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Promoting Indonesian Cultural Practices through August 17th Games: A Community Service Program in Thailand

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Abstract

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Students in international schools may have limited opportunities to get to know Indonesian culture firsthand. This community service program aims to introduce social values with education in the celebration of August 17 through simple games at Islamwittaya Foundation School, Thailand. The method used is a participatory method that is carried out using four stages, including planning, implementation, observation, and mentoring. The data collected was by direct observation with photo documentation, then analyzed descriptively based on participation, compliance with rules, cooperation, and sportsmanship. Cultural introduction was analyzed as an additional outcome of the program. Activities are adjusted to the conditions in the classroom, student characteristics, facilities, and school schedule. The results of observations indicate that students have a high level of participation, compliance, cooperation, and sportsmanship in individual, pair, or group activities. They communicate, divide roles, help friends, follow the rules, by accepting the outcome of the game without dispute. Photo documentation also indicates that the activity took place in an orderly and enjoyable manner. Because it does not use a pre-test or post-test, the standard attitude scale, the results of the study only indicate a direct response of students, not long-term changes in cultural understanding. The program indicates that simple, low-cost games can provide cross-cultural experiences, strengthen social interactions, and support experiential learning. This activity model can also be implemented by schools or service teams without disrupting routine learning.

Abstrak

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Siswa di sekolah internasional mungkin mempunyai kesempatan yang terbatas untuk mengenal budaya Indonesia secara langsung. Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini memiliki tujuan memperkenalkan nilai sosial dengan pendidikan dalam perayaan 17 Agustus melalui permainan sederhana di Islamwittaya Foundation School, Thailand. Metode yang digunakan adalah metode partisipatif yang dilakukan dengan menggunakan empat tahap, diantaranya adalah perencanaan, pelaksanaan, observasi, dengan pendampingan. Data yang dikumpulkan adalah dengan pengamatan secara langsung dengan dokumentasi foto, lalu dianalisis dengan deskriptif yang didasarkan dari partisipasi, kepatuhan terhadap aturan, kerja sama, dan sportivitas. Pengenalan budaya dianalisis sebagai hasil tambahan program. Kegiatan disesuaikan dengan kondisi di kelas, karakteristik siswa, fasilitas, dan jadwal sekolah. Hasil pengamatan mengindikasikan bahwa siswa mempunyai tingkat partisipasi, kepatuhan, kerja sama, dan sportivitas yang tinggi dalam kegiatan individu, berpasangan, ataupun kelompok. Mereka berkomunikasi, membagi peran, membantu teman, mengikuti aturan, dengan menerima hasil permainan tanpa perselisihan. Dokumentasi foto juga mengindikasikan bahwa kegiatan berlangsung secara tertib dan menyenangkan. Dikarenakan tidak menggunakan pre-test ataupun post-test maka skala sikap standar, hasil penelitian hanya mengindikasikan respons langsung siswa, bukan perubahan jangka panjang dalam pemahaman budaya. Program ini mengindikasikan bahwa permainan sederhana dan berbiaya rendah dapat memberikan pengalaman lintas budaya, memperkuat interaksi sosial, dan mendukung pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman. Model kegiatan ini juga dapat diimplementasikan oleh sekolah atau tim pengabdian tanpa mengganggu pembelajaran yang rutin.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural transmission is not only by continuity through formal explanations but also by involvement in common practices, rituals and daily activities. One example can be seen at the celebration of Indonesian Independence Day every August 17 which is filled with various traditional community-based games that focus on the values of cooperation, solidarity, togetherness, and healthy competition. This kind of activity is part of a living culture that can be used as a learning medium when adjusted to the context of students and the local environment (Fitri et al., 2020). The use of culture in education is also in line with global efforts to link cultural knowledge with the continuous learning process in schools (UNESCO, 2025). Therefore, schools can have a role in cultural preservation by integrating festivals and traditional practices into learning activities (Yatim et al., 2025).

In the international education environment, Indonesia may be more often known by students through geographical information or general facts, while the opportunity to experience the implementation of its culture directly still has limitations. This situation can be a delay in the formation of intercultural relationships that have food because culture is only understood as information, not as a truly felt experience. Cultural literacy programs implemented in schools indicate that activities carried out in a repetitive and contextually adjusted manner can help students make an introduction to cultural values, responsibility, curiosity, discipline, and mutual respect (Safitri & Ramadan, 2022). Similar activities implemented in the school environment can also improve students' cultural literacy and citizenship (Sari & Supriyadi, 2021). In intercultural education, students need to be included to understand related to differences through openness, dialogue, reflection, and respect, not through rigid or stereotypical cultural views (Deardorff, 2020). The implementation of learning

in the classroom can also be strengthened with a critical and reflective approach to intercultural communication (Hoff, 2020).

Games are seen as appropriate because they have clarity in the rules, allow for direct participation, social interaction, and an element of fun. A systematic review indicates that game-based learning can create increased motivation, cognitive development, and social-emotional aspects if adjusted to the needs of students (Alotaibi, 2024). Gamification has also been shown to increase student engagement when challenges, feedback, and participation align with learning objectives (Ramírez Ruiz et al., 2024) and meta-analyses indicate a positive impact on learning outcomes (Sailer & Homner, 2020). However, game design needs to be able to be adjusted to the goals, needs of students, and the context of implementation which is not just a competition or giving prizes (Hou, 2023; Piñero Charlo et al., 2022). In practice, where analog and classroom games are relevant choices because they are cheap and do not depend on high technology (Sousa et al., 2023).

Traditional games with cooperative games can also be used to encourage the development of children's social skills. With cooperative play, children are given the opportunity to communicate, divide and negotiate roles, and face challenges together (Hanum et al., 2022). Traditional sports games have also been linked to improving students' social skills in elementary school (Irmansyah et al., 2020). In addition, traditional Javanese games can help in conducting concentration training, decision-making skills, strategizing, and solving problems (Iswinarti & Suminar, 2019). Experience in using games in the classroom also indicates that well-formed assignments can provide opportunities for students to take control of the learning process, face challenges, and actively participate (Debrenti, 2024). A practical game design framework suggests the use of simple rules, clear goals, easy-to-manage time, by assisting teachers so that educational games remain inclusive and can be implemented properly (Nautiyal et al., 2024)

Game-based strategies are increasingly used in cultural heritage education because it will facilitate access to cultural materials. Bibliometric reviews indicate game-based learning, serious games, and mobile learning as the main trends (Camuñas-García et al., 2023), while experimental studies provide evidence where well-designed serious games can create increased motivation and learning outcomes (Ye et al., 2021). Although the program has a non-digital nature, the findings focus that active learning is more effective than passive explanation.

Community service activities with service learning have provided a different learning dimension because the learning process occurs through interaction between participants, facilitators, and partner institutions. Service learning experiences, both in the international and domestic scopes, can improve intercultural competence when students cooperate with others and reflect on tasks that have been completed in a joint way (Bletscher & Hellmann, 2022). Service learning is also associated with the development of intercultural sensitivity, although the results obtained are greatly influenced by the design of the program with the quality of involvement in each participant (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2021). Therefore, cultural activities in community service programs need to be formed contextually, participatory, and strongly encouraged by facilitators. In these activities, it should not be just transferred from one environment to another without making adjustments to the conditions, needs, and characteristics of participants and partner institutions.

At Islamwittaya Foundation School, Thailand, where it was found that there was a limited exposure of students to the practice of celebrating Indonesian culture. A similar approach has been implemented in other schools through the August 17 competition that introduces Indonesian culture and is considered relevant to the Thai educational context (Riani et al., 2025). Competition activities can also create academic participation and culture if they are made part of learning that is not just entertainment (Sukaesih et al., 2025). However, previous research still separates the study of traditional games, gamification, cultural literacy, and service learning and has not discussed much

adaptation of the simple and low-cost classroom-scale August 17 game in the context of international community service.

Based on this, this program has the purpose of introducing the implementation of Indonesian culture with the typical game of the August 17 celebration, documenting students' participation and social response directly, by identifying the practical educational value of the activities carried out. The main contribution of the program is to provide a model of activities that can be re-implemented by collaborating cultural introduction, experiential learning, and social relationships in ordinary classroom conditions and limited learning time. Table 1 summarizes the relationship between some of the selected previous studies and the current service programs.

Table 1. Comparison of selected previous studies and the present program

Source	Focus/context	Approach	Main relevance	Difference from this program
Fitri et al. (2020)	Indonesian Independence Day and traditional games	Conceptual/cultural discussion	Cooperation, solidarity, togetherness	Present program applies the cultural practice in Thai classrooms.
Irmansyah et al. (2020)	Traditional sport games in primary schools	Empirical study	Social-skill development	Present program focuses on cross-cultural exposure and community service.
Riani et al. (2025)	August 17th competition in a Thai school	Community service	Directly comparable cultural introduction	Present program adds qualitative indicators and a class-by-class model.
Rodríguez-Izquierdo (2021)	Service learning and intercultural sensitivity	Comparative study	Intercultural learning through service	Present program observes immediate classroom responses, not pre-post change.
Camuñas-García et al. (2023)	Games in cultural heritage education	Bibliometric review	Games as cultural learning media	Present program uses simple non-digital activities.
Yatim et al. (2025)	Traditional festivals and school education	Qualitative case study	School support for cultural heritage	Present program introduces a foreign culture in an international context.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This community service program is implemented by applying a participatory approach that involves the implementation team, teachers, and students in the planning and implementation process. This approach was chosen so that there can be adjustments to school schedules, classroom conditions, available facilities, and student characteristics. At Islamwittaya Foundation School, Thailand, where activities are then integrated with classroom-based learning so that it does not become a significant source of disruption to the regular learning process.

The participants of this community service program were students from Primary 4, 5, and 6, as well as Secondary 7 to 12 at Islamwittaya Foundation School, Thailand. Each Primary class consisted of approximately 20 students. Secondary 7, 8, and 9 consisted of approximately 25 students in each class, while Secondary 10, 11, and 12 consisted of approximately 20 students in each class. Based on this composition, the total number of students involved in the program was approximately 195 students.

This program is carried out in four stages. In the planning stage, coordination with the school was carried out with the facilitators who chose simple games typical of August 17 that were safe to implement in the classroom, prepared low-cost materials, and arranged related to the division of activity time. At the implementation stage, students are included individually, in pairs, or in small groups adjusted to the rules of each game. Observations are made during the entire activity, while assistance is provided when students need additional explanations or use assistance in participating in activities.

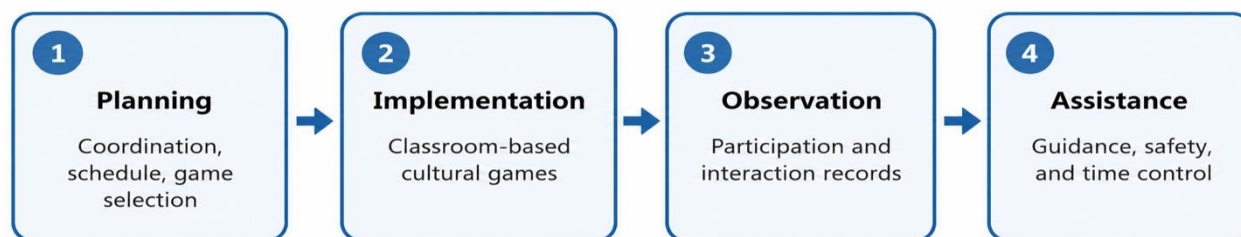


Figure 1. Stages of the community service program

During the activity where students are involved as active participants by running games and interacting with classmates. The learning process is supported by teachers who maintain a smooth classroom, maintain a conducive atmosphere, and there is an adjustment of activities to the needs of students in the field. On the other hand, the facilitator coordinates the overall activity by designing the game, explaining the cultural context and rules, preparing and sharing materials, arranging time and safety, documenting the implementation, and guiding students during the continuation of the activity.

Data was collected by conducting direct observations and photo documentation. In the analysis process, field notes and photos were classified into four observable behavioral indicators, namely: (1) participation, which is indicated by the willingness of students to participate and remain involved in activities; (2) compliance with the rules, which is indicated by the ability to follow instructions and complete tasks in accordance with the agreed procedures; (3) cooperation, which is indicated in communication, role sharing, and assistance between friends; and (4) sportsmanship, which is indicated by playing behavior in a fair way and accepting the results of activities. Cultural introduction is recorded separately as an additional result of the program, not as a category in behavioral achievement. In the overall evidence, a descriptive analysis was then carried out by identifying patterns that appeared repeatedly in each class session and conducting a tailored examination between the results of written observations and available documentation.

The assessment of achievements in this activity was carried out in a qualitative way in three categories, namely high, medium, and limited. The high category is used when the behavior appears consistently in most participants, the medium category when the behavior appears unstable or only occasionally, while the limited category indicates the occurrence of infrequent behavior. Because of the absence of initial or final measurements such as pre-test, post-test, or standardized attitude scales, the results obtained are only a form of representation of direct responses during the activity that are not long-term changes in cultural understanding or attitudes. This condition is deliberately to be maintained so that the interpretation of the impact does not exceed the available evidence.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Activity Implementation

Activities are carried out by alternating in each class where this arrangement has been made so that the process in routine learning is not much disturbed by activity instructions that can be adjusted by the facilitator to the conditions in each class. The game has used simple materials with an emphasis on precision, coordination, concentration, and cooperation. Students are divided into pairs or small groups, while winners are determined based on success in completing tasks and obeying the rules, not just based on speed. Clear goals, easy-to-implement rules, with active assistance from facilitators

help in creating an atmosphere of activities that are organized but still fun (Nautiyal et al., 2024). The use of simple analog games also makes activities continue to be carried out under limited technology and material conditions (Sousa et al., 2023).

The limited time and space make this activity organized through a class rotation system so that it can still run effectively but still must be able to maintain core elements such as joint participation, cooperation, healthy competition, and sportsmanship. This approach was chosen because cultural learning is more appropriate to be applied contextually according to the implementing environment which is not transferred directly without any adjustments. Flexibility in game-based learning will allow for the adaptation of activities to local conditions and available resources (Hou, 2023), in line with cultural education guidelines that emphasize contextual and inclusive implementation in schools (UNESCO, 2025).



Figure 2. Classroom implementation of August 17th cultural games

At the end of the activity where simple prizes are distributed by the facilitators which is a form of appreciation for the participation of students and to maintain a positive and fun learning atmosphere. The distribution of prizes is also indicated to increase students' enthusiasm by fostering a sense of satisfaction in their success in completing activities.



Figure 3. Prize distribution for participants of the August 17th games during the community service program in Thailand

Key Observed Findings

Table 2. Summary of immediate observational outcomes

Indicator	Observable evidence	Category	Interpretation
Participation	Students willingly joined individual, paired, and group activities and remained involved until task completion.	High	The activity format was accessible and engaging.
Rule of Adhesion	Students followed instructions and completed tasks using the agreed procedures.	High	Clear rules supported orderly implementation and fairness.
Cooperation	Students communicated, shared roles, coordinated actions, and assisted peers.	High	Interdependence encouraged social interaction and shared responsibility.
Sportsmanship	Students accepted activity outcomes and participated without visible disputes over winners.	High	Fair criteria supported responsibility and respectful competition.

The program output can not only be seen from the four behavioral indicators but also in the aspect of cultural exposure that can appear during the activity. Through direct involvement in the typical game of the celebration of Indonesian Independence Day where students no longer only receive theoretical cultural explanations but experience them participatically.

Student Participation, Social Interaction, and Cultural Learning

The results indicate that the level of student participation has been relatively high where the students follow the directions given by the facilitator while still engaging in individual, pair, or group tasks. Such engagement is driven by activities that are considered new, objectives that are immediate and easy to understand, with a relatively short duration of tasks. Game-based learning can increase motivation if the assignment has an appropriate level of challenge and provides clear opportunities for students to participate (Alotaibi, 2024). The use of games in the classroom can also support active involvement because students are given indicated goals with challenges that can still be solved (Debrenti, 2024). Gamification has a more effective tendency to increase student involvement in schools if the design can be tailored to the characteristics of learners and learning goals (Ramírez Ruiz et al., 2024). The results of the meta-analysis also indicate that well-formed gamification can improve student learning outcomes (Sailer & Homner, 2020).

Cooperative interactions arise when students have to communicate with each other, share roles, and coordinate actions for game completion. This activity places participants to not only be competing individuals but also groups that have interdependence. This is able to create a space for positive social interaction during the activity. Research indicates that cooperative play can improve communication and social intelligence through shared challenges (Hanum et al., 2022) while traditional games also support the development of children's social skills (Irmansyah et al., 2020) as well as problem-solving, concentration, and decision-making skills (Iswinarti & Suminar, 2019).

Compliance with rules and sportsmanship is also consistently indicated during activities. Each activity is completed by students in accordance with the procedures that have been described, while the determination of the winner is carried out using the same criteria for all participants. Fair rules have provided guidelines together so that confusion can be lowered and students' attention is more directed to involvement in the activity, rather than to disputes related to the outcome of the game. Games in the celebration of Indonesia's Independence Day can be used to instill a connection with the values of solidarity, cooperation, and togetherness (Fitri et al., 2020). Competitions in the school environment can also increase positive participation if these activities are formed as part of the educational process, not just entertainment that is carried out separately (Sukaesih et al., 2025).

This program provides a cultural contribution through direct introduction to the practice of celebrating Indonesian Independence Day to students who previously had limited exposure. The

learning experience can not only be built through verbal explanations but there must also be involvement in the rules of the game, the atmosphere of the activity, and the social values inherent in it. It is through such participation that students gain hands-on cultural experience that will enable the development of intercultural competencies that focus on participation, reflection, openness, and mutual respect (Deardorff, 2020). This process is also in line with critical intercultural learning by demanding the ability to understand cultural differences without stereotypes (Hoff, 2020). In the context of the school itself, experience-based cultural literacy activities can help students understand cultural values and responsibilities more clearly (Safitri & Ramadan, 2022) while cultural literacy programs in schools also strengthen cultural understanding as well as civic awareness (Sari & Supriyadi, 2021).

Comparison with Previous Studies and Practical Implications

The results of this program are in line with the project in community service in Thailand analyzed from the research of Riani et al. (2025), which also used the August 17 race to introduce Indonesian culture. However, in this program there is a difference because it focuses more on the implementation that alternately in each class, the use of indicators in qualitative achievement, with the provision of a classroom-scale activity model that can be re-implemented. The program can also enhance research on cultural heritage games by indicating that meaningful cultural recognition does not necessarily require digital technology. The results of bibliometric studies indicate that an interactive approach based on games is increasingly used in cultural heritage education (Camuñas-García et al., 2023). Serious games can improve learning outcomes and motivation in conducting cultural heritage analysis with the active involvement of participants (Ye et al., 2021). This activity indicates that low-cost analog games can also implement the same principles of active learning.

During the implementation where the interaction between students, teachers, and facilitators forms a joint work environment that will allow culture to occur through direct activities. This condition is in line with findings from the service-learning literature that have indicated that collaborative engagement in cross-background contexts can contribute to the improvement of intercultural competence (Bletscher & Hellmann, 2022). In addition, service learning can create increased intercultural sensitivity if it is accompanied by meaningful experiences and a directed reflection process (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2021). However, the results in this study are still limited to short-term behavioral observations in the classroom, so the assessment of intercultural sustainability requires follow-up measurements such as interviews, pre-post tests, or repeated implementation.

Overall, where the practical results stand out are the ease of this model to implement. The program requires only inexpensive materials, can be implemented in a regular classroom, and can be adjusted to the number of students and the time available. Sources related to educational gamification emphasize that activities must be adjusted, formed inclusively, and directed towards clear learning goals (Piñero Charlo et al., 2022). The learning guide, which is based on games, also suggests that activities be equated with student characteristics, goals, and conditions of implementation (Hou, 2023). Therefore, this model can be used by schools as a first step to developing a broader cultural and artistic education (UNESCO, 2025). The next implementation should be equipped with stronger measurements, repetitive activities, and reflection sessions so that the educational value of cultural festivals can be analyzed more deeply (Yatim et al., 2025).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of the August 17 game at Islamwittaya Foundation School, Thailand has indicated that the introduction of Indonesian culture can be done effectively through a simple class-based community service model. During the continuity of activities where students indicate high

participation, compliance with the rules, and consistent patterns of cooperation and sportsmanship. The experience does not provide direct cultural exposure but also creates support for the development of communication, shared responsibility, concentration, and playful attitudes so that they can be applied without worrying that it will become a distraction in the regular learning process. Therefore, similar applications are given recommendations to be adapted in other educational environments with integration into cultural or language learning as well as the addition of reflection sessions that relate games to the values and historical context of Indonesia. In the future, it is recommended to strengthen the evaluation through recording the characteristics of participants, the use of pre-post instruments or observation rubrics, and follow-up to be able to assess the sustainability of intercultural understanding and attitudes.

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