Journal of Computer and Education Research
J. Comp. Educ. Res., 14
dergipark.org.tr/jcer
ISSN: 2148-2896
Continuous Publishing Model



Research Article Open Access

The Role of Traditional Sports and Games in Kyrgyzstan's Education System: An Evaluation Based on Teacher and Administrator Perspectives

Remzi ADSIZ [1,*] Yavuz Ercan GÜL [2]

[1] *Hakkari University, Hakkari, Türkiye, remziadsiz@hakkari.edu.tr*

[2] *Kyrgyz - Turkish Manas University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, ydidim@gmail.com*

[*] *Corresponding Author: remziadsiz@hakkari.edu.tr*

Article Info

Received: 18 January 2026
Accepted: 11 June 2026
Published: 08 July 2026

10.18009/jcer.1866422

Keywords: Traditional sports, cultural heritage, education system, Kyrgyzstan, curriculum integration

Publication Language: English

This article was published under the continuous publishing model.

Abstract

This study examines the role of traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan's education system through a case study approach, utilizing teacher and administrator perspectives. The aim is to evaluate the current status, implementation methods, requirements, and contributions of these activities to children's development. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 27 participants (17 teachers and 10 administrators) using snowball sampling and examined through thematic analysis, with MAXQDA 24 software used to support the coding process. Findings indicate that traditional sports and games have limited inclusion in the formal curriculum, primarily integrated through physical education classes and extracurricular activities (ECA). Movement-focused games dominate in primary schools, while strategy-based games are prominent in secondary and high schools. These activities are more prevalent in rural areas but are gaining traction in urban settings, influenced by factors such as resource availability, cultural attitudes, and access to training. Traditional sports and games are vital for fostering national identity, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. However, their implementation is constrained by limited school resources, inadequate teacher training, and inconsistent application across regions.

To cite this article: Adsız, R. & Gül, Y.E. (2026). The role of traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan's education system: An evaluation based on teacher and administrator perspectives. *J. Comp. Educ Res.*, 14, e2614053 https://doi.org/10.18009/jcer.1866422

Introduction

Traditional sports and games are invaluable cultural assets that reflect a society's historical and cultural heritage, embodying ethnic identities passed down through generations. These activities span a wide range, from physical endeavors to strategic mental exercises, encapsulating a society's values, philosophy, and collective memory (Kylasov, 2015). In countries with rich cultural legacies like Kyrgyzstan, traditional sports and games

transcend mere entertainment, playing a critical role in constructing national identity, preserving cultural values, and strengthening social bonds. For instance, Kyrgyz cultural staples such as Kok-Boru, Toguz korgool, and Ordo not only foster physical and cognitive skills but also keep the nation's historical and cultural narratives alive (Akmatova, 2021; Jusupov & Dayirbekov, 2019; Kapsalamova, 2018). Consequently, integrating traditional sports and games into the education system is considered a vital tool for cultural preservation and transmission to future generations.

Research highlights the multifaceted contributions of traditional sports and games to students' physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development (Dzhiparkul et al., 2022; Orak et al., 2020). These activities support character development (Handayani et al., 2024), enhance problem-solving and strategic thinking skills (Trajkovik et al., 2018), foster teamwork, and promote cultural tolerance (Ariesta & Maftuh, 2020; Louth, 2014). Moreover, they contribute to cognitive skill development, such as number recognition in early childhood, and stimulate creativity in subjects like mathematics and science (Arga et al., 2020). The educational potential of these games lies in their ability to sustain children's innate curiosity, facilitate the learning of societal values, and foster a sense of belonging in school settings (Gray, 2016). Thus, systematically integrating traditional sports and games into the curriculum is crucial for both individual development and cultural continuity.

The integration of traditional sports and games in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan can be understood through the lens of 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012) and the strategic construction of national identity in the wake of Soviet collapse. Following Anderson's (1991) concept of 'imagined communities,' the Kyrgyz state has actively promoted activities such as Kok-Boru and Toguz korgool as symbols of a pre-Soviet nomadic authenticity, despite many of these practices having been marginalized or re-shaped during the Soviet era (Igmen, 2012; Korth, 2005). This selective revival raises critical questions about authenticity, power, and exclusion in the process of nation-building through sport. Reading these dynamics solely as instances of invention, however, risks underestimating the durability of pre-existing cultural material. Smith's (2009) ethno-symbolist perspective is instructive here, as it holds that successful national identities are not fabricated from nothing but are assembled around myths, symbols, memories, and traditions that already carry affective resonance for a population. From this standpoint, practices such as Kok-Boru and Toguz korgool function as ethno-symbolic resources: the post-Soviet state did not simply

invent them but selectively re-activated and re-framed elements that retained meaning within Kyrgyz collective memory. Approaching traditional sports and games as cultural heritage in this fuller sense, situated between Hobsbawm's account of invention and Smith's account of ethno-symbolic continuity, allows the curricular role of these activities to be examined as both a political project and a form of intergenerational cultural transmission.

This study aims to investigate the role of traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan's education system, following the country's independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Kyrgyzstan has placed significant emphasis on traditional sports and games to construct national identity, particularly through international events like the World Nomad Games, which have heightened awareness of these activities. However, a review of the literature reveals a lack of comprehensive studies directly examining the integration of traditional sports and games into Kyrgyzstan's educational curriculum. Existing scholarship on traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan has largely concentrated on their ethnographic description, their economic and touristic value through the World Nomad Games, or their role in broader nation-building discourse. What remains underexamined is how these activities are actually positioned within formal schooling and how the educators responsible for their delivery interpret their pedagogical and cultural function. The originality of the present study lies in this shift of analytical focus: rather than treating traditional games as cultural symbols in the abstract, it examines them as situated curricular practices, foregrounding the perspectives of teachers and administrators who mediate between national identity policy and everyday classroom realities. In doing so, the study connects the literature on invented traditions and national identity construction with the under-researched question of curriculum integration, offering an account that is both context-specific to Kyrgyzstan and relevant to comparable post-Soviet and post-colonial education systems. By analyzing teachers' and administrators' perspectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent are traditional sports and games included in Kyrgyzstan's school curriculum?
2. What are the perceived benefits and necessities of including these activities in the curriculum?
3. What factors influence their significance and implementation?
4. In which subjects can traditional sports and games be incorporated, and why?

5. How do traditional sports and games contribute to children's holistic development?
6. What are the key barriers to their effective integration, and how can they be addressed?

The significance of this study extends beyond Kyrgyzstan, drawing attention to the global role of traditional sports and games in education systems for preserving cultural heritage. International efforts, such as UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the initiatives of the World Ethnosport Confederation, underscore the need to protect and promote these activities. Kyrgyzstan's designation as the hub for the World Nomad Games demonstrates their effectiveness in fostering international relations, boosting tourism revenue, and building cultural bridges between communities. In this context, the study argues that integrating traditional sports and games into the curriculum can strengthen cultural dialogue at both local and international levels.

The rationale for this study is rooted in understanding the current state of traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan's education system, identifying deficiencies, and contributing to curriculum development. Teachers' and administrators' perspectives are critical for understanding the pedagogical potential and curriculum placement of these activities. The study's findings are expected to guide educational policy and curriculum reform in Kyrgyzstan, supporting students' holistic development and promoting Kyrgyz culture globally. Thus, the research aims to address a significant gap at both academic and practical levels.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a case study design to examine the role of traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan's education system based on teachers' and administrators' perspectives. In this context, the case study method was deemed appropriate for investigating the integration of traditional sports and games into the curriculum of Kyrgyzstan's public schools and understanding teachers' experiences and perceptions (Stake, 2003; Yin, 2014). The research treated Kyrgyzstan's public schools as a single case, aiming to thoroughly examine the current status, implementation methods, and teachers' perceptions of traditional sports and games within the curriculum. The case study design provides an effective framework for understanding the context-specific dynamics of a

particular educational practice (i.e., the integration of traditional sports and games) and the roles of teachers in this process (Stake, 2003). This approach enables researchers to holistically analyze participants' perspectives, experiences, and contextual factors.

Study Group

The study utilized snowball sampling to access the perspectives of experienced and knowledgeable teachers and administrators in Kyrgyzstan's public schools. This sampling technique, suitable for case study designs, was chosen to gather in-depth insights from individuals with relevant expertise (Wilson, 2015). Snowball sampling was preferred over probability-based alternatives such as stratified sampling for a specific reason. Experience with the integration of traditional sports and games is not recorded in any centralised administrative database in Kyrgyzstan, and there is no official register identifying which educators possess this particular expertise. Constructing a reliable sampling frame for stratified or random selection was therefore not feasible. In this context, the study targeted an information-rich rather than a statistically representative sample, and snowball referral through trusted professional networks was the most dependable route to educators who could speak knowledgeably about the phenomenon under study. The study acknowledges that this technique may introduce homophily bias, since participants tend to recommend colleagues who share their views, which can narrow the range of perspectives obtained. To mitigate this limitation, several procedural steps were taken. Multiple independent entry points were used rather than a single initial contact, so that the referral chains did not all originate from one professional cluster. Recruitment deliberately spanned different educational levels, both rural and urban schools, and a range of provinces, and the diversity of the emerging sample was monitored during data collection so that referral could be steered toward under-represented categories. These measures cannot eliminate selection bias entirely, but they reduce its influence and improve the credibility and contextual coverage of the findings.

The target population consisted of teachers and administrators in Kyrgyzstan's public schools with experience in integrating traditional sports and games into the curriculum. Initially, the researcher contacted a small number of accessible teachers, who were then asked to recommend colleagues with similar expertise. This snowball effect enabled access to teachers and administrators across various educational levels (primary, secondary, and high school) and regions (rural and urban schools). The teachers in the sample were not limited to

physical education specialists. Because traditional sports and games are not confined to a single subject in practice, the study deliberately included both physical education teachers and classroom and subject teachers, particularly at the primary level where one teacher commonly delivers most lessons. The sample therefore comprised primary school classroom teachers as well as secondary and high school teachers from subjects such as physical education, music, and history, all of whom had direct experience of using traditional games in their teaching. This breadth was intentional, since restricting the study to physical education teachers alone would have excluded the cross-curricular uses of traditional games that the research set out to examine. Participant selection criteria included knowledge of traditional sports and games, at least 5 years of professional experience, and roles within the education system. This method was time-efficient and fostered a trusting and open communication environment, as new participants were recommended by their peers.

In total, 27 participants (17 teachers and 10 administrators) were interviewed, resulting in a rich and diverse dataset for understanding the role of traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan's education system (Table 1). Demographic details include: average age of 42 years (range: 28–58), average experience of 15 years (range: 5–32), with 14 participants from rural areas and 13 from urban areas. Roles comprised 8 primary school teachers, 6 secondary school teachers, 3 high school teachers, 5 school principals, and 5 curriculum coordinators. This distribution aimed to capture varied perspectives, though it does not fully represent all regions (e.g., underrepresented southern provinces). To preserve confidentiality while allowing the source of each excerpt to be identified, participants were assigned codes in which the letter T denotes a teacher and the letter A denotes an administrator (school principal or curriculum coordinator), followed by a participant number. Throughout the Findings, each quotation is attributed to its participant code together with the participant's role and years of professional experience (for example, T7, primary school teacher, 11 years; A3, curriculum coordinator, 18 years).

Table 1. Study group demographics

Category	Details
Total Participants	27 (17 teachers, 10 administrators)
Average Age	42 years (Range: 28–58 years)
Average Experience	15 years (Range: 5–32 years)
Geographic Distribution	14 rural, 13 urban

Roles	- 7 Primary School Teachers - 6 Secondary School Teachers - 4 High School Teachers - 5 School Principals - 5 Curriculum Coordinators
Selection Criteria	- Knowledge of traditional sports and games - Minimum 5 years of professional experience - Roles within the education system
Sampling Method	Snowball sampling
Regional Representation Notes	Limited representation from southern provinces

Data Collection Tools

Qualitative data collection methods were employed to gain a deep understanding of teachers' perspectives on the role of traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan's public-school curriculum. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide developed based on a literature review and expert input from two education scholars. Both experts were university faculty members rather than ministry officials. One specialised in curriculum development and the other in physical education and the teaching of traditional games, and each had prior experience in qualitative research. They reviewed the draft guide for the clarity, relevance, and coverage of the questions, and their feedback was used to reword ambiguous items and to ensure that the guide adequately addressed both the pedagogical and the cultural dimensions of the study. The guide included open-ended questions covering key themes such as the placement of traditional sports and games in the curriculum, their implementation methods, requirements, and contributions to children's development.

These questions were designed to encourage participants to evaluate the current situation and express their views on the potential impact of traditional sports and games in the education system. The open-ended and flexible nature of the questions facilitated in-depth responses (Kvale, 1996). Interviews were conducted either face-to-face (n=15) or online via Zoom (n=12, Due to geographical or scheduling constraints) to ensure a comfortable environment for participants to share their views. Online interviews were balanced with face-to-face ones to maintain data quality; no significant differences in response depth were observed, though online sessions occasionally faced minor technical issues. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were transcribed verbatim to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the data analysis.

Ethical considerations were prioritized: All participants provided informed consent after being informed of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures. Data were anonymized using pseudonyms, stored securely on password-protected devices, and used solely for research purposes. Approval was obtained from the scientific research and publication ethics committee of Hakkari University. The questions included in the data collection form are as follows:

1. To what extent are traditional sports and games included in the curriculum?
2. In your opinion, should traditional sports and games be included in the curriculum? Why?
3. Why do you think traditional sports and games are included in the curriculum? What factors might have influenced this inclusion?
4. In which subjects can traditional sports and games be incorporated? Why?
5. Do you believe traditional sports and games contribute to children's development? If so, in what ways?
6. What barriers do you face in implementing these activities, and how could they be addressed?
7. Can you provide examples of specific games used in your school and their outcomes?

Data Analysis

The data collected from teachers and administrators in Kyrgyzstan's public schools were analyzed using thematic analysis to understand their perspectives on the role of traditional sports and games in the curriculum (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data were coded using MAXQDA 24 software through an open coding approach. Initial codes were generated inductively by identifying meaningful statements related to the placement, implementation, requirements, and contributions of traditional sports and games. For example, the statement "Games are mostly played in rural areas" was categorized under the code "Rural and Urban Differences." Two researchers independently coded 20% of the transcripts, achieving an inter-coder reliability of 85%; disagreements were resolved through discussion, focusing on code definitions and examples.

Initial codes were grouped using MAXQDA 24's code tree feature, and potential themes were identified. Codes with similar meanings were combined to form higher-level themes, such as "Curriculum Integration," "Contributions to Children's Development," and "Cultural Heritage Preservation." These themes were reviewed for alignment and relevance

with the data. MAXQDA 24's code frequency and code relationship analysis tools were used to clarify the scope and boundaries of the themes. The themes' alignment with the study's objectives and consistency with the data were evaluated, and codes were reorganized or merged as needed. Each theme was assigned a clear name reflecting its content and supported by sub-codes. For instance, the theme "Placement of Traditional Sports and Games in the Curriculum" included sub-codes such as "Curriculum Integration," "Inclusion in Physical Education Classes," and "Rural and Urban Differences." MAXQDA 24's visualization tools (e.g., code maps and word clouds) were utilized to create visual representations of the themes, enhancing the depth of the analysis.

Validity and Reliability

Several measures were implemented to enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis process. First, data triangulation was employed by analyzing perspectives from teachers across different educational levels (primary, secondary, and high school) and regions (rural and urban), ensuring diversity in the findings. Second, MAXQDA 24's inter-coder reliability feature was used to compare codings performed by multiple researchers, resolving any inconsistencies. Additionally, themes were cross-referenced with the literature to ensure contextual validity. Finally, direct quotes from teachers' and administrators' interviews were included to enhance the transparency and traceability of the findings. In addition, two further procedures recommended for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research were applied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking was carried out with five participants, who were selected to reflect the diversity of the sample across roles and regions. These participants were given a summary of the preliminary themes and supporting interpretations and were asked to confirm whether the analysis accurately represented their views and experiences; their feedback was used to refine the wording of two themes and to clarify the boundaries of several codes. Peer debriefing was also undertaken, whereby the developing codes, themes, and analytic decisions were reviewed in successive sessions with an experienced qualitative researcher who was not involved in data collection. This external scrutiny served to test the plausibility of the interpretations, surface possible researcher bias, and ensure that the thematic structure remained firmly grounded in the data.

Findings

Thematic analysis of the collected data identified six main themes: the placement of traditional sports and games in the curriculum, the types of traditional sports and games taught, the necessity of including traditional sports and games in the curriculum, factors influencing their significance, subjects in which traditional sports and games can be integrated, and their contributions to children's development. The thematic map and corresponding codes are presented in Figure 1.

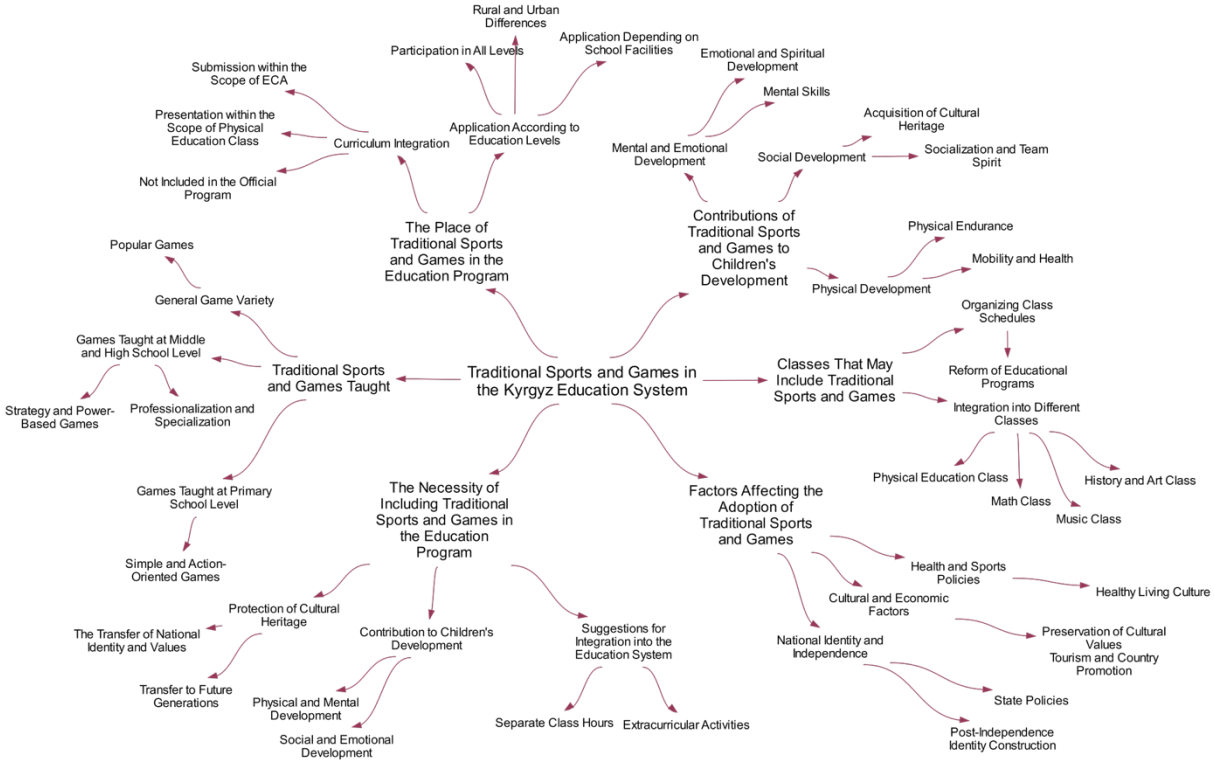


Figure 1. Hierarchical code-sub-code map of traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan's education system

Placement of Traditional Sports and Games in the Curriculum

To evaluate the placement of traditional sports and games within the curriculum, data were coded and interpreted. The literature highlights the integration of traditional sports and games into education systems as a significant topic, particularly for preserving cultural heritage, promoting physical activity, and fostering social skills. The codes and analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Hierarchical code-sub-code model for the placement of traditional sports and games in the curriculum

Theme	Code	Subcode	Sample Excerpt
The Place of Traditional Sports and Games in the Education Program	Curriculum Integration	Not Included in the Official Program	"The integration of the games into the official program has not yet been completed." (A3, curriculum coordinator, 18 years)
		Presented as part of Physical Education Class	"Although it is not part of the official curriculum, it is taught as part of Physical Education classes starting from the first grade." (T7, primary school teacher, 11 years)
		Provision under ECA	"It is particularly common for it to be taught within the ECA framework from the 5th grade onwards." (T11, secondary school teacher, 16 years)
	Application According to Education Levels	Participation at All Levels	"It is included in all levels of education from elementary school to university." (A6, school principal, 22 years)
	Rural and Urban Differences		"Games are played more in rural areas." (T3, primary school teacher, 9 years)
	Application Dependent on School Facilities		"At many levels of education, different proportions are allocated in accordance with the school's resources." (A1, curriculum coordinator, 14 years)

Table 2 demonstrates that traditional sports and games are positioned largely outside the formal curriculum and are implemented primarily through physical education classes and extracurricular activities. Participants clearly indicated that the absence of official curricular status results in fragmented and unsystematic practices. The data further reveal notable rural–urban differences, with rural schools providing more frequent and culturally embedded applications due to stronger local traditions and contextual familiarity. Participants offered several explanations for this rural advantage. They linked it partly to the everyday presence of traditional games in rural community life, where festivals, family gatherings, and informal play keep practices such as Ordo and wrestling visible to children outside school. Rural teachers also described their schools as having more open space and easier access to the simple equipment many games require, in contrast to the crowded buildings and limited grounds reported in urban schools. Beyond these material factors, participants pointed to a stronger cultural orientation in rural settings, where families and local communities expect schools to sustain heritage practices and tend to support teachers who do so. In urban schools, by contrast, participants described stronger competition from

globally popular sports and from digital entertainment, together with a more diverse pupil population for whom a particular set of Kyrgyz games may carry less immediate familiarity. The rural–urban gap therefore appears to reflect a combination of infrastructural, social, and cultural conditions rather than differences in teachers' goodwill or pedagogical interest. These findings suggest that institutional placement, rather than pedagogical value, is the main factor limiting the sustainable integration of traditional sports and games into the education system.

Traditional Sports and Games Taught

Coded text and examples obtained from teachers illustrate how traditional sports and games are implemented in Kyrgyzstan's educational programs, particularly at primary, secondary, and high school levels, and highlight their diversity. The codes and analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Hierarchical code-subcode model for traditional sports and games taught

Theme	Code	Subcode	Sample Excerpt
Traditional Sports and Games Taught	Games Taught at the Elementary School Level	Simple and Action-Oriented Games	"In elementary schools, games such as Kachmay top, Ak terek kok terek, Orto top, Top chapmai, Chabalekey, Koon uzmoy, Orompoy tebu, Ashkabak chapmay, Urmai top, Uchtu uchtu, and Uychu oyunu are commonly played." (T1, primary school teacher, 6 years)
	Games Taught at Middle School and High School Level	Strategy and Power-Oriented Games	"In middle school and high school, games such as Ordo, Kyrgyz kuroshu, Tai tebishuu, Kulatuu, Toguz korgool, and Arkan tartyshuu are played." (T14, high school teacher, 24 years)
		Professionalization and Specialization	"Starting in 10th grade, students begin to participate in certain sports more professionally and begin to specialize in a particular field." (T16, high school teacher, 29 years)
	Overall Game Variety	Popular Games	"Çikildek, Ak terek kok terek, İkiden Turmay, Top Taş, Tokuz Korgool, Ordo, Tok Soramay, Küreş (Barba Alış)." (T9, secondary school teacher, 13 years)

Table 3 illustrates a clear differentiation in the types of traditional sports and games taught across educational levels. While primary education focuses predominantly on simple, movement-oriented games that support basic motor development, secondary and high school levels emphasize strategy- and strength-based games such as Toguz korgool and Kyrgyz kuroshu. Participants also highlighted a gradual shift toward professionalization and specialization in upper grades, indicating that traditional games are not merely recreational

but are perceived as pathways to skill development and sporting identity. This progression reflects an implicit pedagogical structure aligned with students' developmental stages. The game names listed in Table 3 are Kyrgyz-language terms; for example, Uychu oyunu derives from uy (cow) and uychu (cattle-herder) and refers to a blindfold chasing game in which one player, acting as the herder, must locate and catch the other players, who imitate cattle within a bounded circle.

The Necessity of Including Traditional Sports and Games in the Education Program

The codes and examples in Table 4 indicate a multidimensional framework consistent with the literature.

Table 4. Hierarchical code-subcode model related to the necessity of including traditional sports and games in educational programs

Theme	Code	Subcode	Sample Excerpt
The Necessity of Including Traditional Sports and Games in Educational Programs	Protecting Cultural Heritage	Transmission of National Identity and Values	"Preserving the values that distinguish us from other societies will be possible through our efforts." (A8, school principal, 27 years)
		Transmission to Future Generations	"These games should be included in educational programs because their presence in such programs will be an effective way to pass them on to future generations." (T6, primary school teacher, 10 years)
	Contributing to Children's Development	Physical and Mental Development	"These games are also important in terms of ensuring the mental and physical development of today's children." (T12, secondary school teacher, 19 years)
		Social and Emotional Development	"Games are important in terms of establishing, preserving, and developing the connection between children and their past." (T4, primary school teacher, 8 years)
	Recommendations for Integration into the Education System	Separate Class Hours	"However, offering them only within the scope of physical education classes is not sufficient. It may be more beneficial to allocate separate class hours for games and offer them in a more varied manner within the scope of ECA." (A4, curriculum coordinator, 20 years)
		Extracurricular Activities	"I think these games should be supported on special days." (T8, secondary school teacher, 12 years)

Table 4 reveals that the perceived necessity of including traditional sports and games in educational programs extends beyond physical activity and is strongly linked to cultural transmission and national identity. Participants emphasized the role of these games in preserving cultural values and ensuring intergenerational continuity. Additionally, the findings indicate that teachers and administrators view current integration methods as insufficient, frequently recommending separate class hours or structured extracurricular frameworks. This suggests a collective recognition that symbolic inclusion alone does not fulfill educational or cultural objectives.

Factors Influencing the Importance of Traditional Sports and Games

Table 5 presents the codes.

Table 5. Hierarchical code-subcode model of factors influencing the importance of traditional sports and games

Theme	Code	Subcode	Sample Excerpt
Factors Influencing the Importance of Traditional Sports and Games	National Identity and Independence	Identity Construction After Independence	"There may be a desire to establish national identity after independence." (A9, school principal, 30 years)
		Government Policies	"Our president's emphasis on sports, his concern for public health, and his efforts in this direction." (A2, curriculum coordinator, 16 years)
	Cultural and Economic Factors	Preservation of Cultural Values	"The goal of preventing our values from being forgotten and ensuring that games are kept alive by future generations may have been effective." (T13, secondary school teacher, 21 years)
		Tourism and Country Promotion	"The impact of immigrant games, tourism revenues, and pre-independence oppression may have played a role." (T15, high school teacher, 26 years)
	Health and Sports Policies	Healthy Living Culture	"To instill a healthy lifestyle in the nation by increasing the amount of physical activity at the national level." (A7, school principal, 25 years)

Table 5 highlights that the importance attributed to traditional sports and games is shaped by a combination of political, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Participants frequently associated their growing prominence with post-independence identity construction and government-led cultural policies. In addition, tourism development and public health initiatives emerged as influential drivers. These findings indicate that the integration of traditional sports and games is not solely an educational concern but is

embedded within broader national strategies related to identity, visibility, and social well-being.

Courses in Which Traditional Sports and Games Can Be Included

Table 6 shows the codes.

Table 6. Hierarchical code-subcode model for courses that can include traditional sports and games

Theme	Code	Subcode	Sample Excerpt
Classes that may include traditional sports and games	Integration into Different Classes	Physical Education Class	"It can be achieved through playing games in physical education classes." (T10, secondary school teacher, 15 years)
		Mathematics Class	"It can be used in mathematics classes to teach numbers and develop thinking skills." (T2, primary school teacher, 7 years)
		Music Class	"It can be taught in music classes by teaching the songs sung in the games." (T5, primary school teacher, 9 years)
		History and Art Classes	"It can be taught in different ways in history, art, and language classes." (T17, high school teacher, 32 years)
	Arrangement of Class Schedules	Reform of Education Programs	"If educational programs are designed to include games, they can be taught in all classes." (A5, curriculum coordinator, 23 years)

Table 6 demonstrates that participants perceive traditional sports and games as pedagogically flexible tools that can be integrated across multiple subjects, not limited to physical education. Mathematics, music, history, and art were frequently mentioned as suitable contexts for interdisciplinary application. However, participants stressed that such integration requires deliberate curriculum reform and clearly defined learning objectives. Without structural alignment in lesson planning and scheduling, the cross-curricular potential of traditional games remains largely theoretical.

Contributions of Traditional Sports and Games to Children's Development

Table 7 presents the codes.

Table 7. Hierarchical code-subcode model of the contributions of traditional sports and games to children's development

Theme	Code	Subcode	Sample Excerpt
The Contributions of Traditional Sports and Games to Children's Development	Physical Development	Mobility and Health	"To rescue individuals from a sedentary, lethargic lifestyle and support their physical development." (T8, secondary school teacher, 12 years)
		Physical	"I believe it will contribute to their

	Endurance	physical endurance." (T1, primary school teacher, 6 years)
Mental and Emotional Development	Mental Skills	"Games teach thinking, patience, respect for the rights of others, and the acquisition of social rules." (T14, high school teacher, 24 years)
	Emotional and Spiritual Development	"It helps children establish a connection with their past and uphold their values." (T6, primary school teacher, 10 years)
Social Development	Socialization and Team Spirit	"It can contribute to the development of a conscious society by helping them integrate into society." (A10, school principal, 31 years)
	Acquisition of Cultural Heritage	"Games contribute to children's acquisition of cultural heritage and the development of their national identity." (A4, curriculum coordinator, 20 years)

Table 7 indicates that traditional sports and games contribute to children's development in multiple, interconnected domains. Participants consistently emphasized physical benefits such as mobility and endurance, alongside mental skills including strategic thinking, patience, and rule awareness. Socialization, teamwork, and the acquisition of cultural heritage were also highlighted as key outcomes. These findings suggest that traditional games support holistic development by simultaneously addressing physical, cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions, reinforcing their educational value beyond mere recreation.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that traditional sports and games occupy a marginal yet symbolically charged position within Kyrgyzstan's public education system. Predominantly channeled through physical education classes and extracurricular activities, these practices are implemented inconsistently, with greater frequency and cultural resonance in rural schools compared to urban ones. Teachers and administrators consistently highlighted resource constraints, inadequate teacher training, and competing demands from global sports such as football and basketball as primary barriers to broader integration. These patterns align with broader international trends, where traditional games rarely feature in formal curricula and are instead sustained through informal or supplementary channels (Siedentop, 2002; UNESCO, 2017).

Yet the significance of these activities extends far beyond pedagogical utility. In the post-Soviet context, their selective promotion reflects deliberate efforts to construct a national identity rooted in an imagined pre-Soviet nomadic authenticity. Drawing on the concept of invented traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012), the Kyrgyz state has elevated practices such as Kok-Boru and Toguz korgool as emblematic of courage, strategic intellect, and communal solidarity. These are values framed as distinctly Kyrgyz despite historical disruptions and reconfigurations during the Soviet period (Igmen, 2012; Korth, 2005). This process parallels similar nation-building strategies in neighboring states, such as Kazakhstan's institutionalization of kokpar, where traditional equestrian games serve as instruments of post-colonial identity consolidation (de Haan & Dumbell, 2016; Harrel, 2024; Kaya & Turkmen, 2023). Schools, as key sites of socialization, become arenas where these selectively revived traditions are transmitted to younger generations, reinforcing an imagined community bound by shared cultural narratives (Hasan et al., 2021; Pickel-Chevalier, 2020).

At the same time, the findings complicate any straightforward narrative of cultural preservation. Many games identified as "traditional"—wrestling, tag variants, horse racing, and ball-throwing—share structural similarities with practices found across global contexts. Their increasing hybridization is evident in urban schools, where football and basketball often displace local games, and in the staging of the World Nomad Games as an international spectacle that blends heritage display with global branding strategies (Adam & David, 2023; Fabian, 2023; Maksüdünov, 2020; Sheranova, 2021). This tension illustrates how identity reinforcement occurs not through pure preservation but through selective appropriation amid ongoing processes of cultural hybridity. Rather than maintaining rigid boundaries between "traditional" and "modern," educators navigate a continuum in which global and local elements continually intersect and reshape one another.

Participants also noted developmental contributions, including enhanced motor skills through movement-focused games in primary education and strategic thinking via games like Toguz korgool in higher grades. These observations resonate with established research on play-based learning (Griggs & Ward, 2012) and with cases elsewhere, such as Japan's incorporation of sumo to foster discipline and cultural continuity (Matsunami, 2017). However, the findings suggest that such benefits are unevenly realized, constrained by infrastructural deficits and limited professional development opportunities for teachers.

A further dimension that emerged from the findings concerns the competition traditional games now face from digital entertainment. Participants, particularly those working in urban schools, observed that children increasingly direct their leisure time toward screen-based games and social media, which reduces the everyday exposure to physical and communal play that once sustained traditional games informally. This shift has two implications for curriculum policy. First, it weakens the assumption that traditional games will survive through community transmission alone, and it strengthens the case for giving them a more secure place within formal schooling rather than leaving them to extracurricular goodwill. Second, it suggests that digital media need not be framed only as a threat. The same technologies can be enlisted to document, teach, and popularise traditional games, for example through instructional videos, simple mobile applications for strategy games such as Toguz korgool, and digital archives of regional variants that teachers in resource-poor schools could draw upon. Approaching digitalisation as a potential vehicle rather than solely as a rival reframes a contemporary pressure as an opportunity for cultural transmission.

Read against current education policy in Kyrgyzstan, the finding of limited curricular inclusion points to several concrete measures. At the level of curriculum design, traditional games could be granted explicit status in national curriculum documents, with defined learning outcomes, rather than depending on the discretion of individual physical education teachers. At the level of teacher preparation, pre-service and in-service training could include dedicated modules on the pedagogy of traditional games, so that teachers across subjects are equipped to use them and the present reliance on personal cultural knowledge is reduced. At the level of resourcing, targeted support for under-equipped and urban schools, including shared equipment and partnerships with local cultural organisations and ethnosport federations, could narrow the rural–urban gap identified in the data. Finally, the cross-curricular potential that participants described, linking games to mathematics, music, and history, could be made operational through model lesson plans and clearly stated objectives. Such measures would move traditional games from a symbolic and uneven presence toward a structured and equitable place in schooling, without imposing an essentialist or purely nostalgic version of culture on pupils.

Ultimately, the limited curricular integration of traditional sports and games in Kyrgyzstan reflects broader dilemmas facing post-Soviet societies: how to harness cultural

heritage for national cohesion while contending with globalization's homogenizing pressures. Schools emerge as critical yet under-resourced sites for negotiating these dilemmas. Targeted policy interventions—such as sustained teacher training programs, partnerships with cultural organizations, and explicit learning objectives linking games to multiple subjects—could strengthen their role without succumbing to essentialist or nostalgic framings. By addressing these structural barriers, Kyrgyzstan has the opportunity to transform traditional games from peripheral activities into meaningful vehicles for both cultural dialogue and critical engagement with ongoing processes of identity formation in a globalized world.

Limitations and Future Directions

The research was conducted based on the opinions of 27 teachers and administrators in Kyrgyzstan, with a geographically diverse sample but limited representation across all regions (e.g., underrepresentation in remote areas) and education levels. Snowball sampling may have introduced selection bias by favoring participants with similar views, and the exclusion of other stakeholders (e.g., students, parents) limits perspectives. Future research should employ mixed methods, such as surveys combined with interviews, for broader representation, or longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts of game integration. Additionally, comparative studies with other nomadic societies like Mongolia or Kazakhstan could explore cross-cultural applications. Pilot projects testing curriculum reforms, such as integrating Toguz korgool into math with specific objectives (e.g., "Develop strategic planning skills"), are recommended.

Author Contribution Statement

Remzi ADSIZ: *Conceptualization, coding, data analysis, interpretation, supervision, writing-review and editing*

Yavuz Ercan GÜL: *Conceptualization, coding, data analysis, interpretation, supervision, writing-review and editing*

Ethical Committee Permission Information

Name of the board that carries out ethical assessment: Hakkari University Rectorate Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee

The date and number of the ethical assessment decision: 06.03.2025-1/105490

References

Adam, S., & David, L. (2023). Sport globalization and glocalization. In A. Lawrence (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sport and Society* (pp. 173–193). Oxford University Press.

Akmatova, Z. (2021). Kyrgyz traditional games. *Contribution of Young Scientists to Innovative Development of the Russian Agro-Industrial Complex*, 106–108.

Anderson, B. (1991). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. ed.). Verso.

Arga, H. S. P., Nurfurqon, F. F., & Nurani, R. Z. (2020). Improvement of creative thinking ability of elementary teacher education students in utilizing traditional games in social studies learning. *Mimbar Sekolah Dasar*, *7*(2), 235–250.

Ariesta, F. W., & Maftuh, B. (2020). Traditional games as a multicultural education planning for children in primary schools. *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Dasar*, *5*(2), 51–58. https://doi.org/10.22236/jipd.v5i2.114

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

de Haan, D., & Dumbell, L. C. (2016). Equestrian sport at the olympic games from 1900 to 1948. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, *33*(6–7), 648–665.

Dzhiparkul, A., Bakyt, T., & Kanat, D. (2022). Methodological recommendations on the use of ethnic Kyrgyz games to strengthen the health of preschool children (5-6 years old). *Pakistan Journal of Medical and Health Sciences*, *16*(2), 669–678.

Fabian, T. (2023). *The revival of traditional games in Central Asia* (1st ed.). Routledge.

Gray, P. (2016). *Çocuğum okulu sevmiyor: Ama oyun oynamayı seviyor* [My child doesn't like school: But he/she loves playing games]. Kuraldışı Yayıncılık.

Griggs, G., & Ward, G. (2012). Physical education in the UK: Disconnections and reconnections. *The Curriculum Journal*, *23*(2), 207–229.

Handayani, W. S., Rochmawan, A. E., & Amin, L. H. (2024). Teacher experiences of physical education, sports and health teaching in elementary: Challenges and strategies. *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research*, *4*(5), 5432–5440.

Harrel, M. (2024). Boy dancers and men on horses: Post-colonial identity and gender policy in modern Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. *Embodied: The Stanford Undergraduate Journal of Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies*, *3*(1), 1–11. https://ojs.stanford.edu/ojs/index.php/sjfgss/article/view/3189/1661

Hasan, I., Yufiarti, & Edwita. (2021). Horse racing: A traditional game to improve children's motor gross skill (Ethnopedagogy study on Dompu tribe). *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, *6*(3), 1247–1258. https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v6i3.1646

Hobsbawm, E., & Ranger, T. (2012). *The invention of tradition* (E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger, Eds.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295636

Igmen, A. (2012). *Speaking Soviet with an accent*. University of Pittsburgh Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vkh78

Jusupov, A., & Dayirbekov, B. (2019). National sport games. *Physical Education, Sport, Physical Rehabilitation and Recreation: Problems and Prospects of Development*, 40–44.

Kapsalamova, E. (2018). Negative influence of interpersonal relations of athletes in kok-boru and kokpar games. *Bulletin of Physical Culture and Sport*, *2*(21), 125–129.

Kaya, A., & Turkmen, M. (2023). *Applications of traditional equestrian sports in the world* (A. Kaya & M. Turkmen, Eds.). Nova Science Publishers.

Korth, B. (2005). *Language attitudes towards Kyrgyz and Russian: Discourse, education and policy in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan*. Peter Lang Group AG.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. SAGE.

Kylasov, A. (2015). *Ethnosport: The end of decline*. LIT Verlag.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.

Louth, S. (2014). *An investigation into the impact of traditional Indigenous games (TIG) on primary school students and their teachers* [PhD Thesis, University of Southern Queensland].

Maksüdünov, A. (2020). Economic and socio-cultural impacts of the World Nomad Games. *Ekonomika Regiona*, (2), 586–596.

Matsunami, M. (2017). Traditional sport in Japan. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Leisure Theory* (pp. 169–186). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56479-5_10

Orak, S., Çilek, A., & Yilmaz, F. G. (2020). Adaptation of traditional children's games to social studies course. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences*, *15*(6), 1422–1438.

Pickel-Chevalier, S. (2020). Tourism as an agent of reinvention for European equestrian intangible heritages. *Mondes Du Tourisme*, (18). https://doi.org/10.4000/tourisme.3019

Sheranova, A. (2021). Political invention of the World Nomad Games in Kyrgyzstan. *Kulturní Studia*, (2), 66–81. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1192817

Siedentop, D. (2002). Sport education: A retrospective. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, *21*(4), 409–418. https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.21.4.409

Smith, A. D. (2009). *Ethno-symbolism and nationalism*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876558

Stake, R. E. (2003). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2nd ed., pp. 134–164). SAGE Publications.

Trajkovik, V., Malinovski, T., Vasileva-Stojanovska, T., & Vasileva, M. (2018). Traditional games in elementary school: Relationships of student's personality traits, motivation and experience with learning outcomes. *PLOS ONE*, *13*(8), e0202172.

UNESCO. (2017). *Traditional sport and games*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000252837

Wilson, A. (2015). A guide to phenomenological research. *Nursing Standard*, *29*(34), 38–43. https://doi.org/10.7748/ns.29.34.38.e8821

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. SAGE Publications.

Copyright © JCER

JCER's Publication Ethics and Publication Malpractice Statement are based, in large part, on the guidelines and standards developed by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0) https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/