



The Challenges Preserving Traditional Games in Malaysia and Indonesia

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Abstract. Traditional games are a vital aspect of cultural heritage, reflecting the values and practices of past generations. However, the rapid advancement of technology poses significant challenges to their preservation. In Malaysia and Indonesia, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, traditional games face competition from modern, technology-driven alternatives that captivate younger audiences. This paper investigates the difficulties in maintaining these cultural practices through a qualitative approach, surveying 166 respondents from both countries. The analysis reveals key challenges: the greater appeal of modern games, perceptions of traditional games as outdated, a lack of family support, and the swift pace of technological change. Exploring these issues within the context of sustainable development offers valuable insights into strategies for cultural preservation. By addressing these challenges and involving diverse stakeholders, there are opportunities to integrate traditional games into contemporary contexts, ensuring their continued relevance and survival.

Keywords: Traditional Games, Cultural Preservation, Challenges, Sustainable Solutions

1 Introduction

Traditional games, as an integral part of cultural heritage in various countries, not only reflect unique local values and deep historical riches but also function as intergenerational links that bring togetherness, creativity, and cultural identity that underlie people's lives amidst the challenges of globalization and modernization. Traditional games hold a distinctive place within the cultural heritage of Malaysia and Indonesia, encompassing regions such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and parts of Thailand and the Philippines (Mat Nayan & Kun, 2019; Warni & Karim, 2023). Traditional games are a cultural heritage that reflects ancestral values and practices in the archipelago, including Indonesia and Malaysia. This game is not only a means of entertainment but also a tool to strengthen social relationships, practice skills, and pass on cultural values to the next generation. For example, in Indonesia, games such as Congklak,

Egrang, and Benteng reflect local wisdom and strong social interaction (Andriani & Purba, 2024; Wazuda & Subayani, 2024), while in Malaysia, games such as Gasing, Sepak Raga, and Galah Panjang symbolize the spirit of togetherness and cohesion in society (Muhamad et al., 2023; Zainurin et al., 2024).

Games like Congklak reflect strategic values and thinking skills, where players must plan their moves to collect as many seeds as possible (Fatimatuszahro et al., 2025; Hariyadi et al., 2024). Gasing, the game of spinning a wooden top, symbolizes skill and high concentration (Hasim et al., 2024; Jusmaniar et al., 2024), while Sepak Raga emphasizes teamwork and physical dexterity (Nasrulloh et al., 2024). These games are more than mere pastimes; they encapsulate the values, customs, and social practices of their communities. For instance, games like Congklak, Egrang, and Benteng in Indonesia reflect the nation's cultural identity through local wisdom and social interaction (Aisyah et al., 2024; Nurjanah & Slamet, 2023; Triansyah et al., 2023). Similarly, Malaysia is home to traditional games such as Ketingting, Congkak, Sepak Bulu Ayam, Tok Harimau, Gasing, Batu Seremban, and Galah Panjang, each carrying cultural significance (Norfadilah Kamaruddin et al., 2021).

Efforts to preserve these games include integrating them into educational settings and promoting their value to younger generations (Damayanti et al., 2023); Maryati et al., 2021; Sutriadi et al., 2020; Syafa'ah et al., 2023; Nurafifah et al., 2024; Kurnia & Sari, 2023). However, these efforts face significant challenges in the modern era. Rapid urbanization, globalization, and the pervasive influence of digital technology contribute to a decline in the popularity of traditional games. Urbanization has disrupted communal spaces where these games thrived, especially in urbanized Malaysia and Indonesia (Namli & Demir, 2020; Arabnarmi et al., 2024; Azlan et al., 2021; Desiana & Khan, 2022; Syafi'i, 2024; Sunandi et al., 2023). Migration from rural to urban areas further disrupts the intergenerational transmission of traditional games, as urban environments lack the communal spaces essential for their practice (Norfadilah Kamaruddin et al., 2021). The allure of modern, technology-driven entertainment captivates young audiences, diminishing their engagement with traditional games. Digital games, social media, and television dominate leisure activities among the youth in both countries (Sabila & Nurdin, 2021; Ulya et al., 2021; Elsa, 2022). In Malaysia, children exhibit a strong preference for electronic games over traditional activities (Norfadilah Kamaruddin et al., 2021). This trend not only affects physical activity but also distances younger generations from cultural heritage.

In this context, this research aims to explore the challenges faced in preserving traditional games in Indonesia and Malaysia, while offering sustainable solutions to ensure the continuity of the cultural values contained therein. With a comprehensive approach, this research not only discusses existing challenges but also explores the role of technology, education and community support in promoting traditional games as an important part of cultural identity in the archipelago.

2 Problem Statement

The preservation of traditional games in their original form faces growing challenges as technology continues to evolve. Rapid advancements in digital entertainment, particularly through smartphones, have altered the landscape of leisure activities. Modern games are often preferred for their convenience and reduced need for social interaction, making them more attractive to younger generations compared to traditional games (Nur Syahela Hussein et al., 2022). This shift raises concerns about the decline in physical activity, potential health problems, and the erosion of cultural identity due to exposure to foreign ideologies through these digital games (Mohd. Haizra Hashim et al., n.d.; Tanucan, 2023). Several factors contribute to the diminishing interest in traditional games. Technological dominance plays a significant role, as digital games often offer greater entertainment value and convenience than traditional forms of play. Spatial constraints in urban areas further complicate the preservation of traditional games, as they typically require larger open spaces that are not readily available in cities dominated by high-rise apartments (Noraziah Chepa & Wan Ahmad Jaafar Wan Yahaya, 2017; Tanucan, 2023). Additionally, the generational preference for modern games, which emphasize individualistic gameplay, contrasts with the communal nature of traditional games, making them less appealing to younger audiences (Muhammad Iqbal Salman et al., 2024).

Research Questions

- 1) How important do respondents perceive the preservation of traditional Malay games?
- 2) What is the level of knowledge among respondents about playing traditional Malay games?
- 3) How do the importance and knowledge of traditional Malay games among respondents reflect potential challenges for their preservation?

3 Literature Review

3.1 The Influence of Urbanization and Modernization on the Preservation of Traditional Games in Indonesia and Malaysia

Urbanization and modernization are major forces reshaping societies globally, including in Malaysia and Indonesia. The rapid expansion of urban areas in Indonesia has led to profound sociocultural changes, particularly impacting the way traditional practices, such as games, are maintained and observed (Mahira, E. D., et al., 2023; Hiswara, A., et al., 2023). As cities grow and populations shift from rural to urban settings, the living environments often become unsuitable for traditional forms of play. Traditional games, which typically require expansive spaces and communal participation, face challenges in densely populated urban areas where such spaces are scarce or nonexistent (Syaukani, A. A., et al., 2023).

Modernization introduces a shift in societal values, often prioritizing economic and technological advancement over the preservation of cultural heritage (Kurdi, K., 2023).

This shift can create a generational gap, where younger individuals, influenced by contemporary education and lifestyles, may regard traditional games as obsolete or irrelevant (Riskyanto, A. W., et al., 2023). The decline of traditional games signifies more than just a loss of entertainment; it represents a loss of cultural heritage and identity, as these games carry historical and social values passed down through generations (Makorohim, M. F., et al., 2023).

In both countries modern digital games such as Clash of Clans and Candy Crush captivate users with their engaging and visually appealing interfaces, offering numerous levels and challenges that keep players hooked for extended periods (Noraziah Chepa and Wan Ahmad Jaafar Wan Yahaya, 2017). Traditional Malaysian games, in contrast, are often designed for fun and leisure without a central narrative theme (Norfadilah Kamarudin et al., 2021). To remain relevant amidst the allure of modern digital games, traditional Malaysian games may need to be modernized or adapted to integrate with current technological trends. Both the public and authorities play crucial roles in ensuring that traditional games are preserved and revitalized to compete effectively in the modern gaming market (Nor Fatimah Abd Hamid, 2014). It is also noteworthy that Malaysians retain a moderate level of knowledge about traditional games (Norfadilah Kamarudin et al., 2021), which can serve as a foundation for preserving and revitalizing these cultural pastimes if approached with appropriate strategies.

3.2 Effects of Rural-to-Urban Migration on the Availability of Spaces for Traditional Games

The shift from rural to urban living intensifies the challenges of preserving traditional games. As individuals migrate from villages to cities in search of better economic opportunities, they leave behind the communal settings where these games are typically enjoyed (Damayanti et al., 2023). In rural areas, traditional games are a vital part of community life, played during festivals and social gatherings (Lionanda, G., 2023). However, the move to urban environments disrupts these traditions, as cities often lack the open spaces necessary for such activities. Addressing the impact of urban migration on traditional game spaces is crucial for developing sustainable solutions that integrate cultural preservation within rapidly changing urban landscapes.

Urban areas are characterized by limited public spaces, high population density, and a fast-paced lifestyle, which are less conducive to the leisurely and community-oriented nature of traditional games (Barbosa, I., et al., 2023). This spatial transformation significantly reduces opportunities for playing traditional games and alters social structures, making communal activities less feasible. Exploring innovative approaches to create or adapt communal spaces in urban settings can help sustain traditional games amidst growing urbanization.

3.3 Influence of Global Entertainment Trends on the Appeal of Traditional Games

The rise of global entertainment, particularly through digital media, video games, and social media, significantly impacts the appeal of traditional games among younger generations. The widespread availability of electronic entertainment often overshadows traditional play (Wijayanto, 2020). Modern digital games provide engaging and interactive experiences that can be more attractive than the physical and communal aspects of traditional games. Finding ways to bridge the gap between traditional games and modern entertainment trends is essential for preserving these cultural practices in the face of evolving interests.

Research indicates that children and adolescents are spending increasing amounts of time on electronic devices, leading to a decline in participation in traditional activities (Rodriguez, S., & Merryman, A., 2021). This shift is also influenced by the perception that traditional games are outdated compared to the dynamic and visually stimulating nature of digital games (Wismawati, A. F., et al., 2023). The pervasive presence of global entertainment options creates a cultural shift that threatens the preservation of traditional games. Incorporating traditional games into modern digital formats could be a key strategy for maintaining their relevance and appeal.

3.4 Revitalizing Traditional Games through Mobile Apps in Indonesia and Malaysia

In both Malaysia and Indonesia, efforts are being made to integrate traditional games into digital platforms, offering new opportunities for their revitalization. In Malaysia, local mobile game developers are incorporating traditional games such as Congkak and Carrom into digital apps available on platforms like Google Play Store and Apple App Store (Illinadia Jamil & Zainal Kadir, 2015). These digital versions aim to make traditional games more accessible to a wider audience, leveraging existing familiarity to maintain cultural relevance (Mohd Haizra Hashim et al., n.d.). Such digital adaptations exemplify sustainable solutions for preserving traditional games by merging cultural heritage with contemporary technology.

Similarly, in Indonesia, there is a growing trend of adapting traditional games for mobile platforms. For example, games like "Balap Karung 3D," "Congklak," and "Master of Gundu" have been developed to recreate traditional Indonesian games in a digital format (Putri T, 2022). These games allow users to experience traditional play in a modern context, making them accessible to all ages through smartphones. This approach not only helps preserve traditional games but also introduces them to a new generation, demonstrating that traditional games can thrive in the digital age (Putri T, 2022). This digital transformation is a promising strategy for ensuring the survival and continued engagement with traditional games across Malaysia and Indonesia.

4 Method

The survey was conducted to collect data regarding respondents' knowledge, attitudes and involvement with traditional games in Malaysia and Indonesia. Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure that they were related to the research topic, such as students living in Indonesia and Malaysia. The selection of students was based on the assumption that the younger generation is the group most exposed to the challenges of technology and modernization, so it is relevant to understand their perspective on traditional games.

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS software to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the results. The analysis includes calculating descriptive statistics to explain the demographic distribution and major trends in respondents' answers. The validity of the questionnaire was tested through a content validity test involving experts in the fields of culture and education. Meanwhile, the reliability of the data was tested using Cronbach's Alpha test to ensure the internal consistency of the questions in the questionnaire. With this approach, research can provide credible and reliable results to answer the research objectives.

To gather insights on the preservation of traditional games in Malaysia and Indonesia, a survey was administered to 166 university students from Malaysia and Indonesia. This survey included questions about their knowledge of traditional games, such as the physical components and the rules governing these games. It also explored their engagement with these games and their opinions on the importance of maintaining the traditional games of Malaysia and Indonesia. The collected data was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings, providing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and potential solutions for preserving these cultural practices.

5 Analysis and Discussion

Respondents were repeatedly questioned about their familiarity with Malay traditional games throughout the demographic section, highlighting the need to understand their engagement with these games. This context is crucial for addressing the preservation challenges and evaluating sustainable solutions. Before analyzing the results and drawing conclusions, it is essential to thoroughly examine the profiles of the respondents. The frequency distribution of respondents is presented in Table 1 below, which will help in identifying key trends and insights related to the preservation of traditional games in Malaysia and Indonesia.

Table 1. Respondents' Profiles

Construct	Category	Count	Percentage
Gender	Male	48	28.9
	Female	118	71.1
Total		166	100.0
Ethnicity	Malay	132	79.50
	Chinese	2	1.2
	Indonesia	31	18.7
	Sunda	1	0.6
Total		166	100.0
Age	18 -22 years old	123	74
	22 – 26 years old	43	26
Total		166	100.0
Level of Education	Secondary school	23	13.9
	Diploma	50	30.1
	Bachelor	67	40.4
	Master	26	15.6
Total		166	100.0
Country	Malaysia	98	59
	Indonesia	68	41
Total		166	100.0

Table 1 Respondents' Profiles displays the demographic information of the 166 respondents. The majority were female (71.1%), with males comprising 28.9%. Ethnically, Malays were the predominant group (79.5%), followed by Indonesians (18.7%), Chinese (1.2%), and Sundanese (0.6%). This diverse sample from Malaysia and Indonesia offers a broad perspective on traditional games. Most respondents were aged between 18 and 22 years (74%), while 26% were in the 22-26 years category. This age distribution suggests that younger individuals are more likely to be interested in traditional games from Malaysia and Indonesia due to their unique appeal compared to modern games. Among the respondents, 59% were from Malaysia, and 41% were from Indonesia.

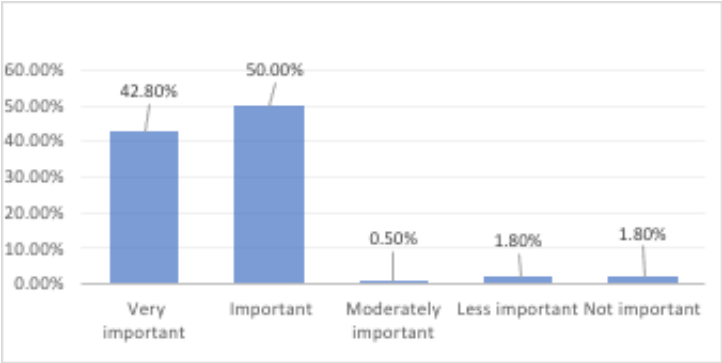


Fig. 1. The Importance of Preserving Traditional Games

This study has explored respondents' perceptions of traditional (Malay) games. The survey, which involved 166 respondents from Malaysia and Indonesia, reveals that a significant majority believe traditional games are important to maintain. Figure 1: The importance of preserving traditional games above shows the importance of preserving traditional games. The findings indicated that 42.8% of respondents considered traditional Malay games to be very important. Additionally, 50% agreed that it was important to preserve them for future generations. These data indicate a high level of awareness in society about the value of traditional games, reflecting the importance of these games in cultural and social contexts. The results of this survey can provide a strong basis for various cultural preservation initiatives and demonstrate widespread support from the community to maintain the heritage of traditional games. Hence, preserving traditional Malay games is crucial to passing on cultural traditions from one generation to the next. After all, the diversity of traditional games contributes to the value of a nation. The community needs to engage with old or traditional culture and ensure it does not become outdated, as traditional games are one of the aspects that reflect a nation's authentic identity.

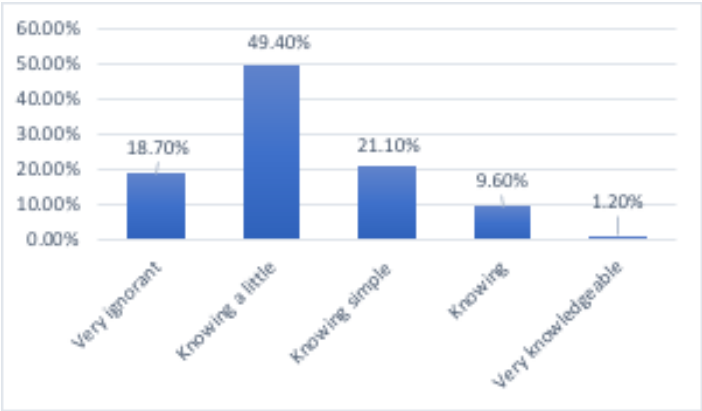


Fig. 2. Knowledge of Playing Any Traditional Games

Additionally, Figure 2: Knowledge of Playing Any Traditional Games above examines respondents' knowledge of playing traditional Malay games. The results showed that 49.4% of respondents had some knowledge about playing these games. However, only 1.2% of respondents were knowledgeable about playing them. The data suggests that a significant majority, around 68.1%, have a good or very good understanding of traditional games, indicating that these games are still well-known in the community. The presence of a moderate knowledge base among respondents highlights the potential for educational initiatives aimed at further preserving and promoting traditional games. Therefore, it is crucial that the relevant authorities, such as the two countries Malaysia and Indonesia: Cultural Agency, organize events and expose the new generation to traditional Malay games. Furthermore, preserving traditional games can ensure that Malay cultural traditions are maintained and not lost in the face of technological advancements.

Traditional games serve a critical role in reflecting and preserving the cultural identity of a nation. In this study, which involved 166 respondents from Malaysia and Indonesia, there is a clear acknowledgement of the importance of preserving these games. The data suggest a strong awareness of the cultural value of traditional games within the community, emphasizing their significance in both cultural and social contexts. Hidayati highlights the inherent worth of these games, recognizing them not just as entertainment, but as vehicles for cultural transmission and social cohesion (Hidayati). Traditional games are seen as carriers of historical narratives, social norms, and community connections, which are vital for maintaining cultural continuity. This widespread recognition forms a robust foundation for initiatives aimed at preserving these cultural assets, such as cultural festivals, educational initiatives, and the inclusion of traditional games in school curricula. However, despite the cultural importance attributed to these games, they face challenges arising from modernization and shifts in lifestyle. Roy (2021) notes that modernization often results in the decline of traditional practices, with traditional games being marginalized in favour of more contemporary forms of entertainment (Roy, 2021). To overcome this, governments, communities, and educational institutions must work collaboratively to safeguard and promote these cultural traditions.

The survey findings indicate that while a substantial portion of respondents (68.1%) had a good or very good understanding of traditional Malay games, a smaller percentage (49.4%) had only some familiarity, and only 1.2% were highly knowledgeable. This suggests that, although there is an acknowledgement of the importance of these games, the overall depth of understanding is limited, which represents a significant challenge for their preservation. While these games are recognized as an important part of cultural heritage, their moderate knowledge of them points to a risk that they may be overlooked in favour of more modern forms of entertainment. The gap in knowledge highlights a potential barrier to passing these games on to younger generations. As a result, while there is cultural support for traditional games, the insufficient understanding and recognition of their value may hinder their continued practice and preservation.

As modernization progresses, traditional practices, including games, are increasingly overshadowed by more contemporary forms of entertainment. The expansion of modern culture tends to marginalize traditional practices, making them less visible and less practised within communities. Firdaus et al. (2023) observe that traditional cultural

practices are often pushed to the periphery by the forces of modernity, which leads to their erosion (Firdaus et al., 2023). This further underscores the need for targeted actions to preserve and promote traditional Malay games. Cultural organizations such as the Malaysia Cultural Agency, along with their counterparts in Indonesia, must take an active role in organizing events that expose younger generations to these cultural traditions. Jane Goodall emphasizes the importance of such efforts, stating, “Preserving traditional cultural practices requires sustained and collaborative efforts between governmental and community organizations to ensure they remain vibrant and relevant” (Otieno et al., 2020). This collaborative approach is crucial in ensuring that traditional games continue to be a living part of the cultural landscape, contributing to the enrichment of cultural identity for future generations.

A growing decline in the popularity of traditional games in Malaysia and Indonesia is evident in recent survey findings. These findings point to a significant shift in societal preferences, as traditional games become less familiar and practiced by younger generations. Many children today are unfamiliar with traditional games such as engklek, gobak Sodor, petak umpet, and lompat tali. The rise of Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD), which refers to the excessive or uncontrolled preoccupation with video games, further reflects the growing dominance of digital entertainment over traditional games (Weinstein et al.). The impact of globalization and technology in children's lives is undeniable, with many spending significant time engaging with game applications on gadgets. Marsh & Mannari (2015) show that playing games on devices such as iPads is a predominant activity for children aged 0–5 (Marsh & Mannari, 2015). Chassiakos et al. (2016) also highlight that as urbanization increases and digital entertainment becomes more widely available, both children and adults are less likely to engage with traditional cultural practices (Chassiakos et al., 2016). The widespread use of gadgets and the prevalence of digital entertainment contribute significantly to the decline in traditional game participation.

Furthermore, contemporary children have less time to engage in both indoor and outdoor activities, including traditional games, largely due to a lack of knowledge about them and the tendency to forget how to play these games (Rombot, 2017). In Indonesia, children and adolescents are abandoning traditional games for a variety of reasons: lack of awareness, insufficient access to play areas, difficulty forming play groups in urban settings, and the rapid development of online gaming technology (Setiawan et al., 2013). These factors indicate a challenging environment for maintaining the practice of traditional games, necessitating intentional efforts to revitalize interest and engagement.

The benefits of playing traditional games are numerous and essential for development. These games not only foster values but also enhance various abilities, including cognitive, psychomotor, and affective skills. Benefits include physical development, such as improved fitness, coordination, and balance; social development through teamwork, cooperation, and sportsmanship (Urbach & Masnina, 2018; Kogoya et al., 2023); emotional development by building confidence and resilience (Ramayenda; Ilmi et al.; Rahayu); and cognitive development, such as stimulating creativity and problem-solving abilities, alongside cultural preservation that connects children to their heritage (Yılmaz & Griffiths, 2023).

The results indicate that the younger generation is becoming increasingly engaged with digital games, which has led to a decline in interest in traditional physical games. The accessibility of smartphones and social media games has made modern games more appealing, making it harder for traditional games to compete for attention. This trend presents a significant challenge to the preservation of traditional games, as they are often viewed as outdated when compared to the dynamic and interactive nature of digital games. To address this issue, it is essential to integrate traditional games with modern interests and adapt them to contemporary settings. Additionally, the lack of knowledge about traditional games among younger people, coupled with insufficient support from family and peers, poses another challenge. The primary difficulty in sustaining interest in traditional games is the growing preference for modern, tech-based entertainment. Traditional games are often promoted on a seasonal basis, which contributes to their rapid decline in relevance. Therefore, efforts must be made to integrate traditional games with modern elements to attract younger audiences and sustain their interest over time.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study addresses the challenges of preserving traditional Malay games in Malaysia and Indonesia, with a focus on respondents' perceptions of their importance and their knowledge about these games. The findings suggest that traditional Malay games are seen as an essential part of cultural heritage, as a significant majority of respondents recognize their value in maintaining cultural identity and social cohesion. Specifically, 42.8% of respondents deemed these games "very important," and 50% viewed them as crucial for future generations, highlighting the widespread recognition of their cultural significance.

However, despite this recognition, the level of knowledge about these games among the respondents presents a considerable challenge to their preservation. While 68.1% of respondents reported having a good or very good understanding of traditional games, a large portion (49.4%) had only some familiarity, and only 1.2% were highly knowledgeable. This suggests that, while traditional Malay games are well-known, there is a noticeable gap in in-depth knowledge, especially among the younger generation. This moderate level of awareness indicates that these games may be at risk of being overshadowed by modern forms of entertainment, such as digital gaming, which further emphasizes the preservation challenge.

Modernization and the rapid advancement of digital technologies are major factors contributing to the decline in participation in traditional games. The increasing dominance of digital entertainment, particularly video games and smartphone applications, has led to a shift in leisure activities, with traditional games losing ground. As urbanization progresses, the lack of play spaces, knowledge, and engagement with these games, particularly among children and adolescents, exacerbates the challenge of preserving them. Additionally, the influence of globalization and technology has made it more difficult for traditional cultural practices, including games, to remain relevant and visible within communities.

To address these challenges, both governments and cultural institutions in Malaysia and Indonesia must collaborate to preserve and promote traditional Malay games. This could involve organizing events, incorporating these games into educational curricula, and adapting them to modern interests. Such initiatives could bridge the knowledge gap, ensure that younger generations are exposed to these games, and make them a more engaging part of contemporary leisure activities. By doing so, traditional games can be preserved as a vibrant and meaningful aspect of cultural identity, providing both developmental benefits and a connection to heritage. Ultimately, the preservation of traditional Malay games depends on efforts to raise awareness, increase knowledge, and adapt these cultural practices to modern contexts, ensuring their continued relevance and sustainability in an increasingly digital world.

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