Article

The Educational Content of Traditional Games and Their Impact on Social Upbringing (A Socio-Anthropological Study in a Village in Southern Algeria) [1]

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Abstract

This study aims to highlight the impact of traditional games as one of the educational methods adopted by many human societies in the process of raising their individuals and instilling in them the values and customs of the community. Particularly, these traditional or heritage games, with their educational contents rooted in the characteristics and culture of the society, are akin to hidden curricula that exert their influence on these young children. To this day, traditional games remain among the most common and widespread games within rural, nomadic, and especially desert environments, where the characteristics of these environments have made them suitable spaces for such a type of human activity. A village or "badiya" (Ghamra) in the vicinity of the southern province of Touggourt represents one of these environments where these games are prevalent as methods of social upbringing. Through this study, we have attempted to explore the types of these prevalent games, their characteristics, their relationship with the natural and social environment of the village, and to uncover the educational contents within them and their impact on the social upbringing of the village's individuals.

Keywords: Traditional games, education, socialization, Ghamra Village, Touggourt Province.

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Introduction

Humans have known play in its simple concept as a type of beneficial activity within the context of their social development, where it has accompanied them since the beginning of their lives. It became intertwined with their lifestyle and their journey in life. Primitive humans resorted to play to imitate the movements and sounds of animals, to reenact their actions during hunting or combat with enemies, through dances, or in worship of spirits, mysterious forces, and deities (Moutheke, 2004: p. 40).

Similarly, primitive man played with stones, boards, trees, and all other animals, aiming to transition from playing with them to establishing roles and creating life necessities. Following the emergence of speech and spoken language, humans delved into a new form of play where speech and language controlled the play dynamics.

In ancient civilizations, it was the children of ancient Egyptians who first engaged in play in its recognizable form. The Egyptians were the first to be acquainted with playing with glass balls, which were small balls made from stone. They also understood that each age corresponds to suitable play and games. They found in their children's play various toys and dolls made from wood, clay, stone, and even ice, which parents relied on to instil in their children the manners of behaviour and social norms (Abdul-Hameed, 2006: p. 17).

The connection between popular play and the socialization process has been present since the appearance of humans on this earth. This pivotal and important process within any human society, regardless of time and place, and regardless of characteristics and traits, is fundamental. The evolution of society fundamentally relies on what socialization accomplishes through the successive generations, utilizing its various mechanisms and methods, among which undoubtedly include Traditional Games with their educational values.

As an example of these human societies where the practice of Traditional Games was prevalent, we find the communities of the great deserts, including the Algerian Sahara. In these societies, these patterns are widely and significantly practiced among children. While the apparent motives for these activities may seem recreational and entertaining, they carry within them educational values that have a significant impact on the socialization process within these communities. Through these games, these societies preserve their cultural model with all its characteristics.

In order to uncover the types of these Traditional Games and understand their impact on the socialization process, this field study was conducted in one of the villages in southern Algeria (Ghmera village). Through this study, we aimed to address the following inquiries:

- The first question: What are the Traditional Games practiced by children in the studied community environment?

- The second question: What are the characteristics of Traditional Games in the studied community and how do they relate to the local environment?

- The third question: What are the educational contents of popular play that contribute to the development of an individual's social personality?

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- The fourth question: What are the educational contents of popular play that aid an individual in acquiring the culture of their community?

Traditional Games: Concept and Implications

Firstly, Definition of Traditional Games:

Traditional Games are defined as simple games passed down from one generation to the next automatically and without organized learning. They are played in various environments and locations and are characterized by several features that have positioned them as crucial in serving the educational and pedagogical processes (Hussein, 2008: p. 02). "Al-Hilah," defines it as an activity or a set of organized activities that children engage in individually or in groups spontaneously and without supervision. It represents a cultural inheritance and a social tradition transmitted from one generation of children to the next through direct observation or partial participation. These games are not chaotic but rather spontaneous activities that are self-regulated and adhere to unwritten ethical principles and conditions that players commit to through an internal moral contract. Children engage in these games within the local environment to meet physical, psychological, and social needs (Al-Hilah, 2004).

Traditional Games, as seen by Ahmed Abu Saad, encompass both what sets them apart and what is shared with others. They are rooted in our language, with their distinct terminology and chants sung by players, imbued with our social and geographical colours. They resonate with the separations and joys of our people, reflecting images of their lives.

It is evident in all the concepts surrounding Traditional Games that this form of play is intricately tied to culture and the local environment. It often diverges from the familiar organizational frameworks of modern games. The ethical contract governing these games does not align with modern organizational standards but is rather linked to a specific law that takes the form of obligation and falls under the supervision of a particular entity.

Secondly, Characteristics and Features of Traditional Games:

Traditional Games are distinguished by a set of features and characteristics that make them a highly unique social phenomenon compared to other types of games known to individuals today. Some of these features aid us in better understanding them and revealing their contents:

- These are games practiced by children in their various environments spontaneously, without supervision or organized teaching, and not governed by predetermined conditions.

- They are considered a cultural heritage and a social tradition passed down from one generation of children to the next, regardless of the attitudes of the adults around them.

- These games are played outdoors, in the streets, public squares, fields, in front of houses, inside courtyards and rooms, and so forth, within various spaces facilitated by the social environment.

- Traditional Games are transmitted across generations through direct observation at times and through partial participation at other times.

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- Traditional Games evolve in their form and content based on the current events experienced by society, reflecting what is happening within the community at that moment.

- They are considered organized social representations or simulations (Al-Hilah, 2004).

- Traditional Games come in a variety of forms and patterns across different age groups. There are games specifically for children and others for adults, as well as games tailored for males versus females, mirroring the societal landscape.

- These games rely on verbal and symbolic means for their practice.

- Traditional Games are characterized by freedom during play, with material incentives being absent.

- Traditional Games are typically easily spread and common in areas that share similar values, customs, and traditions.

- Children who engage in these types of games often align in age groups (Al-Annani, 2009).

Researcher Mohamed Adel Khattab has pointed out a set of characteristics that distinguish Traditional Games from other games and sports, as follows:

- They do not require special equipment, complex sports tools, or dedicated fields.

- They have an endearing nature that attracts players, especially children, showcasing skills, strength, and quick wit.

- These games do not necessitate a specific type of skill or extra skills but rather cultivate skills themselves.

- They are simple to understand and perform, governed by easy rules.

- Suitable for rural environments and the customs and traditions of the people because they stem from them.

- They are low-cost or even cost-free, making them an important economic reality (Adel, 1964: p. 97).

Given these distinctive characteristics of Traditional Games, they have the ability to attract a larger number of players because they are suitable for everyone, not limited to a particular social class. Both adults and children, the poor and the wealthy can engage in these games, making them one of the most influential games for youth.

Furthermore, another distinguishing feature of Traditional Games is the prevalence of group games. This is attributed to the fact that they are often played in open spaces and streets. A group of Algerian researchers noted that children who frequent the streets tend to develop group games and motor skills (climbing, sliding), while children who stay at home tend to develop intellectual skills (Kraske, 1996: p. 21).

Secondly - The Importance of Traditional Games as a Space for Social Development:

The significance of Traditional Games lies in their consideration as cultural heritages. They form a part of the inherited traditions from the society's culture, reflecting the nature of the community, its style, and living patterns. These games carry deep meanings, values, and noble objec-

tives specific to that society, thereby contributing to the development of a child's personality from various social, emotional, educational, physical, and linguistic perspectives (Hussein, 2008: p. 9).

Additionally, the importance of Traditional Games can be seen in their role as activities that stimulate feelings of fun and joy. Through them, individuals express their emotions and fulfill their physiological needs. As such, they serve as a compensatory tool for a child to alleviate psychological stress that arises or accumulates due to various pressures imposed upon them. They serve as a means for children to release themselves from the suppression they experience, thus attempting to restore balance by assuming adult roles in certain forms of symbolic Traditional Games.

Furthermore, Traditional Games help children solve their personal problems, shape their feelings, and develop them by instilling self-confidence and fostering social interaction with the elements of their surrounding environment and its components for the purpose of learning and personal growth.

In a study conducted by Al-Shorouk newspaper titled "Lack of Playgrounds, Old Games... and Video Games Teaching Stupidity," it was found that Traditional Games used to teach children in the past real social meanings and cultural values, such as self-reliance through children's self-made play, learning discipline through the rules that everyone adhered to without violation. Additionally, these games cultivate in them a spirit of solidarity and community, all of which are benefits that Traditional Games offered to individuals and society.

Therefore, Traditional Games serve as a true reflection of both the simple and complex aspects of daily life. Through them, models of life in the environment with its characteristics, traditions, and systems are conveyed. As they pass through generations, they transfer cultural models and living patterns. Each society and civilization have distinctive features and characteristics that are reflected through children's games inspired by their local environments.

These Traditional Games also provide individuals with a sense of social belonging that sets them apart from other beings, as highlighted by Ibn Khaldun and others who assert that individuals are inherently social. This is evident through the direct relationship these games entail between the child, their play, the other players they engage with, and the playing space, contrasting with modern games that psychologists argue can instil individualistic tendencies, introversion, and social alienation.

Moreover, one of the key benefits of engaging in these games is that they genuinely reflect the characteristics of innocent and pure entertainment in both urban and rural societies, shedding light on all avenues leading to an understanding of popular ethics (Rahim, 2005: p. 07).

The patterns of traditional play contribute significantly to the development of linguistic wealth and expressive capabilities, which are among the greatest outcomes resulting from engaging in traditional play through the songs and chants that children repeat and echo.

Furthermore, these Traditional Games also work towards dissolving class differentiations in society, where everyone is equal and all differences are eliminated. Individuals exchange roles

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without fear, embarrassment, or feelings of humiliation, reaching the consideration that the game is a cognitive vessel preserving the memory of generations, and a living model that observes aspects of daily life for all. (Al-Saleh, 2009)

Field Study

1. Field Study Domains:

Inasmuch as place of the field study is concerned, the study was conducted in the village of Ghamra, administratively belonging to the municipality of Al-Maqarin in the province of Ouargla, currently part of the province of Touggourt.

As for the human domain of the study, it included the total population that constitutes the study community (Ghamra village), comprising approximately five thousand individuals, with children representing the majority. It is noticeable that there are clear disparities between the apex and the base in terms of population size. The study community is characterized by a high degree of cohesion, consisting almost entirely of one ethnic group, the Hashashna, one of the Amazigh tribes in the region. They are predominantly descended from only two families, Ben Hamed and Abish, which represent about ninety percent of the total population. The villagers speak the Shilha dialect, a branch of the Amazigh dialects in the region. Most villagers rely on date palm cultivation and land cultivation for their livelihoods, creating an organic relationship between the inhabitants and the land. This close connection is clearly reflected in the children's representations of this relationship through traditional games.

The temporal domain of the study was defined over a period of four months, divided as follows:

- The first period: During the summer of 2020, from July until the beginning of the children's school year, the researcher attempted to observe all the traditional games practiced by children in their environment. This phase aimed to capture a general overview of these games, their characteristics, and how they are played in order to select a research sample.

- The second period: During the winter break, from mid-December to early January, a sample of traditional games was selected, observed, and documented.

- The third and final period: During the spring break, from mid-March to early April, the researcher returned to the field to observe the remaining specified games, document them, conduct some interviews to support observations, and then classify these games into categories for analysis and extraction of educational content from them.

Study Methodology:

In this study, the anthropological approach was adopted because it was deemed suitable for research that delves into the cultural construction of societies. This aspect falls within the purview of anthropological research methodologies. One of the objectives of the anthropological approach is to provide the researcher with the ability to describe and analyse scientifically while establishing connections between relationships and various factors related to the study subject. This facilitates the generalization of results to similar or analogous phenomena when dealing with other communi-

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ties that resemble or are similar to the researched community from which the results are derived (Zrouati, 2007: p. 194).

This methodology is known as a way to describe humans in their society or as a method to understand the rules of social behaviour. It is also recognized as a method of observation, collection, writing, recording, and describing field data, as well as a method for analysing topics and images related to organizing life affairs (Zrouati, 2007: p. 191). The definitions provided align well with the study subject, as traditional games are considered social behaviours and images through which the community contributes to organizing its life affairs.

Data Collection Tools:

1. Observation:

- The researcher utilized observation as a primary tool for collecting data and information from the study field. This method was employed during the exploratory phase, where the researcher observed groups of children playing their games, aiming to analyze the different situations and scenarios they engaged in during play. Both direct observation and participant observation techniques were employed.

2. Interviews:

- Interviews were conducted with the parents of the children and some children who were able to describe the content of their games and their representations of them.

Study Sample and Selection Method:

The sample is defined as a specific part or proportion of individuals from the original community, where this part or proportion is representative of the original community. In this study, a purposive target sample was employed. This type of non-probability sampling does not adhere to statistical laws or chance but instead follows specific criteria and standards set by the researcher to serve the research purpose. The sample selection was guided by principles aimed at serving the research objectives as much as possible.

The research sample elements (units of traditional games) practiced by members of the research community were selected. Twenty games out of thirty-six traditional games were chosen. These games were selected to the best of the researcher's ability to serve the research objectives. The selected games were those available primarily within the local specificity of the community, rather than games common in other regions. Therefore, some games, such as jump rope, were excluded from the sample.

Fifth: Results of the Field Study:

Answer to the first question regarding the traditional games played by children in the community under study: Through the findings of the study, we have determined that there are many traditional games that children engage in within their environment. We have categorized these games into various types: physical games, such as "Arranging the Days," "Hawiza," and "Wheel Rolling." This type of game is common in the study environment due to the wide spaces that allow for freedom of movement.

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There are also constructive games, such as "Clay Statue Making." The most prevalent type, however, is representational games, which are primarily targeted in the socialization process as they facilitate role learning and the imitation of others. Examples of these games include "The Thief and the Hunter," "The Executioner," "War Game," "Horse Riding," "Stick Fighting," and "Doll Play." Additionally, there are recreational games, such as "Siss," which children typically engage in after completing their schoolwork and family obligations in order to refresh and recharge their energy in preparation for upcoming tasks. Finally, there are cultural games, such as "Kharbqa" and "Kart," all of which are played to stimulate and activate the child's intellectual and cultural development.

Answer to the second question regarding the characteristics of traditional games in the community under study:

Through the observations we conducted on these games and the analysis we attempted to apply, we concluded that these games possess several distinctive characteristics that set them apart from others. One of the key features is their social nature: it became evident to us that these games are more collective than individual. This is because these games are among the rituals practiced by communities to express their cultural identity. As is well known, rituals are typically practiced collectively rather than individually. Additionally, these games reflect the psychological and social state of the individual towards the society, which rejects isolation and introversion, favouring participation with others. In such communities, working within a group is seen as the sole guarantee for the survival of such practices. The community finds that the integration of the individual into the group, and the formation of a collective sense of solidarity, serves as protection against extinction.

Clarity of the difference in gender roles:

Despite the social changes that have affected the structure of society due to globalization and the intrusion of cultural peculiarities, as well as women's entry into the workforce and their participation in economic life, which has led to a shift in the social dynamics between gender partners (man and woman), the roles envisioned for children and practiced in their traditional games remain largely conventional. Even in households where mothers have entered the workforce and share leadership responsibilities with their husbands, and where fathers are inclined to participate in household chores, we found that girls still portray the role of the nurturing mother with their dolls or the caretaker of the home, as seen in "Kitchen Play." On the other hand, boys still take on the role of the provider, protector of the family, and defender, often portrayed as being outside the home. This indicates that the imaginative roles in traditional games still draw from a collective unconscious that remains traditional, and do not automatically reflect the changing realities of life. Furthermore, this distinction does not translate into the gender conflict that has historically constrained the social progression of both men and women in their social and cultural movements.

3- **Masculine Nature:**

The data from this study, along with the observations we conducted, revealed that a masculine nature dominates and predominates in the traditional games practiced by children. This is due

to the reflection of social values and prevailing beliefs (such as the idea that "men are the protectors and providers for women") and the societal culture that grants males a set of preferential values within the gender hierarchy. Through this dominant masculine thinking, which governs social life, society seeks to deconstruct and rebuild this gender hierarchy, employing various methods, one of which is traditional games. These games align with a cultural and social system that corresponds to its different desires.

4- **Dependence on Available Tools and Materials in the Local Community:** Traditional games rely on the materials and tools available within the local community, especially the palm tree and its derivatives. This dependence is rooted in the fact that societies which base their way of life on specific animals and plants attribute social value to them. As a result, these items become central to many rituals and social ceremonies.

5- **Most Traditional Games are Played in Streets, Squares, and Alleys, Outside the Home:**

The results of the study revealed that most traditional games, especially those associated with males, are played outside the home. This is because these spaces provide freedom of movement and expression, and because these games reflect the life of early humans, who used nature as their primary learning environment. On the other hand**,** female games or girls' games are mostly played inside the home. This is due to the cultural connection between women and the domestic space within the community's cultural structure. A woman's social mobility is tied to the home, which represents her identity within the masculine intellectual framework of society. It is sufficient to note that a woman outside the home is referred to as "the home." A man does not say "my wife" or "my mother" in the house; rather, he addresses her by saying "the home is in the house" or "I am going to bring the home from her father's house," referring to the woman.

Answer to the third question regarding the educational content of traditional games that contribute to building the social personality of the individual:

The results of the field study, which primarily aimed to examine the impact of traditional games on one aspect of the socialization process—the development of the individual's social personality—revealed the following:

These traditional games, with their previously mentioned characteristics, foster in children a sense of teamwork and an understanding of the importance of participation within a group to achieve its goals and ensure unity within society.

These games help children acquire social loyalty and a sense of belonging to the group through the solidarity of team members during play, working together to defeat the opposing team.

The organizational rules of these traditional games allow children to acquire the concept of social responsibility, understand the principles of order within society, and develop a collective awareness of social norms.

- Some types of traditional games contribute to shaping the concepts of self-defence, community, patriotism, and sacrifice.

- These games help children accept their social reality by imagining some frightening events as non-frightening, thereby bringing the social reality closer to the child.

- Engaging in traditional games with their communal nature helps in forming social relationships and acquiring new social values and concepts due to the social interaction that occurs during these games.

- Traditional games instil positive qualities in children such as fair competition, self-esteem, and respect for others through the interactions that take place, especially in competitive games.

- Traditional games aid in developing a balanced and self-controlled social personality by allowing children to release aggressive emotions in a constructive manner, thereby calming their psychological state in ways that might not be achievable through appropriate means.

- These traditional games shape and cultivate children's future social roles by allowing them to portray roles such as father, mother, police officer, president, and others. They are among the most important socialization processes facilitated by traditional play, as they instil values in children. Social life is essentially a stage for roles, as posited by role theory, and traditional play is a method of preparing children for these roles.

- These games help girls express maternal instincts, especially in doll play or pretend weddings, while boys highlight masculine instincts. These instincts are among the crucial values acquired from these games, aiding in the socialization process.

- These games bridge social gaps within the community by involving children from various family backgrounds, thus promoting one of the most important values of social solidarity that community members strive to instil in their children.

- Traditional games help children pick up prevalent patterns of activity within the society by influencing the child through the environment in which they live, as suggested by social communication theory.

- Particularly constructive traditional games increase a child's awareness of their social reality and cultivate their interest in handicrafts and prevalent professions, aiding them in choosing a future career path.

- Traditional games contribute to children acquiring cultural concepts present in their local environment through verbal communication that children engage in during play.

- These games help children acquire their specific gender roles within their social culture by differentiating between male and female play.

- Some traditional games aid in shaping a child's artistic, imaginative, and creative senses, enabling them to depict their society's culture and preserve it through their creativity in creating images, artistic panels, models, sculptures, and more.

Recommendations and Suggestions:

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In order to connect scientific research with social reality and to benefit from the results of this study, it is imperative to provide some recommendations and suggestions based on the study's findings:

1. Conduct a survey and documentation of all traditional games existing in the Algerian social environment through extensive and comprehensive studies on traditional games.

2. Incorporate traditional games into the educational curriculum and have educational institutions adopt them as a hidden curriculum to assist in the educational process.

3. Toy manufacturing institutions should market the idea of producing traditional toys that reflect the local reality of the child, so that the child does not experience alienation with the influx of Asian, European, and American toys reflecting the cultures of these countries.

4. Educational institutions should open their school doors, playgrounds, and spaces to children to engage in their traditional games under the supervision of school teachers as supervised activities to give these games official recognition for their educational role.

5. Educational institutions, research centres specialized in education, sociology, and anthropology should collaborate with each other and with community members to conduct qualitative studies and campaigns aimed at rooting traditional games to ensure their continuity and development by elevating and adapting them in terms of form, content, and performance in line with cultural, social, and technological changes.

6. Authorities in heritage preservation should organize international and national festivals focusing on traditional games to introduce others to our culture, promote it, and preserve it.

Conclusion:

This study has revealed the significant impact that traditional games have on the social upbringing of children by providing them with various attributes and skills that contribute to the development of their social character. This social upbringing allows them to prepare well for their future social lives, ensuring that they do not experience alienation within their communities. This is achieved through the collective awareness acquired by various play activities.

In addition to the social upbringing that games provide, they represent a part of the nation's heritage that reflects its identity and essence. No nation truly understands itself or its identity except through an understanding of its material and spiritual heritage, which explicitly defines its social and cultural life in a specific period. The remnants of past civilizations that have reached us have been preserved by scholars and researchers who safeguard cultural heritage.

Recommendations:

Therefore, this study calls for the necessity to pay attention to this folk heritage from two perspectives:

1. Adopting traditional games as a hidden parallel curriculum in education alongside other approaches: Numerous studies have shown that children, especially at a young age, learn through activities that allow freedom of movement, speech, and expression outside the formal framework. This adoption should be done through official entities such as educational institutions.

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2. Emphasizing the importance of traditional games as part of the nation's heritage: It is crucial to preserve the cultural distinctiveness in an era of cultural penetration and the dominance of inclusive globalization driven by the alliance of wealth, media, and politics, aiming to shape the world in a singular image, that of the imperialist American capitalist giant.

By recognizing and promoting the value of traditional games, not only as tools for social upbringing but also as integral components of cultural heritage, societies can ensure the preservation of their unique identity and shield themselves against the homogenizing forces of global culture.

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