

## Learning while Playing: Effective Strategies for Strengthening the Character of Elementary School Students in Sidrap Regency

Sam Hermansyah<sup>1</sup>, S. H. Sheik Mohamed<sup>2</sup>, M. Nirmala<sup>3</sup>  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>  
S.A. College of Arts and Science, India<sup>2</sup>

Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, India<sup>3</sup>

Correspondent: [sam.hermansyah82@email.com](mailto:sam.hermansyah82@email.com)<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** An early age. This study explores the implementation of the Learning While Playing method as an effective strategy for strengthening character education among elementary school students in Sidrap Regency. Through interactive and engaging learning activities, students are encouraged to develop positive values such as discipline, cooperation, responsibility, and critical thinking. The research was conducted through direct implementation in elementary schools, where students participated in various games and activities designed to instill moral and ethical principles. The findings indicate that the Learning While Playing approach not only enhances students' enthusiasm and engagement in the learning process but also fosters better character development in a natural and enjoyable manner. This method is recommended as an alternative educational strategy to cultivate strong character traits in young learners.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Learning While Playing, Elementary Students, Interactive Learning, Kabupaten Sidrap.



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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar in shaping quality human resources (Fitri, 2021). In the educational process, not only cognitive aspects need to be considered but also affective and psychomotor aspects that include character development of students. Character education plays a crucial role in building students' personalities from an early age, so they can grow into responsible, disciplined individuals with strong moral values (McGrath & Walker, 2016). One effective approach to character education is through the learning-while-playing method. Learning while playing is a learning strategy that allows students to acquire knowledge and positive values in a fun and interactive way. This approach uses play activities as a medium for learning, so students not only understand academic material but also develop positive attitudes such as cooperation, discipline, and responsibility. This method is particularly relevant at the elementary

school level, considering that children are still in the exploration phase and tend to learn through direct experience.

In the context of education in Sidrap Regency, building students' character has become a unique challenge, especially post-Covid-19 pandemic, which caused changes in learning patterns and social interactions. The online learning implemented during the pandemic resulted in reduced direct interaction between students and teachers, which caused some aspects of character education to be less effectively internalized (Minsih et al., 2021). Therefore, the learning-while-playing method can be an effective solution to restore students' enthusiasm for learning while strengthening their character education. Various studies have shown that the learning-while-playing method can increase students' interest in learning and strengthen character values. Additionally, this approach can also help develop students' social and emotional skills, such as teamwork, emotional regulation, and critical thinking in problem-solving. Thus, play-based learning not only provides a fun learning experience but also has a positive impact on children's personality development (Nurfauziah et al., 2022).

Implementing the learning-while-playing method in character education needs to be systematically designed and tailored to students' needs. The games used in the learning process should have clear objectives and align with the values to be instilled (Nurfauziah & Rachmawati, 2022). For example, group games can be used to develop teamwork and leadership, while story-based games can help students understand moral and ethical values. Thus, the learning process can proceed effectively and in line with the expected character education goals (La, 2022). Furthermore, the role of teachers in applying the learning-while-playing method is also crucial. Teachers must be able to design and manage engaging learning activities and create a conducive environment so that students can learn comfortably. Teachers also need to provide optimal guidance to help each student understand the meaning of each game being played. With proper guidance, students will not only experience enjoyable learning but also understand and internalize the character values being taught.

This research focuses on applying the learning-while-playing method to elementary school students in Sidrap Regency as an effort to strengthen character education (Khaerunisa et al., 2020). The activities include various educational games aimed at instilling values such as discipline, responsibility, teamwork, and critical thinking. This study will also evaluate the effectiveness of this method in improving students' character, which could serve as a recommendation for schools to develop more innovative, character-based learning strategies. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to the development of more effective learning methods, especially in the context of character education at the elementary school level. Through the learning-while-playing approach, it is hoped that students can have a more meaningful learning experience, making them not only academically intelligent but also having a strong and positive character in their everyday lives. Character education is a key aspect of education aimed at shaping students' personalities, morals, and social values. According to Julacha, (2019), character education must be instilled from an early age because it has a significant impact on individual development in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Character education is also part of the national education vision, as outlined in Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017

on Strengthening Character Education (PPK), which emphasizes the importance of forming students' character based on Pancasila values (Firdaus et al., 2025).

The learning-while-playing method has long been recognized as an effective approach to improving the quality of learning, particularly at the elementary school level. According to Ritonga & Dilena, (2022), this method provides a fun and interactive learning experience for students, making it easier for them to understand the material and develop social and emotional skills. Furthermore, Panjaitan & Suriadi, (2023) added that learning through play can increase students' interest in learning and make them more active in the learning process. Several studies have proven the effectiveness of the learning-while-playing method in strengthening character education. Haryati, (2019) revealed that this approach can improve discipline, responsibility, and teamwork in learning. In addition, research by Ilma & Nurhidayati, (2022) showed that this method can increase students' enthusiasm and motivation, which ultimately contributes to the formation of positive character traits. Thus, learning through play is not just a learning method but also an effective tool for building students' character values. In the context of education in Indonesia, the learning-while-playing approach has been widely applied in the curriculum based on the Profile of Pancasila Students (PPP) (Dwiputri & Anggraeni, 2021). According to Irawati, (2022), PPP emphasizes six character dimensions that must be developed in students, namely belief and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, independence, mutual cooperation, critical thinking, and creativity. The learning-while-playing method aligns with these dimensions because it allows students to learn through direct experience and creative exploration.

Furthermore, traditional games can also be used as a medium in the learning-while-playing method. Rachmawati et al., (2022) stated that traditional games like congklak, jump rope, and gobak sodor can help students develop social skills and increase their interaction with the environment. These games are not only fun but also contain character values such as teamwork, honesty, and sportsmanship. Therefore, integrating traditional games into learning can be an effective strategy for character education. Although the learning-while-playing method has many benefits, its implementation still requires good planning. According to Dewi & Putri, (2022), teachers play a crucial role in designing learning activities that meet students' needs and ensuring that the games used have clear educational objectives. Additionally, support from schools and parents is also an important factor in the success of this method. Without good cooperation between teachers, schools, and parents, the effectiveness of learning-while-playing in strengthening character education will not be maximized. Based on the various studies conducted, it can be concluded that the learning-while-playing method is an effective strategy for building the character of elementary school students. This approach allows students to learn in a more enjoyable, interactive, and meaningful way, so character values can be naturally embedded into their everyday lives. Therefore, this research aims to further examine the implementation of the learning-while-playing method in strengthening character education for elementary school students in Sidrap Regency.

## METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study to analyze the effectiveness of the learning-while-playing strategy in strengthening the character of elementary school students in Sidrap Regency. This approach is chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of both students and teachers in implementing play-based learning methods. Data is collected through direct classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students, and analysis of school policy documents related to character education. The research is conducted at several elementary schools (SD) in Sidrap Regency, involving students from lower grades (1st–3rd grade) and upper grades (4th–6th grade) as the primary subjects. Teachers, school principals, and parents are also included as supporting informants to provide a more comprehensive picture. The selection of research locations is based on schools that have implemented the learning-while-playing method in their curriculum.

Data collection is carried out using several techniques: direct observation during learning activities, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation studies related to character education programs in schools. Observations are made to see how play-based methods are applied in the classroom, while interviews aim to understand the perceptions of teachers and students regarding the effectiveness of this method. Documentation is used to analyze school policies and extracurricular programs that support student character development.

In practice, the learning-while-playing method is applied through various activities, such as traditional games (congklak, jump rope, snake and ladder) that instill values of cooperation and honesty, role-playing simulations that train empathy and responsibility, and interactive quizzes and puzzles that develop critical thinking and creativity. These games are selected based on the values in the Profile of Pancasila Students, so students not only acquire knowledge but also build strong character. To ensure data validity, this research uses source and method triangulation techniques, comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis is carried out through data reduction, presentation of data in narrative form, and drawing conclusions based on emerging pattern (Roti, 2020)s. Thus, this research aims to provide a clear picture of the effectiveness of the learning-while-playing method in shaping the character of elementary school students in Sidrap Regency.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This study found that the learning-while-playing method has a positive impact on strengthening the character of elementary school students in Sidrap Regency. The observation results indicated that students were more enthusiastic and active in the learning process compared to conventional methods. The play activities not only created a fun learning atmosphere but also helped students understand character values such as cooperation, discipline, and responsibility. When students were engaged in group play, they showed attitudes of mutual assistance and teamwork in achieving common goals. Additionally, teachers interviewed expressed that this method was very effective in instilling character values naturally in students. Through traditional games like congklak, jump rope, and snake-and-ladder, students learned about honesty,

sportsmanship, and how to handle both victories and defeats with a positive attitude. In role-playing-based games, students also found it easier to grasp the concepts of empathy and responsibility, as they directly experienced situations that mirrored real-life scenarios.

Based on the analysis of school documents, it was found that the character education programs implemented through the learning-while-playing method aligned with the values in the Profile of Pancasila Students (Halidjah & Hartoyo, 2022). The schools involved in this study have adapted the play method as part of their learning strategies aimed at building students' character from an early age. Some schools even have specific policies to integrate educational games into learning, both through curricular and extracurricular activities. Further, interviews with school principals revealed that they supported the implementation of this method because it was seen as effective in enhancing social interaction among students. Through group play, students found it easier to communicate and learn to respect each other's opinions. Additionally, problem-solving-based games helped students develop critical and creative thinking skills, which are also essential in character development.

However, there were some challenges faced by teachers in its implementation. One of the main obstacles was the limited time within the packed curriculum, making it difficult to consistently apply play-based methods in every subject. Some teachers also mentioned that they still required additional training in designing educational games that are effective and aligned with the teaching material. Therefore, further support from schools in the form of training and more flexible time allocation within the curriculum is needed.

Besides curriculum challenges, limitations in facilities and teaching media also hindered the application of this method. Some schools in remote areas still lacked learning aids that support the concept of learning while playing. Therefore, it is essential for the schools and local governments to collaborate in providing adequate resources and infrastructure to ensure this method can be applied optimally. On the other hand, the involvement of parents in the learning process was also identified as a critical factor in the success of this method. Interviews with several parents revealed that they supported the learning-while-playing approach because their children appeared happier and more enthusiastic about learning. However, some parents still hold the perception that play has no relation to academic learning, so further socialization is necessary to help them understand the benefits of this method in shaping their children's character. Overall, the research emphasizes that the learning-while-playing method is an effective strategy for strengthening the character of elementary school students. This method not only enhances social interaction and student engagement in the learning process but also helps them internalize character values in a fun and meaningful way. For the sustainability of this program, support from various parties, including teachers, parents, and education policymakers, is necessary to ensure that this method can be applied more widely and systematically in schools across Sidrap Regency.



## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the learning-while-playing method is an effective strategy for strengthening the character of elementary school students in Sidrap Regency (Fahad & Kistyanto, 2021). Through this approach, students not only gain academic understanding but also experience character education directly in a fun and engaging environment. The observations showed that students were more enthusiastic, active, and had better social interactions compared to conventional teaching methods.

Interviews with teachers and school principals revealed that this method helps instill character values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and cooperation. Traditional games and role-playing simulations were proven to create natural learning situations where students could understand moral concepts through direct experience. This aligns with the character education goals outlined in the Profile of Pancasila Students.

Although this method brings many benefits, several challenges were encountered during its implementation. The main obstacle was the limited time within a packed curriculum, as well as a lack of training for teachers in designing educational games that are appropriate. Additionally, some schools still face limitations in facilities and teaching media that support the optimal implementation of this method. Parental involvement also plays a crucial role in the success of the learning-while-playing method. While most parents support the method due to its positive impact on their children, some still perceive that play is not related to academic learning. Therefore, further socialization is needed to help parents understand the essential role of this method in building children's character from an early age.

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