the students, the objects to be used were selected, two trial rounds were conducted, and the game was then officially started.

**3. HandkerchiefGrab:** In this game, students are divided into two groups, and a referee is selected from among them. A distance of approximately 20–30 meters is maintained between the groups. The referee holds a handkerchief, and one student from each group competes to grab it. The student who secures the handkerchief attempts to run back to their group without being caught by the opponent. If the student successfully returns with the handkerchief, their team earns a point; if caught, the point is awarded to the opposing team. The game continues until all students have had a turn (Erdal, 2019; Irmak, 2016). During the implementation phase of the study, the playing area was introduced to the students, the rules were explained, a referee was selected, the students were divided into two groups, and the game was conducted accordingly.

**4. Blind Man's Buff:** In this game, one student is designated as the “it” player. If no volunteer is available, the “it” player is selected using counting-out or stepping-out methods. The “it” player is blindfolded and attempts to catch the other players, who may recite rhymes or use strategies to mislead and distract the blindfolded player. When the blindfolded player successfully catches someone, the caught student becomes the new “it” player (Kasapoğlu Akyol & Kutlu, 2020; Şepitçi Sarıbaş & Sarıbaş, 2025). During the implementation phase, students were divided into two groups, and a blindfolded player was selected. The playing area was introduced beforehand, any potentially hazardous materials were removed, and the game was conducted safely.

**5. Seven Stones:** In this game, students are divided into two groups. One group attempts to knock over a stack of flat stones using a ball, while the other group defends the area where the stones are stacked. The throwing group is allowed three attempts. If the stones are knocked over, the defending group retrieves the ball and tries to hit members of the opposing team. Meanwhile, the throwing group attempts to restack the stones without being hit. If all members of the throwing group are hit, the turn passes to the other group. The throwing group wins the round if they successfully restack the stones during their turn (Genç & Yılmaz, 2025; Özyürek et al., 2018; Özyürek, 2019). During the implementation phase of the study, students were divided into two groups, the boundaries for the stones and the throwing area were defined, and the game was conducted according to the established rules.

**6. Five Stones:** This game is played by two participants and uses five smooth stones. The player throws the stones onto the ground and picks up one. They then toss this stone into the air and attempt to collect the remaining stones in sequence. In the second stage, the stones are collected in pairs, followed by groups of three and four. In the next stage, the player throws the stones onto the ground and forms a tunnel with their other hand. With each toss, they pass the selected stone through the tunnel. If successful, the stones are collected in the palm, tossed into the air, and caught on the back of the hand. Points are awarded according to the number of stones successfully caught (Genç & Yılmaz, 2025; Irmak, 2016). During the implementation phase, students were paired, the rules were explained, the game materials were distributed, and the activity was carried out according to the established procedure.

**7. Who Has the Ring:** In this game, players form a circle and select a leader. The leader asks the players to hold out their palms behind their backs and secretly places a ring in one player's hand. Then, holding a handkerchief, the leader approaches another player and asks, “Who has the ring?” If the player guesses correctly, the student holding the ring becomes the new leader; if the guess is incorrect, the original leader retains their role (Başal, 2010, p.63; Keskin, 2020). During the implementation phase, the rules were explained to the students, the necessary materials were introduced, and the game was initiated with a volunteer leader.

**8. Touch and Save:** In this game, 2–4 students are designated as taggers. The taggers attempt to touch the other players within a specified playing area. Players who are touched remain frozen, while other players can “rescue” them by touching them. If the taggers manage to freeze all players within the allotted time, they win the round, and new taggers are selected for the

next round (İlgar & Tulumlu, 2021). During the implementation phase, students were divided into two groups, the playing area was prepared, the rules were explained, and the game was conducted after the taggers were chosen.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data obtained for the research were processed through SPSS 27. To identify differences between the experimental and control groups, an independent samples t-test was applied, whereas within-group changes from pre-test to post-test were examined using a paired samples t-test. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to determine the associations among the dependent variables. The statistical significance threshold was accepted as  $p < 0.05$ .

### **Research Ethics**

The groups were formed using a random assignment method, and care was taken to ensure balanced gender distribution. Ethical approval was obtained at the meeting of the Gaziantep University Health and Sports Sciences Ethics Committee dated 15.09.2025, with the decision numbered 24.09.2025-720517. Throughout the present research, all procedures were carried out in accordance with the “Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive.”

### **Findings**

The analysis of the data obtained based on the score differences in the school motivation and self-esteem levels of middle school students who played traditional children's games is presented in the tables below.

**Table 1. Gender distribution of participants**

Variable		N	%
Gender	Male	30	50,0
	Female	30	50,0

Table 1 shows that 50% of the students participating in the study were male, while the other 50% were female students. The pre-test score results between the groups are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. T-test results of the mean school motivation pre-test scores between the experimental and control groups**

School motivation pre-test	N	X	SS	t	p
Experimental Group	30	52,5000	11,20268	0,596	,553
Control Group	30	50,9333	9,04370		

Table 2 shows that the pre-test mean scores obtained from the school motivation scale for the control and experimental groups were 52.50 and 50.93, respectively. The independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between these two groups. This indicates that the pre-test score calculations for the control and experimental groups were not statistically different from each other. This also allowed for the evaluation of changes that may have

occurred during the intervention process. The mean differences in post-test scores for the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. T-test results for the mean differences in school motivation scores between the experimental and control groups**

School motivation score differences	N	X	SS	t	p
Experimental Group	30	11,2667	13,95543	3,739	,000*
Control Group	30	-1,7667	13,02963		

\*  $p < .05$

Table 3 shows that the mean difference scores obtained from the school motivation scale for the control and experimental groups were 11.26 and -1.76, respectively. The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $T= 3.739$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test score differences of the control and experimental groups. Students in the experimental group who participated in the application process experienced a significant increase in school motivation. The self-esteem pre-test mean scores are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4. Results of the t-test comparing the mean pre-test self-esteem scores between the experimental and control groups**

Self-Esteem Pre-Test	N	X	SS	t	p
Experimental Group	30	18,3000	2,86657	-,577	,566
Control Group	30	18,7000	2,49344		

Table 4 shows that the pre-test mean scores obtained from the self-esteem scale for the control and experimental groups were 18.30 and 18.70, respectively. The independent samples t-test revealed no statistically significant difference between these two groups. This indicates that the pre-test scores for the control and experimental groups were not statistically different from each other. Therefore, appropriate conditions have been provided to evaluate any differences that may emerge in the post-test based on the intervention process. The mean differences in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. T-test results for mean self-esteem score differences between the experimental and control groups**

Self-esteem differences	score N	X	SS	t	p
Experimental Group	30	3,6667	2,00574	7,606	,000*
Control Group	30	,6667	,80230		

\*  $p < .05$

Table 5 shows that the mean difference scores obtained from the self-esteem scale for the control and experimental groups were 3.66 and 0.66, respectively. The independent samples t-

test revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups ( $T= 7.606$ ;  $P<0.05$ ). This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test score differences of the control and experimental groups. A significant increase in self-esteem was observed among the students in the experimental group who participated in the intervention. A Pearson Correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between school motivation and self-esteem levels. The findings are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. The relationship between school motivation and self-esteem**

		Difference	Self-Esteem
School Motivation	Pearson r	1	,243*
	p		,031
	n	60	60
Self-Esteem	Pearson r	,243*	1
	p	,031	
	n	60	60

\*  $p < 0.05$

Table 6 shows that the difference in scores between school motivation and self-esteem indicates a moderate (0.243) positive and significant ( $p<0.05$ ) relationship. This result suggests that as students' school motivation increases, their self-esteem also tends to increase. Although the correlation coefficient is low, its significance indicates that the two variables have a weak but statistically significant positive relationship. This situation may indicate that increases in motivation levels positively affect students' self-perceptions.

### Conclusion, Discussion, and Recommendations

This study explored how traditional children's games influenced middle school students' school motivation and self-esteem levels. The research was carried out using a pre-test–post-test structure that included both an experimental group and a control group. Prior to the implementation, the baseline scores of the two groups were compared, and the analyses showed no meaningful differences in school motivation or self-esteem, confirming that both groups were comparable at the outset of the study.

Following the intervention, examination of the post-test results revealed that the students in the experimental group experienced marked improvements in both school motivation and self-esteem. These results suggest that traditional children's games enhance students' engagement and motivation toward learning. A parallel pattern was identified for self-esteem, indicating that participating in traditional children's games helped students feel more capable and valued.

In addition, correlation findings demonstrated a moderate, statistically significant positive association, showing that increases in students' self-esteem were linked to rises in their school motivation, and that these two constructs reinforced one another.

The findings obtained are consistent with studies in the literature. It is stated that traditional children's games contribute to students' social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development, as well as providing enjoyable learning environments where they interact with their peers (Akin et al., 2021; Büyükokutan Töret & Özdemir, 2021; Çelik & Şahin, 2013; Gezer Şen, 2025; Johnson et al., 2017; Yıldız et al., 2025). By their very nature, these games also provide a flexible learning environment that helps students acquire social skills such as following rules, waiting their turn, managing competition, and adapting to group dynamics (Esen, 2008). For example, in a study conducted by Yıldız and colleagues (2025) with middle school students, it was found that playing traditional children's games positively increased students' levels of enjoyment. Similarly, Uzun and colleagues (2017) found that middle school students' participation in sports activities increased their enjoyment of physical activities. Furthermore, the fact that these games also promote the development of students' skills such as self-management, leadership, cooperation, language and communication, and problem solving demonstrates the versatility of games (Girmen, 2012). Considering that games also develop children's ability to express themselves and cooperate, the pedagogical importance of games is even better understood (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002).

When evaluating the contribution of traditional children's games to students' multidimensional development, it is understood that these games should not be limited to physical education and sports classes. In line with school-based planning, it is important to use them in other classes as well, taking into account the relevant learning outcomes (Küçükbiş et al., 2022; Topan, 2024). Some studies also show that traditional children's games can be used in different subjects (Çelik, 2020; Gülay Ögelman et al., 2025). For example, in Çelik's (2020) study, 56 games were identified, and it was determined that these games were common with the skills targeted to be gained in social studies lessons. In addition, traditional children's games are also valuable in terms of cultural transmission and contribute to students' recognition, experience, and internalization of cultural elements (Katı, 2020; Koyuncu & Bulut, 2022).

At the beginning of the study, the pre-test data on school motivation and self-esteem obtained from the experimental and control groups provided a strong baseline for accurately evaluating the effect of the intervention. The post-test findings obtained after the intervention process reveal that traditional children's games significantly increased both school motivation and self-esteem among middle school students. The increase in motivation and self-esteem scores among students in the experimental group demonstrates the effectiveness of the intervention and the positive contribution of traditional children's games to the learning process. Furthermore, the correlation analysis conducted revealed a positive and significant relationship between school motivation and self-esteem, indicating that the two variables are interrelated and that increases in students' self-esteem also strengthen their motivation.

The research results are consistent with the findings in the literature, which emphasize that traditional children's games support students' social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. The fact that traditional children's games support students' multidimensional development also demonstrates their pedagogical value. As a result, traditional children's games can be considered a tool that can be used not only in physical education and sports classes but also in different subjects and disciplines. These games contribute to the transmission of cultural values as well as increasing students' participation in academic processes.

Based on the results obtained in the study, the following can be recommended:

- Traditional children's games can be played not only in physical education and sports classes but also in other subjects, taking into account appropriate learning outcomes.
- School-based plans can be organized to ensure that traditional children's games are passed on to future generations.
- Training programs can be organized for teacher candidates and current teachers on how traditional children's games can be used in the educational process, both before and during their service.

### **Ethics Committee Approval Information**

Ethical review board: Gaziantep University Health and Sports Sciences Ethics

Committee

Date of the ethics approval document: 24.09.2025

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