

Football as A Character Formation Medium 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children in One of The Elementary Schools in Labuhan Ratu District

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the declining interest of the younger generation in traditional sports amidst the digital era, which has impacted the weakening of national character. In fact, traditional sports serve not only as physical activities but also embody noble cultural values capable of shaping the social and emotional character of students. The purpose of this study is to describe how Traditional Sports Week activities can strengthen the social and emotional character of students in public elementary schools across Bangkunan District, Pesisir Barat Regency, Lampung. This study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on three primary variables: social-emotional character, Traditional Sports Week activities, and student participation. The research subjects include students, teachers, and parents involved in the program. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation during the Traditional Sports Week, which was held once a week. The results are expected to indicate that Traditional Sports Week serves as an effective medium for fostering social values such as cooperation, empathy, and sportsmanship, as well as strengthening students' emotional competence in managing feelings, respecting others, and adapting to their environment. The findings of this study are intended to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of character education based on local wisdom and serve as a practical reference for schools in developing relevant co-curricular activities to shape students' social-emotional character in the modern era.

Keywords: character education; traditional sports; co-curricular; social-emotional; local wisdom

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Article History:

Submitted: July, 2025
Accepted: November, 2025
Published: November, 2025

Authors' contribution:

- A) Conception and design of the study;
- B) Acquisition of data;
- C) Analysis and interpretation of data;
- D) Manuscript preparation;
- E) Obtaining funding.

Cite this article:

Putra, Y. G., Lengkana, A. S., & Susilawati, D. (2025). Football as A Character Formation Medium 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children in One of The Elementary Schools in Labuhan Ratu District. *Indonesian Journal of Sport Management*, Vol. 5(4), 959-967. <https://doi.org/10.31949/ijsm.v5i4.16920>

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a central pillar in modern educational discourse, particularly in response to the increasing complexity of social and technological transformations in the 21st century (Dudley, 2025). Character is not merely formed through formal instruction but develops through a combination of knowledge, lived experiences, and reflective processes that shape individual behavior and values (Brunsdon, 2025). Character formation in schools contributes not only to individual student development but also to the overall quality of the educational environment (Cholifah & Faelasup, 2024). Therefore, schools are expected to function as holistic ecosystems that nurture intellectual, social, and moral growth simultaneously.

In Indonesia, the urgency of strengthening character education has been institutionalized through various national programs, including the “7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children,” which emphasizes daily positive routines such as waking up early, worshipping, exercising, maintaining a healthy diet, learning actively, socializing, and



sleeping early (N. P. Akbar et al., 2025; Christin et al., 2025). These habits are aligned with the broader framework of the Strengthening Character Education (PPK) policy introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, reinforced through Circular Letter Number 14 of 2025.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain evident, particularly at the elementary school level. In areas such as Labuhan Ratu District, students often exhibit low discipline, limited collaboration skills, and weak responsibility, exacerbated by excessive exposure to digital technology and social media. This phenomenon reflects a broader global trend where technological advancement, while beneficial, also contributes to social isolation, individualism, and declining interpersonal skills among children (Yu et al., 2025). Consequently, there is a growing need for innovative and experiential learning approaches that can effectively bridge the gap between theoretical character education and practical implementation in students' daily lives.

One promising approach lies in the integration of sports, particularly football, as a medium for character development. Football is widely among elementary school students due to its accessibility, competitive nature, and engaging dynamics. More importantly, it inherently embodies essential values such as teamwork, discipline, responsibility, emotional control, and sportsmanship (Krishnani & Kanade, 2025; Narto, 2024; Yang, 2026). Through participation in football activities, students are naturally exposed to real-life situations requiring cooperation, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Prior studies have demonstrated that sports participation can significantly enhance social-emotional skills (Kanaros & Bourdaniotis, 2025; Wang et al., 2025), although most research has not explicitly connected these outcomes with structured character frameworks (Fauzen, 2025) such as the 7 Habits model (Akbaruddin et al., 2025).

Based on this gap, the present study aims to explore the role of football as a medium for strengthening the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children among elementary school students in Labuhan Ratu District. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research seeks to analyze not only the observable outcomes but also the underlying mechanisms, supporting factors, and challenges in implementing football-based character education. By doing so, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of innovative, culturally relevant, and experiential character education strategies, ultimately supporting the formation of a generation that is not only physically active but also socially responsible and morally grounded.

METHOD

The type of research

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design to explore the role of football as a medium for strengthening the character of the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children among elementary school students. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to understand deeply the processes, meanings, and experiences of participants within a natural setting, rather than measuring variables quantitatively. This approach allows the researcher to capture complex social phenomena, particularly character formation, which involves values, attitudes, and behaviors that develop through interaction and experience.

The descriptive qualitative design was considered appropriate because the study focused on describing real conditions in the field, including how football activities contribute to character development. The researcher acted as the primary instrument,

directly engaging with participants and interpreting the data contextually. This approach is aligned with the view that qualitative research emphasizes understanding participants' perspectives and experiences within their natural environment.

The time and location

The research was conducted at UPTD SD Negeri 3 Rajabasa Lama, located in Labuhan Ratu District. This school was selected purposively because it actively implements football extracurricular activities as part of its student development program. The study took place over approximately two months, allowing sufficient time for in-depth observation and data collection. The research period consisted of three stages: preparation, data collection, and data analysis. The preparation stage involved initial observation and coordination with the school. The data collection stage focused on observing football activities and conducting interviews, while the final stage involved analyzing and interpreting the collected data.

The goals or target

The main target of this study was to examine the development of students' character based on the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children, including discipline, responsibility, cooperation, healthy living, social interaction, and emotional regulation. The research participants consisted of two main groups: 1) Students: 20 fifth-grade students (class 5A and 5B) who actively participated in football extracurricular activities. They served as the primary source of data, providing insights into their experiences and behavioral changes; 2) Teacher (Coach): One physical education teacher who acted as the football coach and program facilitator. The teacher provided information regarding the implementation process and character development strategies. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their active involvement in the football program. This selection ensured that the data collected was relevant and meaningful to the research objectives.

Research procedures

The research was conducted through three main stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. During the preparation stage, the researcher conducted preliminary observations and identified key participants. In the implementation stage, direct observations were carried out during football training sessions, accompanied by in-depth interviews with students and the teacher. The evaluation stage involved analyzing participants' reflections and identifying changes in students' character development. The entire research process was conducted in a natural setting to maintain authenticity and ensure that the data reflected real-life experiences.

Instruments

The main research instruments included semi-structured interview guides, observation checklists, and documentation tools. The interview guides were designed to explore indicators of character such as discipline, teamwork, responsibility, emotional control, and social interaction. Observation checklists were used to record students' behaviors during football activities, including participation, cooperation, adherence to rules, and emotional responses. Documentation, such as photos, activity schedules, and school records, was used to support and validate the findings. The instruments were developed in alignment with the research objectives to ensure data relevance and consistency.

Data collection techniques

Data were collected using three main techniques to ensure depth and triangulation. First, observations were conducted during football activities to capture students' real-time behavior and interactions. The researcher observed how students demonstrated discipline, teamwork, and emotional control during training and matches. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and the teacher. These interviews allowed participants to share their experiences, perceptions, and understanding of character development through football. Third, documentation analysis was carried out to examine supporting data such as activity reports, schedules, and photographs. The combination of these techniques ensured comprehensive data collection and enhanced the credibility of the findings.

Data analysis techniques

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the framework of Braun and Clarke. The analysis process began with data familiarization, where the researcher reviewed interview transcripts and observation notes. This was followed by coding significant data and grouping them into categories. Themes were then developed to represent patterns related to character development through football activities. The analysis focused on identifying how football contributes to the formation of the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children. The findings were presented in a descriptive narrative, supported by direct quotations to maintain authenticity and reflect participants' perspectives. To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and techniques was applied. Data from observations, interviews, and documentation were compared and verified to produce credible and reliable findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Research Context and Participant Characteristics

This study was conducted at an elementary school in Labuhan Ratu District, Lampung Timur, Indonesia, which actively implements a structured extracurricular football program. The program involves 20 students with regular training sessions held three times a week. From this population, 10 students were purposively selected based on their active participation for at least six months and their willingness to participate in the study.

All participants were male students from Grade V, reflecting the composition of the football extracurricular group. The participants demonstrated varying levels of experience, ranging from six months to three years, which provided diverse perspectives on character development through football activities. To provide a clearer overview, Table 1 summarizes the participant characteristics:

Table 1. Participant Profile

No	Grade	Gender	Duration of Participation	Training Frequency
1-6	V.a	Male	1-3 years	2-3 times/week
7-10	V.b	Male	6 months-2 years	1-3 times/week

Implementation of the Football Program

The football activities were conducted in structured sessions consisting of warm-up, technical drills (passing, dribbling, shooting), tactical exercises, and small-sided games. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. Importantly, the coach integrated reflective discussions before and after training, emphasizing character values such as discipline, teamwork, and responsibility. Observational data revealed that these structured routines created a consistent environment for behavioral habituation. Students were regularly exposed to rule-based interactions, cooperative tasks, and emotionally challenging situations such as winning and losing.

Integration of the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children

The findings indicate that football activities effectively facilitated the internalization of the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children (KAIH). However, the level of manifestation varied across different habits. Descriptively, habits related to discipline and physical activity (e.g., waking up early and exercising) were strongly evident, as students consistently arrived on time and actively participated in training. Similarly, social interaction and teamwork were highly visible during gameplay, where students demonstrated cooperation and communication. In contrast, habits such as healthy eating and proper rest showed less consistency, suggesting the influence of external factors beyond the school environment. These findings are summarized in Table 2:

Table 2. Implementation of Character Habits in Football Activities

No	Habit	Observed Behavior	Level of Implementation
1	Waking Up Early	Students arrive on time for practice	High
2	Praying	Students pray before and after training	High
3	Exercising	Active participation in football activities	High
4	Love of Learning	Following coach instructions and improving skills	High
5	Healthy Eating	Awareness of nutrition, but inconsistent practice	Moderate
6	Social Interaction	Teamwork and communication during games	High
7	Sleeping Early	Awareness of rest importance, but variable	Moderate

Students' Perspectives on Character Development

Interview data further reinforce the observational findings. Students reported experiencing positive behavioral changes after participating in football activities. They described becoming more disciplined, cooperative, and emotionally controlled. For example, students expressed that: 1) They became more punctual due to training schedules; 2) They learned to cooperate and trust teammates; 3) They developed emotional control when facing defeat. These responses indicate that character formation occurred through experiential learning, where students internalized values through direct engagement rather than formal instruction.

The role of the teacher (coach) emerged as a central factor in facilitating students' character development throughout the football activities. Beyond delivering technical instruction, the teacher consistently integrated moral values such as discipline, responsibility, fairness, and teamwork into each training session. This was particularly evident during pre- and post-training reflections, where the teacher guided students to interpret their experiences on the field and relate them to real-life situations. Through this reflective practice, students were encouraged to evaluate their behavior, understand the

consequences of their actions, and internalize positive values. As a result, character education was not delivered explicitly through formal instruction but was embedded naturally within the learning process, making it more meaningful and impactful for students.

Furthermore, the thematic analysis of interview data revealed that character formation occurred across three interconnected dimensions: self-regulation, social interaction, and balanced lifestyle awareness. Students demonstrated increased self-discipline through punctuality, adherence to rules, and commitment to training routines. In the social domain, football provided a collaborative environment that fostered teamwork, communication, and mutual respect among peers. Meanwhile, the dimension of balanced lifestyle awareness highlighted students' growing understanding of the importance of maintaining physical health, adequate rest, and overall well-being, although its implementation varied depending on external factors. These findings indicate that character development is a gradual and holistic process shaped by repeated social interactions and experiential learning within structured physical activities such as football.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that football serves as an effective medium for character development among elementary school students, particularly in fostering the values embedded in the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children (Akbar et al., 2024; Bahagia et al., 2021). The results demonstrate that football is not merely a physical activity but also a pedagogical tool that provides meaningful and contextual learning experiences (Machado et al., 2019; Orozco et al., 2026). Through structured training, rules of play, and team interactions, students are naturally exposed to situations that require discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and emotional control. This supports the perspective of holistic physical education, which emphasizes the integration of cognitive, affective, and social domains in student development.

Furthermore, the study reveals that character formation occurs primarily through experiential learning rather than direct instruction. Students internalize values by actively participating in football activities, facing real situations such as winning, losing, and collaborating with teammates (Camiré & Trudel, 2010; Carlson & Hastie, 1997). This aligns with constructivist learning theory, which suggests that knowledge and values are constructed through direct experience and social interaction. The triangulation data strengthen this interpretation, showing consistent patterns between students' behaviors, teacher observations, and theoretical constructs such as discipline, social interaction, and self-regulation. These findings confirm that sports-based activities can serve as authentic contexts for character education.

In addition, the implementation of the seven-character habits was found to vary in intensity. Habits closely related to physical activity and social interaction—such as exercising, teamwork, and willingness to learn—were more strongly developed due to their direct connection with football activities (Ma, 2026). In contrast, habits such as healthy eating and adequate rest were less consistently observed, as they are influenced by external factors beyond the school environment, particularly family and home routines. This indicates that while schools play a crucial role in character formation, collaboration with families is essential to ensure the sustainability of certain character habits.

Another important finding is the central role of the teacher (coach) in reinforcing character values. The teacher acts not only as an instructor but also as a role model and

facilitator who guides students in reflecting on their experiences (Wall & Hall, 2016). Through consistent guidance, feedback, and reflective discussions, the teacher helps transform physical activities into meaningful moral learning experiences. This finding is consistent with social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of modeling and interaction in shaping behavior. The teacher's role ensures that the values emerging from gameplay are consciously understood and internalized by students.

Moreover, the thematic analysis highlights that character development occurs across three interconnected dimensions: self-regulation, social competence, and balanced lifestyle awareness. Students develop self-discipline through punctuality and adherence to rules, social skills through teamwork and communication, and awareness of well-being through physical activity and rest (Synytsia et al., 2025). These dimensions indicate that character formation is a gradual and holistic process shaped by continuous practice and repeated exposure to meaningful experiences.

This study reinforces previous research on experiential learning in sports contexts while also contributing new insights into the integration of the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children within elementary education. While experiential aspects are strongly evident, the reflective and application stages still require further optimization. This suggests the need for more structured reflection sessions and follow-up activities to strengthen the internalization of values. Therefore, football-based extracurricular programs have strong potential to be developed as structured character education models that integrate physical activity with reflective learning processes.

The implications of these findings are significant for both theory and practice. Practically, schools should design extracurricular sports programs that intentionally integrate character education through structured reflection and guidance. Theoretically, this study confirms the relevance of experiential learning frameworks in primary education while highlighting the need for contextual adaptation. Future research is recommended to explore long-term impacts, involve more diverse participants, and examine comparative effectiveness across different extracurricular activities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that football extracurricular activities serve as an effective medium for character development among elementary school students, particularly in fostering the values embodied in the 7 Habits of Great Indonesian Children. Conducted at UPTD SD Negeri 3 Rajabasa Lama, the research demonstrates that character formation occurs naturally through structured gameplay, social interaction, and guided participation. Values such as discipline, responsibility, teamwork, sportsmanship, and healthy living were consistently observed in students' behavior during training and matches. The presence of a teacher or coach as a facilitator further strengthens this process by guiding reflection and reinforcing moral values, allowing students to connect their experiences in football with real-life situations.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the concept of holistic physical education and experiential learning, which emphasize that meaningful physical activities can effectively shape students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Overall, the study highlights that football is not merely a physical exercise but also a powerful educational tool that contributes to the holistic development of students. By integrating structured activities with reflective guidance, football programs can play a

significant role in achieving broader educational goals, particularly in strengthening character education at the elementary school level.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict whatsoever related to the research, writing and publication of this article.

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