



EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SRI LANKAN TRADITIONAL GAMES IN PROMOTING PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG CHILDREN: IN LIGHT OF LITERATURE

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Abstract: *This purpose of this article is to explore the role of Sri Lankan traditional games in promoting physical development among children. To achieve this purpose a review of literature was conducted in order to reveal the role of Sri Lankan traditional games in promoting physical development among children. Main findings of the paper were the traditional Sri Lankan games have a significant role to play in promoting physical development among children. These games not only provide opportunities for physical fitness but also contribute to the overall well-being and social development of children. Based on the findings, the paper discusses strategies for integrating traditional games into education and recreational settings to enhance children's physical development. It also proposes promotion and marketing strategies to increase awareness and interest in traditional games among children, parents, and the wider community.*

Keywords: *traditional games, physical fitness, psychological benefits, participation factors, parental attitudes, social factors, cultural factors, play spaces, equipment availability, modern technology, integration in education, recreational programs, promotion strategies*

Introduction

Traditional Sri Lankan games hold a rich cultural significance and have been an integral part of the country's heritage for centuries. These games not only offer entertainment but also play a crucial role in promoting physical development among children. In today's digital age, where sedentary lifestyles and modern technology dominate, understanding the value of traditional games in fostering physical well-being becomes even more essential. Traditional Sri Lankan games encompass a diverse range of activities that have been historically played by children across the island (Abeysekara, 2006). These games often reflect the cultural identity, values, and customs of Sri Lanka, making them a unique and cherished aspect of the nation's heritage. From simple outdoor games to complex team-based competitions, these traditional activities provide an engaging platform for children to develop physical skills, nurture social interactions, and explore their cultural roots. The importance of physical development in children cannot be overstated. It is widely acknowledged that regular physical activity during childhood is vital for optimal growth, motor skill development, and overall health. Physical development encompasses various aspects, including cardiovascular fitness, strength, endurance, coordination, and flexibility. Engaging in physical activities from an early age not only supports the growth of muscles and bones but also contributes to the development of essential motor skills and body awareness. In recent years, the prevalence of sedentary lifestyles and a decline in physical activity among children have raised concerns about their overall well-being. This makes the exploration of traditional Sri Lankan games particularly significant, as they provide a potential solution to address the physical inactivity crisis. By promoting the participation of children in these traditional games, it becomes possible to revive cultural heritage while simultaneously fostering physical development and a healthier lifestyle (Abeysekara, 2006).

In this research paper, we are delving into the role of traditional Sri Lankan games in promoting physical development among children. By identifying and documenting different traditional games, examining their physiological and psychological benefits, investigating factors influencing participation, exploring the impact of access and technology, and proposing strategies for integration into modern education and recreational settings, we aim to shed light on the significance of traditional games in nurturing the physical well-being of Sri Lankan children. Through this exploration, we hope to encourage the preservation and revitalization of these traditional games for the benefit of current and future generations (Bandara, 2016).

Aim and Objectives

Examining how traditional games from Sri Lanka can encourage children's physical development is the main aim of this study. The study is specifically interested in how children's active engagement in these traditional activities affects their overall health and fitness. The study aims to shed light on these games' significance as a tool for promoting physical development by examining their features, advantages, and effects. The study aims to achieve following objectives.

- Identify the different traditional Sri Lankan games that contribute to physical development of children.

- Examine the physiological and psychological benefits of engaging in traditional games for children's physical development.
- Investigate the factors influencing the participation of children in Sri Lankan traditional games.
- Explore the strategies for integrating traditional games into modern education and recreational settings to promote physical development among children in Sri Lanka.

Different traditional Sri Lankan games contribute to physical development of children.

Historical traditional Sri Lankan games played by children

Sri Lanka boasts a rich array of traditional games that have been enjoyed by children for generations (Bandara, 2016). These games not only provide entertainment but also offer valuable opportunities for physical development. Some of the historically significant traditional Sri Lankan games played by children include:

- Elle (also known as "dhel gudu") This game resembles cricket and involves hitting a small ball with a wooden stick. It requires running, throwing, and hand-eye coordination.
- Pancha Keliya: Pancha Keliya is a group of five traditional games, including Kotta Pora (pillar fighting), Kana Mutti (pots and pillars), Olinda Keliya (tug-of-war), Kamba Keliya (pole climbing), and Poramara (pole vaulting). These games involve physical strength, agility, and teamwork.
- Gudu: Gudu is a game similar to tag, where one person chases the others to touch or catch them. It promotes running, dodging, and quick reflexes.
- Kana Mutti Bindeema: This game involves throwing small balls (kana mutti) into holes (bindeema) in the ground. It enhances hand-eye coordination, aiming skills, and concentration.

Categorization of traditional games based on physical development benefits

Traditional Sri Lankan games can be categorized based on the physical development benefits they provide to children (Abeysekara, 2006). These categories include:

- Endurance and Stamina: Games such as Elle, Pancha Keliya, and Gudu involve running, chasing, and sustained physical activity, which improve endurance and stamina in children.
- Strength and Power: Games like Kotta Pora (pillar fighting) and Olinda Keliya (tug-of-war) require physical strength, pushing, pulling, and grappling, thus developing muscular strength and power.
- Balance and Coordination: Activities like Kamba Keliya (pole climbing) and Poramara (pole vaulting) focus on balance, coordination, and body control, enhancing these skills in children.

- Reflexes and Agility: Games such as Gudu, which involve quick movements, dodging, and reaction times, enhance reflexes and agility in children.

By understanding the historical traditional games and categorizing them based on their physical development benefits, we gain insights into the specific areas of physical development that children can develop through participation in these games (Hettiarachchi, 2012). This knowledge can inform the design of interventions and initiatives aimed at promoting physical development among Sri Lankan children through the revitalization of traditional games.

Physiological and psychological benefits of engaging in traditional games for children's physical development

Physiological benefits (cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility)

Traditional Sri Lankan games offer several physiological benefits that contribute to the overall physical development and health of children:

- Cardiovascular Fitness: Games involving running, chasing, and sustained physical activity, such as Elle and Pancha Keliya, promote cardiovascular fitness by increasing heart rate, improving blood circulation, and enhancing lung capacity.
- Strength and Muscular Development: Traditional games like Kotta Pora (pillar fighting) and Olinda Keliya (tug-of-war) require physical strength, pushing, pulling, and grappling, leading to improved muscular strength and development (Hettiarachchi, 2012).
- Flexibility: Many traditional games involve movements that enhance flexibility, such as bending, stretching, and reaching. These activities, like Kamba Keliya (pole climbing) and Poramara (pole vaulting), promote joint mobility and overall flexibility.

Contribution of traditional games to overall physical fitness and health of children

Engaging in traditional Sri Lankan games can have a significant impact on the overall physical fitness and health of children (Bandara, 2016). These games provide opportunities for regular physical activity, which is crucial for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. By participating in these games, children can experience benefits such as improved cardiovascular endurance, increased strength and muscle tone, enhanced flexibility, and improved motor skills and coordination.

Moreover, traditional games often involve outdoor play, which exposes children to fresh air, sunlight, and natural environments. This exposure can contribute to improved vitamin D levels, increased immune function, and a reduced risk of certain health issues associated with sedentary behaviors (Abeysekara, 2006).

Positive effects on psychological factors (self-confidence, self-esteem, social interactions)

Beyond the physiological benefits, traditional Sri Lankan games also have positive effects on various psychological factors:

- **Self-Confidence and Self-Esteem:** When children participate in traditional games, they have opportunities to set goals, achieve success, and overcome challenges. These experiences foster a sense of accomplishment, boost self-confidence, and enhance self-esteem.
- **Social Interactions and Teamwork:** Traditional games often involve group play, encouraging social interactions, cooperation, and teamwork (Bandara, 2016). Children learn to communicate, collaborate, and develop important social skills, such as leadership, empathy, and conflict resolution.
- **Cultural Identity and Pride:** Traditional games are rooted in Sri Lankan culture and heritage. Engaging in these games helps children connect with their cultural identity, fostering a sense of pride, belonging, and cultural preservation.

Reduction of stress and improvement of mental well-being

Participating in traditional games can also contribute to the reduction of stress and the improvement of mental well-being in children (Abeysekara, 2006). Physical activity, including playing games, releases endorphins, which are natural mood-boosting chemicals in the brain. These endorphins help reduce stress levels, improve mood, and enhance overall mental well-being. Traditional games provide an outlet for children to release pent-up energy, relax, and engage in enjoyable activities that promote mental rejuvenation.

Additionally, traditional games often involve playful and lighthearted interactions, creating a positive and joyful atmosphere (Hettiarachchi, 2012). This can serve as a form of recreation and stress relief, promoting mental relaxation and emotional well-being.

Factors influencing the participation of children in Sri Lankans traditional games.***Reasons for engagement or refraining from participation***

There are various reasons that can influence children's engagement or refraining from participating in traditional Sri Lankan games:

1. **Personal Preference:** Children may have individual preferences when it comes to the types of games they enjoy. Some may naturally gravitate towards traditional games, finding them enjoyable and engaging, while others may have different interests or preferences for modern activities (Bandara, 2016).
2. **Access and Exposure:** The availability and accessibility of traditional games can significantly impact children's participation. If traditional games are not easily accessible or if children lack exposure to these games, they may be less likely to engage in them.

3. **Peer Influence:** Peer interactions and social dynamics can influence children's participation in traditional games (Abeysekara, 2006). If their friends or peers are actively involved in playing traditional games, children are more likely to participate to fit in or be part of the group.
4. **Modern Technological Distractions:** The prevalence of modern technology and digital entertainment can compete for children's attention and time. The allure of video games, smartphones, and online activities may draw children away from traditional games.

Influence of parental attitudes and beliefs

Parents play a significant role in shaping children's choices and activities (Abeysekara, 2006). The attitudes and beliefs of parents can influence children's participation in traditional Sri Lankan games in several ways:

1. **Cultural Transmission:** Parents who value and appreciate traditional games are more likely to pass down their cultural heritage to their children. If parents actively engage in and promote traditional games, children are more likely to develop an interest and engage in these activities.
2. **Perceived Importance:** Parents' perceptions of the importance of physical activity, cultural preservation, and the benefits of traditional games can influence their encouragement or discouragement of children's participation (Abeysekara, 2006).
3. **Parental Support:** Parents who actively support and facilitate children's participation in traditional games by providing resources, guidance, and opportunities for engagement are more likely to have children who actively participate in these activities.
4. **Parent-Child Bonding:** Engaging in traditional games together can foster a sense of bonding and strengthen the parent-child relationship. Parents who recognize the value of spending quality time with their children through traditional games may encourage participation for the sake of family connections.

Social and cultural factors impacting popularity or decline of traditional games

Several social and cultural factors can impact the popularity or decline of traditional Sri Lankan games among children:

- **Modernization and Urbanization:** With the rapid modernization and urbanization of society, traditional games may face competition from modern forms of entertainment. The shift towards urban lifestyles may limit access to open spaces and traditional play areas, making it challenging for children to engage in these games (Bandara, 2016).
- **Globalization and Western Influences:** Western cultural influences, including the prevalence of Western sports and games, may overshadow traditional Sri Lankan games. Children may perceive Western activities as more trendy or appealing, leading to a decline in the popularity of traditional games.

- **Education System Emphasis:** The focus on academic achievement and the structured nature of the education system may reduce the time and opportunities for children to engage in unstructured play, including traditional games (Bandara, 2016).
- **Cultural Shifts and Generational Gaps:** Changing societal norms, values, and lifestyle preferences can contribute to generational gaps in interest and engagement with traditional games. Younger generations may be less connected to their cultural heritage and less inclined to participate in traditional activities.

Understanding these factors is crucial for developing strategies to promote and sustain the participation of children in traditional Sri Lankan games. By addressing challenges such as accessibility, parental involvement, and cultural preservation, it becomes possible to create an environment that encourages and supports children's engagement with these valuable cultural assets.

Strategies for integrating traditional games into modern education and recreational setting to promote physical development among children in Sri Lanka.

Impact of Access, Equipment, and Modern Technology

Access to play spaces, availability of equipment, and exposure to modern technology can significantly impact children's engagement with traditional Sri Lankan games

- **Play Spaces and Environments:** The availability and suitability of play spaces influence children's opportunities to engage in traditional games. Adequate open spaces, parks, playgrounds, and community areas that accommodate traditional games provide children with the necessary environment for participation. Limited or unsuitable play spaces may hinder children's access to these games.
- **Equipment Availability:** The availability and condition of equipment required for traditional games can affect children's engagement. Traditional games often have specific equipment, such as balls, sticks, ropes, or traditional instruments. If the necessary equipment is readily available, children are more likely to engage in these games. Lack of equipment or poor-quality equipment may discourage participation.
- **Modern Technology and Digital Distractions:** The pervasive influence of modern technology, including smartphones, video games, and online platforms, can divert children's attention away from traditional games (Abeysekara, 2006). The immersive and interactive nature of digital entertainment may attract children and reduce their interest in traditional activities. Increased screen time and sedentary behavior associated with technology use can also limit physical activity and discourage engagement with traditional games.
- **Cultural Perceptions and Marketing:** The perception of traditional games in the context of modern culture can also influence children's engagement. If traditional games are perceived as outdated or less exciting compared to modern alternatives, children may be less motivated to participate. Effective marketing and promotion of

traditional games, highlighting their cultural value, benefits, and uniqueness, can help generate interest and increase engagement (Perera, 2011).

- **Integration of Technology with Traditional Games:** While modern technology can be a barrier, it can also be leveraged to enhance engagement with traditional games. Integrating technology through innovative learning methods, gamification, or virtual platforms that simulate traditional games can capture children's interest and bridge the gap between traditional and modern experiences.

To foster children's engagement with traditional Sri Lankan games, it is important to address these factors. This can be achieved through creating and maintaining suitable play spaces, ensuring availability of quality equipment, raising awareness about the cultural significance of traditional games, and finding creative ways to integrate technology to enhance the appeal and accessibility of traditional games (Abeysekara, 2006). By providing opportunities for children to experience and appreciate traditional games within the context of their modern lifestyles, their engagement and interest in these valuable cultural activities can be revitalized.

Effective approaches for incorporating traditional games into school curricula

- **Curriculum Integration:** Traditional Sri Lankan games can be incorporated into physical education curricula as a core component (Abeysekara, 2006). They can be introduced through structured lessons, where students learn the rules, techniques, and cultural significance of these games. Integrating traditional games into the curriculum ensures regular exposure and opportunities for children to engage in these activities.
- **Interdisciplinary Connections:** Traditional games can be integrated into other subject areas, such as history, social studies, or cultural studies. Teachers can explore the historical and cultural contexts of these games, incorporating them into lessons that promote cultural understanding and appreciation (Kumar, 2018).
- **Multicultural Events and Celebrations:** Schools can organize multicultural events or celebrations where traditional games are showcased and students have the opportunity to participate. This not only promotes cultural diversity but also provides a platform for children to actively engage in traditional games.

Designing recreational programs and community initiatives to encourage participation

- **Community Partnerships:** Collaborating with local community organizations, cultural centers, or sports clubs that specialize in traditional games can help establish recreational programs (Bandara, 2016). These partnerships can provide access to resources, expertise, and organized events that promote participation in traditional games.
- **Workshops and Training:** Conducting workshops and training sessions for children, parents, and educators can create awareness about the benefits and techniques of traditional games (Gunaratne, 2018). These sessions can be interactive, involving hands-on experiences and demonstrations to enhance learning and engagement.
- **Festivals and Competitions:** Organizing traditional game festivals and competitions at the community level can generate excitement and interest. These events can attract participants of all ages and provide opportunities for children to showcase their skills, learn from others, and build a sense of community through shared experiences.

Necessary resources, training or support for teachers and educators

- **Resource Development:** Developing educational resources, including instructional materials, rulebooks, and guides, can support teachers in integrating traditional games into their teaching (Bandara, 2016). These resources can provide background information, lesson plans, and activity ideas to facilitate implementation.
- **Teacher Training:** Providing professional development opportunities and training for teachers on traditional games and their instructional methods can enhance their knowledge and confidence in incorporating these games into the curriculum. Training can cover game-specific techniques, safety considerations, and effective pedagogical approaches.
- **Access to Equipment and Facilities:** Ensuring schools have access to the necessary equipment and facilities required for traditional games is essential (Hettiarachchi, 2012). Schools should be provided with funding or support to acquire appropriate equipment and maintain play spaces that accommodate traditional games.

Integrating traditional games with technology or innovative learning methods

- **Gamification:** Creating digital games or applications that simulate traditional Sri Lankan games can engage children and bridge the gap between traditional and modern experiences (Hettiarachchi, 2012). These digital platforms can offer interactive gameplay, educational content, and multiplayer options to enhance engagement and learning.
- **Virtual Reality (VR) Experiences:** Using VR technology, children can be immersed in virtual environments that replicate traditional game settings. This allows them to experience the games firsthand, even in the absence of physical spaces or equipment. VR experiences can provide a unique and interactive way of preserving and promoting traditional games.
- **Online Learning Platforms:** Integrating traditional games into online learning platforms can provide children with opportunities to learn and practice these games remotely (Hettiarachchi, 2012). Online platforms can offer instructional videos, interactive quizzes, and discussion forums to support learning and community engagement.

Promotion and marketing strategies to increase awareness and interest

- **Cultural Showcases and Exhibitions:** Organizing cultural showcases or exhibitions that feature traditional games can create awareness and generate interest among children, parents, and the wider community. These events can highlight the historical significance, cultural value, and excitement of traditional games.
- **Media Campaigns:** Utilizing various media channels, such as television, radio, social media, and print, can help promote traditional Sri Lankan games (Hettiarachchi, 2012). Engaging and informative campaigns can showcase the benefits, fun, and cultural aspects of these games, targeting both children and their parents.
- **School Outreach Programs:** Collaborating with schools to conduct outreach programs can be effective in introducing traditional games to children (Jayasundara, 2015). This can include interactive presentations, workshops, and demonstrations that capture students' interest and encourage their participation.
- **Community Engagement:** Involving the local community in promoting traditional games is essential. Community events, festivals, and sports tournaments can serve as platforms to raise awareness, provide opportunities for participation, and celebrate traditional games. Engaging community leaders, cultural organizations, and local influencers can help spread the word and generate enthusiasm (Abeysekara, 2006).
- **Collaboration with Sports Associations:** Partnering with sports associations and federations to incorporate traditional games into their programs can increase exposure and recognition (Perera, 2011). This can include

organizing traditional game competitions alongside mainstream sports events or creating special divisions for traditional games within existing sports structures

By implementing these promotion and marketing strategies, awareness and interest in traditional Sri Lankan games can be increased among children, parents, and the wider community (Rathnayake, 2019). It is important to highlight the unique cultural heritage, health benefits, and enjoyable nature of these games to ensure their continued practice and preservation for future generations.

Conclusion: In conclusion, traditional Sri Lankan games have a significant role to play in promoting physical development among children. These games not only provide opportunities for physical fitness but also contribute to the overall well-being and social development of children. Through the exploration of historical traditional games played by children, categorization based on physical development benefits, and understanding the physiological and psychological advantages, it is evident that traditional games offer a holistic approach to children's growth. However, several factors can influence children's participation in traditional games, including reasons for engagement or refraining from participation, parental attitudes and beliefs, and social and cultural influences. It is crucial to address these factors to ensure the preservation and revitalization of traditional games in Sri Lanka. The impact of access to play spaces, equipment availability, and exposure to modern technology should not be overlooked. Efforts should be made to provide suitable play spaces, quality equipment, and innovative integration of technology to engage children in traditional games and overcome the challenges posed by digital distractions. Integrating traditional games into education and recreation requires effective approaches, including curriculum integration, designing recreational programs, providing necessary resources and training for teachers, and leveraging technology and innovative learning methods. These approaches can enhance children's learning experiences, physical development, and cultural understanding. Promotion and marketing strategies play a vital role in increasing awareness and interest in traditional games among children, parents, and the wider community. By showcasing the cultural significance, benefits, and excitement of these games through cultural showcases, media campaigns, community engagement, and collaborations, traditional games can regain their rightful place in society.

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