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Optimizing Islamic Religious Education Learning through Educational Games to Enhance Elementary School Students' Motivation and Understanding

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Optimizing Islamic Religious Education Learning through Educational Games to Enhance Elementary School Students' Motivation and Understanding

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ABSTRACT

Background: Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in elementary schools is frequently dominated by monotonous lecture methods, resulting in low student learning motivation, boredom, and suboptimal comprehension of daily worship materials such as ablution (*wudu*) procedures. **Objective:** This study aims to optimize Islamic Religious Education learning through the integration of educational games to enhance student learning motivation and cognitive comprehension. **Methods:** This research employed a two-cycle Classroom Action Research (CAR) design consisting of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection stages involving 17 third-grade students at SDN 80 Kaur. Data were collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and learning outcome tests, then analyzed using mixed-methods descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. **Results:** The findings revealed a significant gradual improvement across cycles, with class average scores increasing from 65 in the pre-cycle to 75 in Cycle 1 and reaching 85 in Cycle 2. Simultaneously, student mastery learning rates surged from 41% to 60% and finally 80%, accompanied by heightened classroom engagement and collaboration. **Conclusion:** Integrating educational games effectively overcomes learning fatigue and optimizes both academic achievement and religious character development. **Contribution:** This study provides empirical evidence for Constructivism Theory in elementary PAI and offers actionable Game-Based Learning guidance for educators.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education plays a crucial role in shaping the character and personality of students, particularly at the elementary education level (Siswati et al., 2025). At an early age, children are in a crucial developmental phase where the instillation of religious values can significantly influence their future behavior and attitudes, as well as serve as a foundation for building a generation with noble morals amidst the dynamics of modern times (Safitri & Diana, 2023). Religious character education instilled from an early age is regarded as the primary foundation in forming students who are devout, honest, tolerant, and empathetic toward others (Nurjaman & Andayani, 2025).

Under these conditions, the learning process of Islamic Religious Education should be interactive and enjoyable, and capable of optimizing active student engagement so that religious materials can be internalized deeply (Hanifurrohman et al., 2025). Ideal learning does not merely focus on conventional material delivery, but also creates a dynamic classroom atmosphere, motivates students to think critically, and fosters a love for Islamic values through meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences (Saputri & Triatmo, 2026). This objective aligns with the perspective

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that learning success heavily depends on the quality of interaction between teachers and students, as healthy interactions are able to create a conducive and democratic learning atmosphere (Rohadatul & Prima, 2025).

However, in practical implementation in the field, the teaching of Islamic Religious Education frequently encounters various real-world challenges and problems (Zulfa, 2026). Most learning processes remain dominated by monotonous lecture methods, which trigger low student learning interest, quick feelings of boredom, and result in suboptimal comprehension and learning outcomes (Maulana & Purba, 2024). Furthermore, the limited variety of instructional media causes students to lack the motivation to explore religious material comprehensively.

Various previous studies have examined efforts to overcome problems in religious learning. A number of studies indicate that the implementation of interactive methods and the utilization of game-based learning media can enhance student motivation and engagement across various educational levels (Munawir et al., 2024; Nur & Tanjung, 2026; Olisna et al., 2022). Other research also highlights the importance of utilizing educational tools or interactive digital applications to transform rigid classroom atmospheres into ones that are more dynamic, enjoyable, and communicative for students (Barokah et al., 2025; Subroto et al., 2023). The conclusions from these various studies confirm that innovation in learning methods and media is the primary key to boosting students' learning enthusiasm, particularly in Islamic Religious Education subjects.

Nevertheless, a research gap remains regarding the lack of in-depth exploration concerning the implementation of educational games specifically focused on optimizing student motivation and understanding in Islamic Religious Education within specific elementary school settings, as well as the limited studies combining comprehensive learning outcome evaluations with such interactive approaches.

The urgency and novelty of this research lie in the integration of educational games into the instructional design of third-grade elementary school Islamic Religious Education to overcome learning fatigue. This study not only focuses solely on cognitive aspects, but also examines in depth how game media can enhance students' internal motivation and integratively shape positive character in the digital era.

The significance of this research is highly important both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on interactive media-based religious education learning strategies. Practically, the results of this research are expected to provide guidelines and applicative recommendations for elementary school educators in designing more creative, effective, and enjoyable learning methods.

This study aims to optimize Islamic Religious Education learning through the use of educational games to enhance student motivation and comprehension. The focus of this study is directed toward the application of educational games in the third grade of elementary school and the measurement of the improvement in student learning outcomes and overall engagement.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which is a repeated cycle consisting of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection stages to improve the learning process of Islamic Religious Education gradually and continuously (Utomo et al., 2024). The reason for using this design is that CAR is highly appropriate for directly solving classroom learning problems, with the objective of improving and enhancing the quality of the learning process and outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), particularly in boosting student motivation and comprehension through the continuous implementation of educational games across action cycles.

2.2 Participant

The subjects and participants in this study were 17 third-grade students at SDN 80 Kaur. The rationale for selecting these subjects is that these students were learning the procedures of ablution (wudu) in the PAI subject and required a more interactive learning approach to overcome boredom and improve learning outcomes. Meanwhile, the object of study in this research was student motivation and comprehension of PAI material through the utilization of educational games.

2.3 Instruments and Data Collection

Data collection in this study was supported by various structured instruments, including: 1) content comprehension questionnaires and learning motivation questionnaires to measure conditions before and after the action; 2) classroom observation sheets to record students' levels of engagement, cooperation, and responses to teacher instructions; 3) semi-structured interview guidelines to explore in-depth experiences from students and teachers; and 4) learning outcome tests to assess the improvement of students' cognitive comprehension.

The steps for data collection were carried out through questionnaire distribution, observations conducted during the learning process, post-learning interviews, and learning outcome tests administered at the end of each action cycle.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis technique in this study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses: 1) Quantitative analysis was performed using descriptive statistics to calculate mean scores and percentages from the questionnaires and learning tests, in order to compare conditions before and after the implementation of the action; 2) Qualitative analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to categorize interview and observation data into key aspects such as motivation, learning experiences, and field challenges; 3) Data validity was reinforced through data triangulation techniques, comparing findings from observations, questionnaires, and interviews to ensure credibility and a comprehensive understanding.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

In this study, the results of each cycle are presented to demonstrate the progress achieved following the implementation of optimized Islamic Religious Education learning through educational games to enhance the motivation and comprehension of third-grade students at SDN 80 Kaur. In the first cycle, lesson planning was conducted by formulating a structured Lesson Plan (RPP) and introducing educational games to the students. The implementation of the learning process showed that most students began to participate actively, although a few still appeared less engaged. Observation results indicated an increase in student activity compared to the pre-cycle condition, yet approximately 20% of the students still lacked participation. Some students also appeared to talk among themselves and lacked focus on the teacher's explanation. Nevertheless, the classroom atmosphere became more interactive. Test results after Cycle 1 revealed that 60% of the students successfully achieved the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) with a class average score of 75, showing an improvement compared to the pre-cycle score. Based on reflection from Cycle 1, despite the progress made, improvements in classroom management and instructional strate-gies were still required to ensure that all students engaged more actively.

In the second cycle, planning was carried out by revising the lesson plan based on the reflections from the first cycle. The primary focus in this cycle was strengthening peer interaction and adjusting the educational game methods to make them more engaging and effective. The implementation of learning in Cycle 2 demonstrated a significant increase in student engagement, with all students appearing more enthusiastic and actively participating in the learning activities. Observation results showed that nearly all students participated actively, the classroom atmosphere became more conducive, and interaction between the teacher and students increased. Furthermore, students better understood their respective roles in the educational games, leaving no students looking passive. Test results in the second cycle indicated that 80% of the students successfully achieved the KKM, with the class average score increasing to 85. This demonstrates a more significant improvement in student comprehension compared to the first cycle.

Reflections from the second cycle indicated that the use of educational games successfully enhanced students' motivation and comprehension of Islamic Religious Education material. Based on these results, it is recommended to continuously develop educational games as an effective learning method and to provide training for teachers in optimizing classroom management. From the overall execution of both cycles, it can be concluded that the implementation of educational games in PAI learning for third-grade elementary students is effective in improving student learning motivation and comprehension. The improvement in learning outcomes from the first cycle to the second cycle demonstrates the success of this method in creating a more engaging and interactive learning experience for students.

Table 1. Test Result Comparison

Activity	Number of Students	Average Score	Percentage of Students Achieving KKM (%)
Pre-Cycle	17	65	41% (7 students)
Cycle 1	17	75	60% (10 students)
Cycle 2	17	85	80% (14 students)

The table illustrates the progress of students' comprehension of Islamic Religious Education material before and after the implementation of educational games. In the pre-cycle stage, the students' average score was 65, with only 41% of the students (7 out of 17 students) achieving the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM). Following the implementation of educational games in the first cycle, the average score increased to 75, and the percentage of students achieving the KKM rose to 60% (10 out of 17 students). Subsequently, in the second cycle, with improvements in teaching methods and the application of more effective educational games, the students' average score further increased to 85, with 80% of the students (14 out of 17 students) successfully achieving the KKM. This data indicates that the gradual implementation of educational games is capable of enhancing students' comprehension of PAI material. The significant improvement in student learning outcomes indicates that the game-based learning method is effective in helping students understand the material better and boosting their academic achievement.

The results of this study indicate a significant improvement in the comprehension of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material among third-grade elementary school students following the implementation of educational games. This discussion outlines the main findings from each cycle, the comparative analysis of test results, and the implications of these findings for PAI instructional practices. From the test result comparison table, it is evident that the students' average scores experienced an increase from the pre-cycle to Cycle 2. The average score increased from 65 in the pre-cycle to 75 in Cycle 1, and reached 85 in Cycle 2. The percentage of students achieving the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) also showed a positive trend, rising from only 41% in the pre-cycle to 60% in Cycle 1, and reaching 80% in Cycle 2.

This improvement demonstrates that educational games successfully captured students' attention and boosted their learning motivation. With more interactive and enjoyable learning methods, students became more engaged in the learning process, which positively impacted their comprehension of PAI material. However, in the first cycle, despite the improvement, approximately 40% of the students had not yet achieved the KKM. This highlights the necessity for improvements in teaching strategies and classroom management to ensure that all students are actively involved. Observations during the implementation of the cycles showed that the classroom atmosphere became more interactive and enjoyable. Students appeared more enthusiastic and actively participated in learning activities. The use of educational games not only enhanced academic comprehension but also fostered a positive learning environment.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the implementation of educational games in third-grade elementary school Islamic Religious Education learning is effective in improving material comprehension and student learning motivation. The findings of this study provide an important contribution to the development of more innovative and relevant learning methods in the current educational era.

3.2. Discussion

The implementation of optimized Islamic Religious Education learning through educational games in the third grade of SDN 80 Kaur demonstrated significant results in improving student comprehension and learning motivation. Based on evaluation data, the class average score increased from 65 in the pre-cycle stage to 75 in the first cycle, and further increased optimally to 85 in the second cycle. Furthermore, the percentage of student learning mastery, referring to the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM), surged from 41% in the pre-cycle to 60% in the first cycle, reaching 80% by the end of the second cycle. This success proves that the educational game method is capable of transforming the learning process into a more interactive one, enabling students to internalize religious material better.

The internal mechanism driving this successful improvement is closely related to the transformation of the classroom atmosphere into one that is much more conducive and enjoyable, eliminating boredom caused by conventional lecture methods. Internal factors such as student enthusiasm and engagement developed naturally due to their direct involvement in game activities. Although approximately 20% of students were still found to be less focused and passive during the first cycle, improvements in classroom management and strategic adjustments in the second cycle successfully moved all students to participate actively, understand their respective roles, and eliminate bored behaviors during the learning process.

Educational games allow students to learn through direct experience, which aligns with constructivist learning theory (Hariyono et al., 2023). Students do not merely receive information passively but are also engaged in the process of knowledge seeking. This is consistent with previous research stating that interactive learning methods can enhance student motivation and engagement (Aeni, 2020; Usamah, 2024). In addition to improving comprehension and learning motivation, educational games also contribute to student character development. During the lear-

ning process, observations showed that students learned to cooperate, respect peers' opinions, and develop discipline while following game rules.

This character development is crucial in the context of religious education, where values such as cooperation and mutual respect are strongly emphasized. Thus, educational games function not only as a tool to comprehend learning materials but also as a medium to shape positive character in students (Sari, 2025; Solihah et al., 2026). Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations for future PAI learning practices are proposed, including increasing teacher training to effectively integrate educational games into the PAI curriculum, developing varied educational games to maintain student interest and accommodate diverse learning styles, and conducting periodic monitoring of the method's effectiveness to ensure that all students derive maximum benefit from the learning process.

The findings of this study align with constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of direct experience and social interaction in constructing students' knowledge (Arbadilah et al., 2025; Asrinawati et al., 2025; Oktaria & Waridah, 2026). Through educational games, students do not act as passive recipients of information, but rather as active subjects exploring religious concepts collaboratively (Miftahrudin & Bisri, 2026; Niwangtika & Nisak, 2026). This approach reinforces cognitive comprehension while supporting the internalization of positive character values, such as cooperation, discipline, and mutual respect among peers, which are essential in religious education.

When compared with previous studies, the results of this research reinforce similar findings regarding the effectiveness of interactive media in education (Andini et al., 2025; Nujum & Fadjar, 2026; Solihah et al., 2026). Previous research has generally indicated that the use of established educational games improves learning motivation, either at the secondary school level or through the utilization of digital applications. However, this study places special emphasis on practical implementation at the elementary school level by combining tangible classroom action cycle improvements with the mastery of daily worship materials.

The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on integrating educational games to overcome learning barriers concerning ablution (*wudu*) procedures in third-grade elementary school through a cyclical classroom action approach. This study successfully fills the empirical gap regarding the scarcity of in-depth studies holistically evaluating the transition of cognitive outcome improvements alongside the formation of religious character in early childhood using contextual game media aligned with the students' learning environment.

Critical analysis indicates a conceptual shift from rigid, teacher-centered religious instruction paradigms toward student-centered learning paradigms through the utilization of interactive media. This shift affirms that the success of religious education at the elementary level is insufficient when relying solely on rote memorization; rather, it requires an emotional bridge and joyful psychological experiences so that Islamic values can be appreciated and consciously practiced by learners in daily life.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to providing alternative, applicable learning strategies for teachers in facing the challenge of learning fatigue in the classroom. Alternative explanations indicate that without engaging media modifications, religious materials risk becoming merely theoretical knowledge devoid of functional meaning. Therefore, optimizing educational games becomes a strategic instrument that not only boosts academic achievement but also builds resilient student personality foundations.

The use of educational games has proven to be an effective, valid, and practical pedagogical solution in optimizing the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning in elementary schools. The successful improvement from the pre-cycle to the second cycle affirms that learning media innovation based on interactive activities is capable of bridging students' cognitive and affective needs, making the recommendation for its sustainable integration crucial for future educational quality development.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this study provide profound implications for the practice of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in elementary schools, particularly in transitioning conventional teaching methods into more interactive and student-centered approaches. First, the proven increase in motivation and cognitive comprehension through educational games implies that teachers need to consistently integrate interactive media whether physical board games or digital applications into daily lesson designs to create a dynamic and meaningful classroom atmosphere. Second, the shift from rigid lecture methods toward game activities demands that educators improve their classroom management competencies to ensure a conducive environment where the active participation of all students is accommodated, game rules are well understood, and learning fatigue is minimized. Third, the use of educational

games simultaneously creates a collaborative social interaction space that not only boosts academic achievement but also effectively fosters the development of students' positive character values, such as discipline, teamwork spirit, and mutual respect among peers.

4.2 Research Contributions

This research delivers significant and strategically valuable contributions from theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives for the world of education. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on the application of Constructivism Theory within the realm of elementary Islamic religious education, strengthening empirical evidence that the comprehension of religious values in early childhood is formed much more optimally through active involvement and hands-on experience. Empirically, this study successfully fills the empirical gap by presenting systematic, measurable, and comprehensive classroom action data regarding the effectiveness of specific educational game implementations on daily worship materials, namely ablution (*wudu*) procedures in third-grade elementary school. Meanwhile, from a practical and institutional policy dimension, the findings and recommendations from this research can serve as actionable guidance for PAI teachers and school policymakers in designing school-level curricula, developing digital- or game-based instructional modules, and formulating professional training programs for teachers within the framework of Game-Based Learning.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Research Limitations

Although this classroom action research successfully achieved its objectives in improving student motivation and comprehension, several limitations must be acknowledged and evaluated. First, the scope of the subjects in this study is relatively limited, involving only 17 students at a single elementary school (SDN 80 Kaur); thus, the findings cannot be broadly generalized to elementary school populations in other regions with different demographic and infrastructural characteristics. Second, the specific subject matter focus in this study is limited to ablution (*wudu*) procedures within the Islamic Religious Education subject; hence, the effectiveness of educational games on creed (*aqidah*), moral character (*akhlak*), or Islamic cultural history has not been deeply explored. Third, the implementation timeframe divided across two cycles is relatively short, meaning that measurements of the long-term impacts of educational game utilization on students' memorization retention and consistency in practicing worship in daily life could not be thoroughly observed.

5.2 Recommendation for Future Research

Based on these limitations, several important recommendations are proposed for future research development. First, for subsequent researchers, it is recommended to expand the subject scope by involving a larger sample size or conducting comparative studies across schools (both in madrasahs and public schools) to test the consistent effectiveness of educational games across various cultural backgrounds and learning facilities. Second, further research is also recommended to explore the application of educational game media to broader Islamic Religious Education topics, such as Islamic history, other branches of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqih*), or the introduction of praiseworthy morals. Third, future researchers are advised to employ a longitudinal study design to measure the long-term impact of educational game utilization on students' cognitive comprehension retention and sustainable religious character formation.

6. CONCLUSION

This classroom action research concludes that the use of educational games in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning for third-grade students at SDN 80 Kaur is proven to significantly optimize student learning motivation and cognitive comprehension. This is demonstrated by the gradual increase in students' test scores from the initial stage, through the first cycle, to achieving optimal results in the second cycle. This improvement is directly proportional to the surge in student mastery learning rates, which continuously increased from before the action until the end of the second cycle. The successful implementation of this interactive media proved effective in overcoming boredom caused by conventional lecture methods, boosting enthusiasm, and encouraging the active participation of all students during the learning process.

Beyond boosting academic achievement, the application of educational games also provides a positive contribution to students' character development and social interactions in the classroom. Through structured game activities, students actively learn to cooperate, discipline themselves to follow rules, and mutually respect peers' opinions.

These findings reinforce Constructivism Theory, which asserts that the internalisation of religious values and daily worship comprehension in elementary-aged children is formed more optimally through active involvement and enjoyable learning experiences. Overall, the findings of this study can serve as a practical reference for educators to integrate Game-Based Learning in designing innovative, interactive, and meaningful PAI instruction.

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CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Disma Kospita: Conceptualization, Writing - Original Draft, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Data Curation. Mus Mulyadi: Conceptualization, Writing - Review & Editing, Investigation.

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The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest regarding the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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