


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Cognitive behavioral therapy and traditional cooperative games in improving social skills: A single-subject experimental study

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 Dinda Permatasari Harahap

Department of Psychology, Universitas Medan Area, North Sumatera, Indonesia

## Corresponding Author:

Dinda Permatasari Harahap (email: [dinda@staff.uma.ac.id](mailto:dinda@staff.uma.ac.id))

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to ascertain how cognitive behavior therapy and traditional games in children could improve their social skills. This research was a single-subject experimental study. The participant was a 6-year-old kindergarten student going by the alias “Kila”. The data was collected using interview and observation methods. The CBT techniques are puppets, storytelling, visualization, and imagery techniques. Traditional games are used after the CBT sections. These games involved peer groups to increase the social skills of the participants. The traditional games used are the ones that Indonesian people used to do, such as “Cublak-cublak Suweng,” “Clogs,” “Cardboard Bridge,” “Jump Rope,” and “Word Game.”. Data were collected through observation and interviews with participants, family members, teachers, and colleagues. Information about the participant can also be obtained using psychological tools such as intellectual and socialization. Data is analyzed based on the characteristics of previous and subsequent social capacity changes. The result showed that the CBT technique for children could change the participant’s negative automatic thoughts about her friends. Those traditional games could also improve Kila’s social skills, especially in her interpersonal behavior, such as making friends, communicating, giving feedback to her peers, and being involved in some interactions and communications. CBT techniques and traditional games have an impact on increasing the social abilities of participants. This can be seen from the improvement in participants’ social skills, such as interpersonal behavior, self-behavior, academic behavior, peer acceptance, and communication skills.

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is “a golden period” of child development, often called “the golden age”. Hurlock (2017) stated that there are at least six developmental tasks in early childhood, but the most difficult for children is learning to relate emotionally to parents, siblings, and others. Social skills are essential for children to learn in early childhood (preschool). Developing these skills at an early age will make it

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easier for children to fulfil subsequent developmental tasks to develop normally and healthily. Social skills need to be mastered by children because they will equip them to enter a more comprehensive social life both in the home environment and especially in the school environment, which they will soon enter.

Mappiare (in Kibtiyah, 2003) defines social skills as an individual's ability to socially interact with people in their environment in order to meet their needs to be accepted by peers, both of the same sex or the opposite sex so that they gain a sense of need and a sense of worth. These skills must begin to be developed since childhood by allowing children to play or joke with peers or assigning tasks based on child development. Social skills can bring children to be more courageous in expressing themselves, expressing any feelings or problems they face, and at the same time finding adaptive solutions so that they do not seek escape from other things that can actually harm themselves and others.

Kila is a 6-year-old girl who is attending kindergarten. Kila has brown skin, good hearing, and eyesight. Kila is the youngest child of two siblings. She has an older sister who is attending elementary school. Kila has been in kindergarten for a year. When the researcher visited her in class, Kila looked different from her friend. When her friend played in class and interacted with each other, Kila sat and observed her friends. Kila did not communicate or interact with her friends. During the learning process, Kila just sat and listened to what the teacher said. Kila seems to be daydreaming and rarely responds in class. When the teacher asked her the question, she answered it slowly. When her friends communicated and interacted with each other during the learning process, she was silent and focused on her work. She avoids using things together with her friends.

When her work was finished in class, Kila still had time to play freely in the class area. Some of her friends, who have also finished, began choosing toy blocks, cooking toys, and playing in groups. On the other hand, Kila just looked and watched what her friends did. One of her friends bothered her by scribbling a pin on her back. She only gave an annoying expression and did not express her anger or feeling through verbal language. It caused her friend to keep disturbing her. During outdoor activities, Kila did not play together with her friends. Even though she was in a playground, she was only interested in her friends who were playing. She followed where the teacher went. When invited to play with friends, she refused and followed wherever the teacher or security went. During a psychological test, she wanted to answer the question, and she could tell pictures when asked. She only answered things asked. According to her teacher, Kila had difficulty establishing communication and interaction with her friends in class. At the same time, Kila has attended school for a year. Kila still did not want to play and interact. Even so, Kila keeps finishing her task in class. Her mother told her to only play with the teacher. This condition made it difficult for Kila to interact with her peers in class.

At her home, Kila played with her sister. Kila's sister was also quiet and shy, so compared to her older sister, Kila looked more active in talking and interacting. In contrast to school, Kila was more talkative at home. She played with puppets and storybooks in her home. Her parent felt that Kila is indeed difficult to socialize with other people, but they tend to let this happen without making any effort. It caused Kila not to have the motivation to make friends and socialize at school. Her mother said it does not matter if Kila does not want to communicate. This made Kila difficult to adjust herself in school, and the effect is that she had difficulty establishing social relations with others.

The role of parents is significant in children's early growth and development. As John Locke states about Tabula Rasa, the epistemological study that a human is born with no built-in mental content and that human knowledge comes from experiences and perceptions. Generally, exponents of the tabula rasa study favor the "nurture" side of nature regarding aspects of one's personality, social,

emotional behavior, and intelligence. One of the ways to stimulate children is through experiences. Parents can stimulate children with new experiences, including providing social development.

The researcher often had a counseling section with parents in my work with participants. I provided alternative problem-solving using learning theory, behavior modification, and cognitive and social learning theory. Before using traditional games for intervention, the researcher also found that negative automatic thoughts on the participant can influence her thoughts and feelings. Cognitive therapy focuses on changing negative thoughts or beliefs (Beck, 2005; Martin & Pear, 2003; Antony & Swinson, 2000). The cognitive therapy I used to solve the participant's problem was Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) for children. Beck (2005) stated that CBT focuses on thoughts and core beliefs that cause emotional distress. It can be replaced with positive thoughts. In addition, CBT also aims to facilitate individuals in creating positive emotional situations so that they can implement specific strategies such as cognitive restructuring, organizing activity schedules, and other strategies (McGinns, 2000).

In this case, the researcher found that the participant had negative thoughts about her friend. Kila felt that her friends were not kind. They did not like her and did not ask her to play games together. That is why she was not interested in joining them. The researcher started to dispute her thought about friends. The researcher used a drawing book and asked her to draw a school situation. Kila drew a class building, and there was only one person inside. According to Kila, the person is herself, and no other people exist. Her friends and teacher were playing at the playground. The researcher asked about what her friends felt when playing at the playground. Kila said she was happy when playing together and wanted to join them. The researcher started to dispute her negative thought about her friends. The researcher told her about her friend's kindness, such as sharing food, helping her to use a pencil, borrowing her crayon, and asking her to swim. The researcher used storytelling, playing puppets, and exciting activities to make Kila think more positively.

Another kind of intervention used in this case was cooperative games. A previous study has found that traditional games can improve children's social skills. The intervention provided is supported by the research of Shinta et al. (2019), which also showed that traditional games can be used as a medium for building children's character or social skills, such as (1) cooperation, (2) responsibility, (3) hard work, and (4) caring. Research conducted by Irmansyah et al. (2020) showed that traditional games could improve the social skills of school-age children. Tasnim et al. (2022) discovered that traditional mallogo games could improve social skills in children aged 5 to 6. According to Lestari and Prima (2017), traditional games can improve children's social and emotional development. Traditional games can be piloted in other areas of skill development in early childhood education. In addition, Irmansyah et al. (2020) used the game "Gobak Sodor" in their research and found that it can help children develop social skills such as personal bonding, teamwork, communication, and peer mentoring. The type of traditional game used in this intervention differs from previous research. Traditional games used include Indonesian classics such as "Cublak-Cublak Suweng," "Clogs," "Cardboard Bridge," "Jump Rope," and "Word Game."

## METHOD

The method used in this research was the single-subject experimental study. This approach was used to carefully observe and investigate an event, process, and individual activity (Creswell, 2014) and things of interest to the researcher (Gall et al., 2003). The participant was a 6-year-old kindergarten student. Data were collected through observation and interviews with participants, family members, teachers, and colleagues. Information about the participant can also be obtained using psychological tools such as intellectual and socialization. Data is analyzed based on the

characteristics of previous and subsequent social capacity changes. The method used can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Assessment Method

| Assessment Aspect      | Method                   | Subject     | Location      |
|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Biography              | Interview                | Parents     | Home          |
| Cognitive skill        | Interview                | Teacher     | School        |
| Intelligence           | Psychological test: CPM  | Participant | School        |
| Emotion                |                          |             |               |
| Expression of emotion  | Observation              | Participant | School & Home |
| Participant motivation | Interview                | Participant | School        |
| Social                 |                          |             |               |
| Social interaction     | Observation              | Participant | School & Home |
| Social maturity        | Psychological test: VSMS | Participant | School        |
| Parenting style        | Interview                | Parent      | Home          |
| Participant Perception | Interview                | Participant | School        |

Intelligence is the ability to accept information from the environment. The test used in this case is Coloured Progressive Matrices (CPM). This test consists of 36 questions grouped into three series, A, Ab, and B. This test can be used for children aged 5-11 years. Based on the result of the intelligence test conducted on Kila, it could be seen that Kila has an intelligence level in the grade II percentile 95, which is categorized as above average (CPM scale). This indicated that Kila could perform cognitive tasks equivalent to her age.

The Vineland Social Maturity (VSMS) measures the differential social capacities of an individual. This test estimates Social Age (S.A.) and Social Quotient (S.Q.) and shows a high correlation with intelligence. This test is designed to measure social maturation in eight social areas: Self Help General (SHG), Self Help Eating (SHE), Self Help Dressing (SHD), Self Direction (S.D.), Occupation (OCC), Communication (COM), Locomotion (LOM), and Socialization (SOC). This scale consists of 89 test items grouped into year levels. VSMS can be used for the age group of 0-15 years.

**Table 2.** The result of the VSMS Test *Journal of Psychological Research*

| Aspects            | Finding in Kila   |
|--------------------|---|
| Self-help general  | Kila could take care of herself when going to eat but still assisted in toilet training.  |
| Self-help eating   | Kila has been able to distinguish food, chew, spoon food, and take a drink but has not been able to use a knife to cut something. |
| Self-help dressing | Kila could take off socks, jackets, and clothes, but Kila still needed help fitting and polishing the clothes.                    |
| Locomotion         | Kila could move her position and walk downstairs, but Kila has never played outside the house with peers or neighbors.            |
| Occupation         | Kila was able to write, pick up familiar objects and play.  |
| Communication      | Kila could make sounds, imitate voices, and follow instructions but does not read based on her initiative.                        |
| Self-direct        | Kila has not been able to direct herself personally, such as being able to use the money well.                                    |
| Socialization      | Kila could interact with family but could not establish interactions with friends around the house and school.                    |

Based on the VSMS test conducted on Kila, the result showed that Kila has a social maturity below her chronological age. The social maturity of Kila is equivalent to the age of 5 years, while the chronological age of Kila when testing is 6 years and 4 months. This indicated that her social maturity is above her chronological age. The aspects of social maturity can be seen in Table 2. It can be seen that Kila was already independent in terms of bathing, eating, dressing, and sleeping without assistance. Kila has also been able to communicate, direct herself, and move positions from one place to another. Kila still has trouble interacting with peers both at home and school.

## RESULT

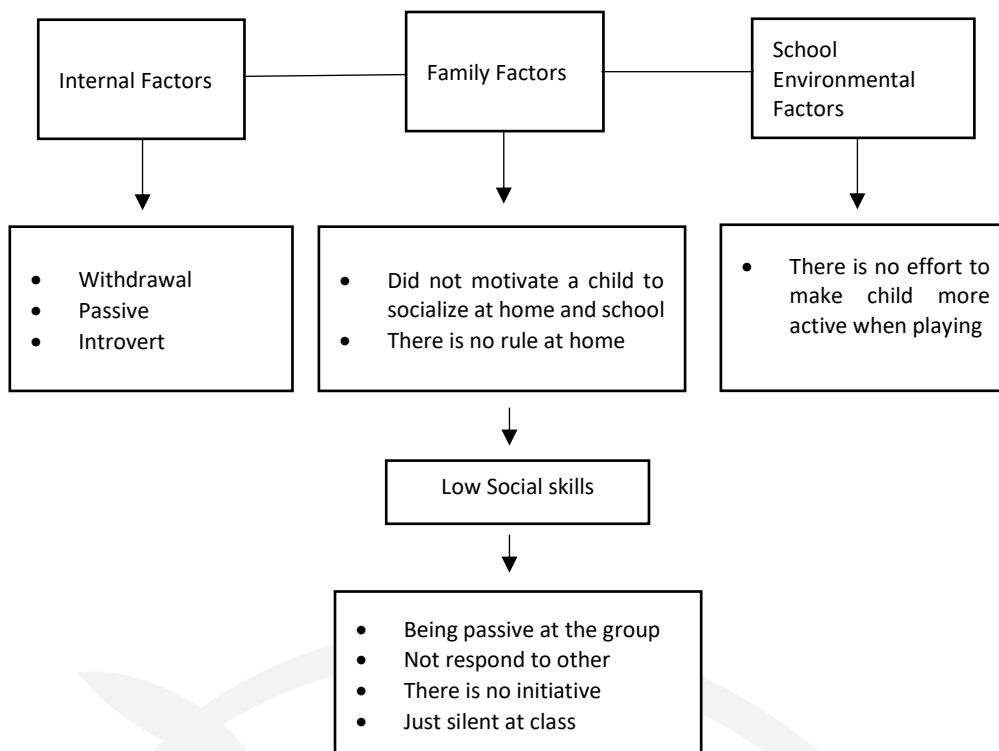
The problem with Kila was establishing social interaction with peers at school. Kila just approached the teacher and security. She did not join the other children. This also happened in class. She just sat and listened to the teacher without communicating with her friends. When taking a break, Kila did not play with her friends. Kila was only staying in class or following the teacher or security at the playground. In contrast, education in kindergarten is directed at developing children's potential through the stages of growth and development through play activities while learning. In this case, Kila has a problem with her social relationship with her peers.

One of the changes experienced by children in their developmental phase is social development. The increasingly complex interactions of children mark this development, so it requires them to make adaptations continuously. Children from 2 to 6 years old learn to make social relationships and associate with people outside the home environment, especially with peers (Hurlock, 2017). According to Hurlock (2017), this includes (1) showing concern and care for others; (2) knowing the difference between right and wrong; (3) being able to act according to social norms; and (4) learning from and socializing with a peer. Each child is expected to be able to get along with others and adjust to their new environment based on their social development. In this case, social skills in children are fundamental to development. Individual skills in starting or maintaining a positive relationship in social interaction are called "social skills." In this case, the social skill development of Kila is still hampered.

Based on their family background, Kila has working parents. Her parents are busy, so they are rarely at home. Kila was taken care of with assistance. She rarely establishes intense communication with her parents. Children's social skills are influenced by their socialization process with parents, starting at an early age. Parents play a role in teaching children social skills and forming relationships with the environment, especially with peers (Hetherington et al., 2005). In this case, parents paid less attention to Kila's social development at school.

Not only at school but also at home, Kila did not have peers. She only played at home with her sister's assistance. Her sister has the same problem as her. However, compared to her sister, Kila is more likely to dominate when they play together. Kila is more talkative than her sister. Her parents, who are working parents, did not have time to pay attention and provide opportunities for Kila to interact with her peers. Kila is also reminded to play only with teachers at school. This causes Kila to interact with other people rarely. According to Hurlock (2017), several factors influence the social development of children. One of the factors is the family factor. The family is the first social group in the child's environment. Social interaction in a family is based on the sympathy humans develop when they first learn to pay attention to others, work together, and help others. The experience of social interaction in the family also determines the behavior of other people in social life outside the family.

Another factor influencing her social life is her early social experiences, which determine her personality. When she entered the school for the first time, Kila looked different from her other friends. She did not respond to the teacher, did not involve herself in communication, and then took a break. She did not join in and make friends. In this case, the role of the teacher is crucial in her social development. The teacher did not try to involve Kila in talking and playing in class. The dynamics of the case can be seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** The dynamic case

Based on the assessment's result, it can be concluded that Kila still lacks social skills. According to Elksnin & Elksnin (2011), the characteristic of social skills are:

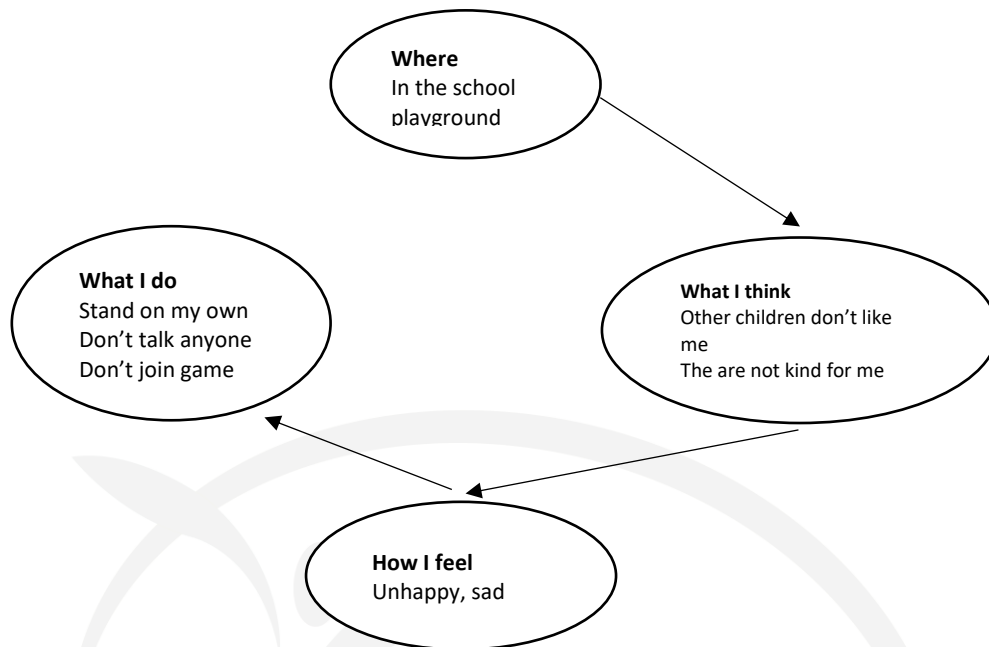
**Table 3.** The characteristics of social skills

| Characteristics        | Finding in Kila   |
|------------------------|---|
| Interpersonal Behavior | Kila was not able to make friends.  |
| Self Behavior          | Kila was not able to understand people's feelings.  |
| Academic Behavior      | Kila was able to do her assignment well.  |
| Peer acceptance        | Kila was passive and did not participate in group activities or share and give information. |
| Communication Skill    | Kila was never an active listener and did not give her peers and teacher feedback.          |

Developing a formulation involves eliciting and identifying relevant information, which is then arranged according to some theoretical or explanatory model to understand the origins, development, and or maintenance of the presenting problem (Tarrier & Calam, 2002). The formulations that can be structured in this case are mini formulations highlighting the relationship between two elements in the CBT cycle. These are particularly useful during the early stages of therapy.

Kila's intervention method is Cognitive Behavior Therapy, which involves her in traditional cooperative games with her peers. The parents and teacher are also given a counseling section. The intervention methods used a cognitive behavioral approach. This method is based on "Think Good Feel Good" by Stallard (2016). This approach is proven effective for solving children's problems such as school refusal (King et al., 1998), anxiety (Silverman, 1999), phobia (Silverman, 1999), and other behavioral problems at school (Stallard, 2016). The method used is through play. The counseling intervention method used with clients uses a cognitive-behavioral approach. This method is based on Stallard's Think Good, Feel Good guidebook (2016). The steps taken in the CBT process, according to Stallard (2016), are as follows: 1) find out the participants' negative thoughts; 2) explain a specific situation; 3) ask questions about "what other people might think or feel" using images as media; 4) oppose the participants' negative thoughts with what people might think and feel and do with the media of images; 5) use dolls as a symbol or self-representation of the client; 6) ask about new

thoughts and feelings that are felt when in the same situation. Therapists can dispute the negative thoughts of children through drawing, playing with toys, and storytelling. In this case, a therapist used a drawing book, puppets, and storytelling to dispute Kila's negative thoughts about her friend and school. According to Salmon & Bryan (2002), preschoolers will represent themselves in puppets as their symbols.



**Figure 2** The Formulations of Problem Function

According to Parten (in Papalia, 2008), cooperative games are games in which a group organizes to achieve specific goals, such as making something, playing a formal game, or dramatizing a situation, with one child controlling the group members and directing activity. Each child takes on a different role and complements the others. Cooperative games help improve positive social interaction (Sapon, 1968). This game includes (a) children playing with other peers; (b) sharing their toys and turning away from using toys; (c) helping other people; and (d) talking about friend strengths rather than friend weaknesses.

According to Nugraha and Yeni (2004), cooperative games involve a group of children, with each child assigned a specific role. In this case, the intervention used the cooperative games module created by Maresha (2011). It was easy to ask Kila to join the games. Kila trusted me and started to be active at games. Another advantage for me was that the intervention was done at school. The school provided many tools I could use, such as boxes, *bakiaks*, string, and other tools. Then, I could invite Kila's friends to join the games. It would help her adjust to the situation, especially after some interactions and communications with friends. The intervention can be seen in Table 4. Kila seems to be active at the moment. She was not cheated and could direct herself well. Kila began to communicate and interact with peers, took turns for the game, and asked her friends to play the game. After playing, Kila started to make a friend at the playground.

**Table 4.** Cooperative games intervention process

| Day | Name of Games        | Rules and Techniques  |
|-----|----------------------|---|
| 1   | Cublak-cublak Suweng | Children played this game in a group. Children sang the song "Cublak-cublak Suweng" while they were rolling the stone above their hands. One child's role was guessing the stone when the song ended. In this game, Kila could involve and make a group with other children. The therapist supports Kila in taking the role, and Kila can be active in this game. She smiled and laughed during the game section.               |
| 2   | Clogs                | Children were asked to pair up with each other. Kila was paired with a friend whose initials were K. Kila patiently waited for her turn. While playing, Kila fell in the middle of the game. However, she got back up and continued the game. Kila won the game and felt so happy.  |
| 3   | Cardboard Bridge     | Kila and her friends were asked to gather to play cooperative games, namely "Cardboard Bridge". The researcher divided the six people into two groups and gave boxes to each group. The researcher then explained the rules. When the game was performed, Kila could follow the rules well. She won at the first chance. Kila was able to do based on the instructions. She could merge into the group and felt enjoy the game. |
| 4   | Jump Rope            | This game was played using string. Kila and two of her friends were playing the game together. Kila took turns playing this game.   |
| 5   | Word Game            | The researcher said the sentences to one child, and the child would forward the sentences to other friends. Kila could communicate and interact with other friends.   |

The result of the intervention can be seen based on observation by the researcher during school. It can be seen in Table 5.

**Table 5.** The result of observation after intervention

| Moments           | Kila's Behavior   |
|-------------------|---|
| In a line         | Kila took a line at the second order. Kila took the initiative and began talking to her friend in front of her. They laughed one each other.  |
| Take a break      | One of Kila's friends was sick, and Kila visited her friend in the room. Kila took the initiative to ask her friend and entertained her friend.<br>Kila shared her food with a friend in class. |
| In the morning    | Kila told the researcher about her friend. She started to communicate and talk to her friend.   |
| At class          | Kila shared her pencil with a friend.<br>Kila took a turn using a computer and talked to her friend about the picture.  |
| In the playground | Kila used the games together with her peers.  |

The change can be seen based on the following criteria of social skills stated by Elksnin & Elksnin (2011):

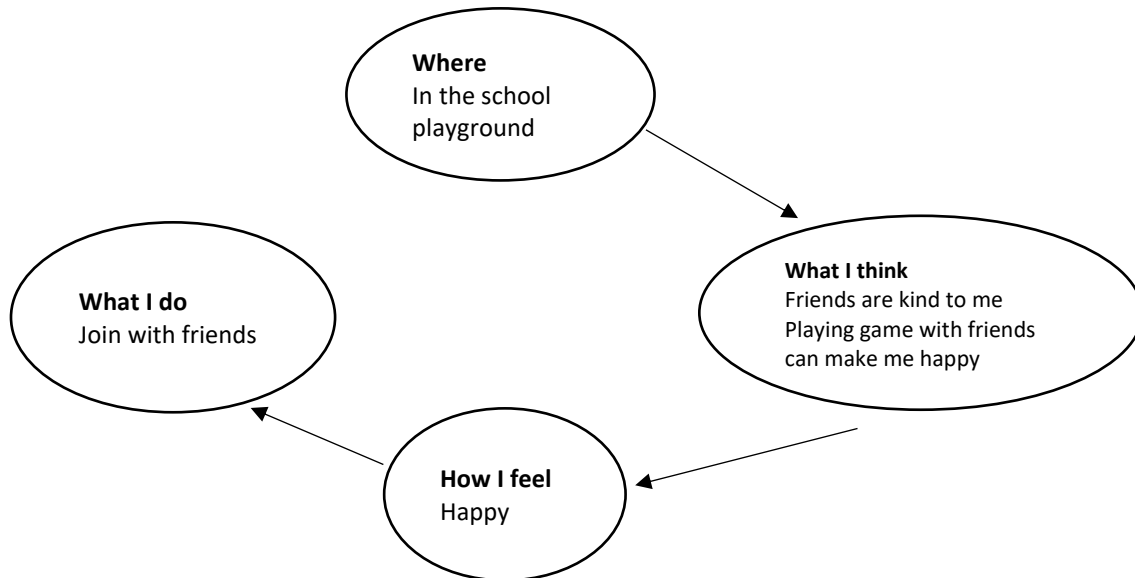
**Table 6.** The participant's improvement in social skills

| Characteristic         | Before Intervention   | After Intervention  |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Interpersonal Behavior | Kila was not able to make friends.  | Kila made friends, took the initiative to talk with friends, and asked friends to sit together. |
| Self Behavior          | Kila was not able to understand people's feeling  | Kila visited her friend and entertained her friend.   |
| Peer acceptance        | Kila was passive and did not participate in group activities or share and give information. | Kila asked her friends to play together and use the computer together.                          |
| Communication Skill    | Kila was never an active listener and did not give her peers and teacher feedback.          | Started to communicate with friends, listened actively, and gave feedback                       |

At the end of the intervention section, it can be seen that Kila has changed to be a more active child. Kila starts to make friends, has some interactions and communications at school, is involved in the games, and starts to take care of her friends.



The result of the intervention also can be seen based on CBT mini formulations in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** The Changing Formulations of Problem Function

## DISCUSSION

The researcher found that the participant had a negative thoughts about her friends. The participant thought her friend was not kind, so she did not want to make friends. The participant was also advised by her parent to make friends with the teacher. It made the participant obey her mother. In addition, teachers at school also did not care and were less sensitive to her condition. The teacher did not encourage her to participate in play or class discussions. These factors cause the participant to have difficulties establishing interactions with others, indicating that the participant had fewer social skills.

There has been considerable debate about the age at which children can participate in CBT. This argument focuses on the issue of whether young children have the cognitive platform necessary to engage in CBT or whether CBT has not been sufficiently adapted for them to access. In this case, the need to adapt CBT by using more nonverbal techniques. Games provide a familiar medium for children. Puppets provide a safe and engaging way of communicating with young children. They can be used for assessment and engage the child in role plays in which they can practice using more valuable coping skills. Storytelling is another familiar way of communicating with children. There is significant variation in the specific treatment components, sequencing, and cognitive emphasis of intervention that fall under the general label of CBT.

Social learning theory become one of the subjects studied in human relationships and interactions with the environment. Ulya (2012) suggests that the teacher still dominates the learning process in social learning and becomes the center. Social learning helps children acquire knowledge, skills, care, express opinions, and act responsibly (Gudzinskiene et al., 2017; Sholikah et al.,2019). Social skills are essential in children's education (Kuss et al.,2022; Navarro-Paton et al.,2022). Social skills are a set of behaviors acquired through observation, modeling, practice, and feedback to learn and contain verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Fathi et al., 2014).

The result of this study showed that the participant's social skills improved. One way to stimulate social skills in preschoolers is through traditional games. Perdani (2014) proposed that the traditional game is played simultaneously or in groups, which is the power of the traditional game that prioritizes

social interaction in children. Through play, children can learn several things, one of which is the social aspect children can develop. Through traditional games, children can study, work together, and have characteristics of persistence, honesty, and sportsmanship (Andriani, 2012).

This study implied that CBT techniques and traditional games increase participants' social abilities. This can be seen from the improvement in participants' social skills, such as interpersonal behavior, self-behavior, academic behavior, peer acceptance, and communication skills. Those traditional games could also improve Kila's social skills, especially in her interpersonal behavior, such as making friends, communicating, giving feedback to her peers, and being involved in some interactions and communications.

This study has limitations, including the research design using a single experimental subject so that the results can not be generalized. In addition, the support of people around participants, such as peers, parents, and teachers, is a determining factor for the success of this research. The subject's age is still in the early childhood category, so researchers must make great efforts when using CBT techniques because participants are in the pre-operational cognitive development stage. According to Piaget (2010), at this stage, children are not yet able to use logic, change, or different ideas and thoughts, so children tend to use symbolic games to represent events. This is a challenge for other researchers when they want to use CBT techniques to intervene in children.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the result, the study could be concluded that the participant's social skills increased after the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) session and joined the traditional games session. There is an enhancement in the development of social skills that can be seen from the criteria of social skills stated by Elksnin & Elksnin (2011). Participant possesses all of the characteristics of social skills, including; 1) interpersonal behavior, the participant was able to make friends, took the initiative to talk with friends, and asked friends to sit together; 2) in self-behavior, a participant visited her friend and entertained her friend; 3) in peer acceptance, a participant asked her friends to play together and use the computer together; and 4) in communication skill, a participant began to communicate with friends, listened, and asked friends to sit together. Suggestions that can be given to future researchers are to use techniques other than CBT and traditional games to improve early childhood social skills. Other techniques that can be used are role-playing, involving children in outbound activities, and project methods. This is because using CBT techniques is quite challenging in early childhood because the child's cognitive development stage is still pre-operational. Therefore other researchers can involve children in other motor and social activities.

## **DECLARATION**

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### **Author contribution statement**

Dinda Permatasari Harahap led the overall research design, conducted discussion processing, and wrote results and discussion.

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### Data access statement

The data described in this article can be accessed by contacting the first author.

### Declaration of interest's statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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