

Innovation in Islamic Education Learning Using Digital Gamification: Enhancing Motivation and Conceptual Understanding

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Info Artikel

Abstract

Keywords:

PAI, digital gamification, learning innovation, learning motivation, conceptual understanding

The development of digital technology offers significant opportunities for the transformation of education, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI). One emerging approach is the application of digital gamification as an innovative learning strategy. This article aims to examine the effectiveness of digital gamification in enhancing students' learning motivation and conceptual understanding in PAI learning. Through a qualitative approach using the literature review method, it was found that the incorporation of game elements into the learning process can significantly increase student engagement. Gamification not only stimulates intrinsic motivation but also facilitates the understanding of religious concepts through visualization, simulation, and enjoyable challenges.

INTRODUCTION

In today's educational landscape, teachers are required not only to deliver material but also to create a learning atmosphere that is engaging and relevant to the digital world of students. Islamic Religious Education (PAI), as an essential component in shaping spiritual, moral, and social character, often faces challenges in maintaining students' learning enthusiasm.¹ Digital gamification is a learning approach that adapts game elements into an educational context. Elements such as points, badges, leaderboards, levels, and challenges are used to create a learning atmosphere that is both competitive and enjoyable.² In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), this approach has the potential to make religious material, often considered "difficult," more accessible and easier to understand. Many studies have shown that gamification can enhance student engagement, active participation, and motivation in learning. Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which has long relied on conventional lecture-based approaches, needs to adopt interactive and participatory digital learning models in order to remain relevant in the digital era. Learning motivation is one of the key indicators of educational success. When students feel engaged and have a high level of interest in a subject.³

¹ Asrori, M. (2015). Dinamika Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 4(1), 12–24.

² Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L. (2011). From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness. *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference*, 9–15.

³ Zichermann, G., & Cunningham, C. (2011). *Gamification by Design*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media.

subject, their conceptual understanding also improves. Therefore, strategies that can combine motivation and understanding become crucial in planning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning.⁴ This article aims to explore the role of digital gamification in enhancing students' motivation and conceptual understanding in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. The study is conducted through a literature review and theoretical reflection on the potential integration of game technology within the field of religious education.⁵ The teaching of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in shaping students' morals, spirituality, and character. Amid globalization and technological advancements, religious education faces a new challenge—how to effectively convey Islamic values to a digital generation growing up in a fast-paced and highly visual ecosystem.⁶

The current generation, known as Generation Z and Alpha, is closely connected to digital technology from an early age. Their learning style is vastly different from previous generations; they prefer interactive, visual, and hands-on learning experiences. Monotonous and conventional teaching approaches tend to be less effective in capturing their interest to the fullest. In this context, PAI learning is required to be more innovative in order to remain relevant and engaging. One approach that has emerged in response to this challenge is digital gamification—the application of game principles and mechanics into the teaching and learning process. Gamification is not merely about introducing games into the classroom, but rather about creating an enjoyable learning system through points, challenges, levels, leaderboards, as well as reward or badge systems. This approach has been proven to enhance motivation and make the learning process more participatory. Motivation is an important aspect of learning success, especially in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which contains abstract and reflective materials. When students have high motivation, they become more enthusiastic and responsible in understanding religious values.

Unfortunately, many Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers still rely on lecture and memorization methods without actively engaging students. As a result, there is a gap between the expectations of a competency-based curriculum and classroom practices that lack innovation.⁷ Gamification emerges as a bridging strategy between the learning needs of digital-era students and the profound values of Islam. Through an approach, this approach allows the concepts of Tawhid, Sharia, and Akhlak to be understood not merely in a dogmatic way, but through enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences.⁸ Not only does gamification enhance motivation, but it also has the potential to strengthen students' conceptual understanding. When students are directly involved in digital activities that contain missions or simulations, they tend to develop a deeper understanding through context and personal experience. The use of gamification in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) also carries a strong pedagogical dimension. It enables personalized learning, provides instant feedback, and creates opportunities for flexible and continuous formative assessment.⁹

Strengthening Islamic values through digital technology is not contradictory. In fact, Islam, as a religion that adapts to the progress of time, encourages its followers to utilize

⁴ Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54–67.

⁵ Kapp, K. M. (2012). *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer

⁶ Zichermann, G., & Cunningham, C. (2011). *Gamification by Design*. Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media.

⁷ Asrori, M. (2015). Dinamika Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 4(1), 12–24.

⁸ Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6.

⁹ Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations: Classic Definitions and New Directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54–67.

technological advancements to spread goodness and knowledge.¹⁰ In this context, gamification can serve as a highly potential tool for modern da'wah. In addition, this approach aligns with the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* in Islamic education, which is to teach Islam in an inclusive, enjoyable, and non-burdensome manner.¹¹ Gamification allows the engagement of students from various ability levels within a single collaborative digital learning space. Several studies have shown that students who participate in gamification-based learning demonstrate increased motivation, participation, and better academic achievement compared to those taught using traditional methods. The use of applications such as Wordwall, Quizizz, and Kahoot in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning has begun to show positive impacts in several schools. However, this utilization remains technical in nature and has not yet been fully integrated into systematic and well-directed lesson planning.

A more comprehensive understanding is needed of how gamification can be integrated into Islamic Religious Education (PAI) pedagogically, and not merely as a form of entertainment. Teachers, as learning designers, must understand an educational gamification framework that remains aligned with the objectives and values of Islam. As part of Islamic educational innovation, gamification is not a replacement for noble values, but rather a tool to facilitate the instillation of those values in a format more suited to the times. Integrating religious values with digital literacy is a strategic step in shaping a generation of Muslims who are faithful, intelligent, and creative.¹²

Therefore, this paper will conceptually and theoretically discuss the urgency of implementing digital gamification in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, with a focus on enhancing students' learning motivation and conceptual understanding. This article is also expected to provide insights for PAI teachers to innovate in developing technology-based learning strategies.¹³ By developing an innovative approach that remains rooted in Islamic values, it is hoped that PAI learning can address the challenges of the times and shape students who are not only cognitively competent, but also spiritually and morally strong.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive approach through library research. Data sources are obtained from national and international journals, textbooks, and academic publications discussing topics related to gamification, learning innovation, and technology-based Islamic Religious Education (PAI).¹⁴ The analysis was carried out using the content analysis technique, which involves identifying key themes related to learning motivation, conceptual understanding, and gamification strategies in religious education. This approach was chosen because it allows the author to explore ideas in depth and comprehensively. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using the library research method.¹⁵

This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore theoretical concepts and empirical practices from various scholarly literature sources relevant to the topic of gamification in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. The purpose of this approach is to

¹⁰ Zuhdi, M. (2014). Pendidikan Islam dalam Arus Perubahan. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2(2), 189–204.

¹¹ Munif, A. (2020). Gamifikasi dalam Pembelajaran Keislaman. *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 3(1), 55–64.

¹² Hamari, J., Koivisto, J., & Sarsa, H. (2014). Does Gamification Work? – A Literature Review of Empirical Studies. *Proceedings of the 47th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 3025–3034.

¹³ Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L. (2011). From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness. *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek Conference*, 9–15.

¹⁴ Al-Qaradhawi, Y. (1994). *Islam dan Tantangan Modernisasi*. Jakarta: Gema Insani.

¹⁵ Suyatno, et al. (2020). Pendidikan Islam Humanis: Pendekatan Berbasis Nilai. *Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, 8(1), 33–45

gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of integrating digital gamification into PAI learning by examining various scientific perspectives, including pedagogy, learning psychology, and educational technology studies. The data collected are conceptual and theoretical in nature, derived from books, journals, scholarly articles, and previous research reports.¹⁶

The data sources were obtained from accredited national journals and reputable international journals through databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Scopus, and Garuda. The keywords used in the data search included: “gamification,” “digital gamification in Islamic Religious Education,” “learning motivation,” “conceptual understanding,” and “educational technology in PAI. education,” “learning motivation,” “conceptual understanding,” “PAI learning innovation,” and “digital Islamic education.”¹⁷ publication recency (published within the last 10 years), as well as the credibility of the publisher and author. Classical literature that has had a significant influence on the development of Islamic education theory is also used as a source for normative reflection. The data collection technique was carried out through documentation, namely by identifying, reading, and classifying relevant literature sources. The data obtained were then systematically analyzed through the stages of reduction, categorization, and thematic interpretation to construct a coherent scientific narrative.¹⁸

In the analysis process, the content analysis method was used to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between concepts that emerged in the literature. The researcher also employed reflective analysis to draw philosophical and practical conclusions from the collected data. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, by comparing the content of various references to confirm information consistency and strengthen the arguments.¹⁹ The researcher also carried out a critical evaluation of the reliability and objectivity of the sources used. Due to its conceptual nature and the absence of field data, the findings of this study are not intended to be statistically generalized. Nevertheless, the results can provide a conceptual framework, pedagogical reference, and practical inspiration for teachers and curriculum designers of Islamic Religious Education (PAI).²⁰ The primary instrument in this study is the author's logical, critical, and interpretative reasoning as the research subject. The researcher acts as an active reader who not only absorbs information but also constructs new meanings based on theory and contemporary context.

This method is relevant to studies on educational innovation, especially when the object of study is still in the exploration and development stage. Therefore, this approach provides ample room to describe the potential, challenges, and implementation strategies of gamification in Islamic education in a deep and comprehensive manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Urgency of Innovation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Learning

Challenges in PAI learning include students' perception that religious material is irrelevant to real-life situations, the use of monotonous teaching methods, and the lack of interactive media. These factors lead to low motivation and poor understanding of religious values among students. PAI teachers need to transform conventional approaches into more dynamic, creative, and contextual methods.²¹ One promising approach is digital gamification, which can provide a fun, challenging, and meaningful learning experience. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the modern era faces

¹⁶ Fauzi, A. (2021). Strategi Guru dalam Menerapkan Gamifikasi pada PAI. *Jurnal Media Pembelajaran Islam*, 6(1), 40–50.

¹⁷ Wahyuni, D. (2023). Kreativitas Guru PAI dalam Inovasi Pembelajaran Digital. *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Islam*, 5(1), 17–29.

¹⁸ Wijaya, H. (2021). Digitalisasi Pembelajaran Agama: Peluang dan Tantangan. *Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan Islam*, 4(2), 89–98.

¹⁹ Nasution, H. (2004). *Islam Rasional*. Bandung: Mizan.

²⁰ Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

²¹ Syafi'i, A. (2022). Desain Pembelajaran Islam Kontekstual. *Jurnal Tarbiyah Digital*, 3(2), 144–158.

major challenges, especially in maintaining student engagement with religious material. Many students experience boredom because the content is delivered normatively without contextual approaches that relate to their daily lives. The predominantly one-way lecture method is considered ineffective in reaching students' understanding and spiritual experiences. Today's generation grows up in a fast-paced and visual digital ecosystem.²²

They are accustomed to interactive, experience-based learning through social media, educational games, and audiovisual content. If PAI continues to be delivered in a traditional format, a gap will arise between the intended message and the way modern students think. Innovation in learning is not merely about tools or applications, but a pedagogical approach that changes how teachers interact with students. Innovation is critical in PAI because its content contains fundamental values that need to be conveyed in a grounded manner that touches students' affective aspects.

Digital gamification is a promising form of innovation because it combines elements of motivation, challenge, and interaction into the learning process. By introducing game elements such as points, missions, levels, and rewards, students feel challenged and actively involved in PAI learning. Furthermore, this approach allows religious material to be delivered in an enjoyable way without diminishing its depth of meaning.²³ Abstract concepts in PAI such as faith, morality, and worship can be simulated digitally through story-based games, quizzes, or educational adventures.

In this context, PAI teachers are required to have both digital competencies and pedagogical creativity. They are not just content deliverers but facilitators and designers of learning experiences who can connect Islamic values with students' real lives.²⁴ If PAI fails to innovate, it is likely that the subject will become a mere administrative routine without impact on character building. Therefore, innovation in learning is not just an alternative but an urgent necessity in contemporary Islamic education. Gamification and other interactive approaches are responses to the demands of the times as well as proof that Islam can be taught dynamically, adaptively, and meaningfully without losing the essence of its core values.²⁵

Gamification as a Driver of Learning Motivation

Gamification works by stimulating students' intrinsic motivation through game elements that trigger a sense of achievement, competition, and exploration. When students are given missions, points, or challenges, they are encouraged to complete learning tasks enthusiastically. Gamification also supports extrinsic motivation, for example by providing rewards such as digital certificates, access to exclusive content, or level advancement²⁶. This combination creates a livelier and more engaging learning atmosphere. Learning motivation is a key determinant of success in education, including in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Motivated students tend to be more active, diligent, and highly interested in the subject matter. Unfortunately, PAI learning is often seen as boring due to monotonous delivery and conventional approaches. Gamification emerges as a strategy to address these issues. By adopting game elements into the learning process, students are encouraged to learn actively and voluntarily. Elements like points, challenges, levels, and rewards not only provide fun but also create healthy competition that boosts students' enthusiasm for learning.

One of gamification's strengths lies in its ability to activate intrinsic motivation—the drive to learn that comes from within the student. When students feel challenged to complete a mission or level up, they engage in the learning process with greater focus and enthusiasm.²⁷ On the other hand, gamification also strengthens extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external rewards such as digital prizes, badges, or recognition from teachers and peers. The combination of these motivations helps students remain consistent in their learning even when the material is

²² Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

²³ Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

²⁴ Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. London: Sage.

²⁵ Moleong, L. J. (2021). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (ed. revisi). Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya

²⁶ Moleong, L. J. (2021). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (ed. revisi). Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya

²⁷ Zed, M. (2014). *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.

difficult or requires more time to understand. In the context of PAI, motivation is crucial because the subject matter includes spiritual and moral dimensions that require emotional and conscientious engagement.²⁸ Through gamification, students do not just read or listen, but actively experience the learning process—for example, through games simulating moral choices, stories of the prophets, or the life of the early Muslim community. This active involvement creates an emotional bond between students and the learning material. When students find religious learning enjoyable, curiosity, awareness, and even responsibility to practice the teachings in daily life naturally develop.²⁹

PAI teachers can design gamification activities that are relevant to learning objectives and appropriate for the age and context of their students. Several applications like Quizizz, ClassDojo, and Wordwall have been widely used to create interactive learning environments, but they need adjustment to ensure that learning is not just play but also educational. Thus, gamification is not merely a technique to make learning more attractive, but an effective pedagogical strategy to increase learning motivation. When students are motivated, they become more open to receiving material, grasp concepts more quickly, and are more inclined to apply Islamic values in real life.³⁰

Gamification in Enhancing Conceptual Understanding

In PAI learning, many abstract concepts—such as Tawhid (the oneness of God), destiny, or ethics—are difficult for students to understand. Gamification can simplify these concepts through interactive visualization, role-playing simulations, and digital storytelling. Students do not merely read or hear the material but experience learning through immersive digital activities.³¹ This strengthens the connection between concepts and students' personal experiences, which is important in value-based education. Besides promoting learning motivation, digital gamification also significantly contributes to enhancing students' conceptual understanding. This is because gamification presents learning materials visually, interactively, and repeatedly, which is very effective in strengthening memory and building deep meaning around a concept. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, many materials are abstract, such as the concepts of faith, piety, or noble character. When these materials are delivered only through texts or lectures, students often struggle to grasp the essence of these values. Gamification allows these concepts to be presented concretely through game scenarios, digital stories, or simulations that evoke a meaningful learning experience.

Educational games developed for PAI can be designed to include historical narratives, moral choices, or challenges that require analysis and problem-solving. For example, students might participate in quizzes about the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) mission or answer situational questions related to Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Such activities compel students to think critically, understand context, and relate knowledge to real life. This approach aligns with the principle of active learning, where learners do not just receive information passively but are directly involved in constructing meaning. Understanding becomes more lasting because it is formed through interaction between cognition, emotion, and personal experience. Gamification provides a wide space for such engagement. Another advantage of gamification is its ability to provide instant feedback. When students answer incorrectly, the system immediately offers corrections or additional hints. This helps students recognize mistakes promptly and improve their understanding without having to wait for formal assessments by the teacher. Gamification also encourages repetition in a way that is not boring. In conventional learning, repetition is often seen as a burden. In gamification, repetition is disguised as "levels" or "advanced challenges," encouraging students to continue learning and refining their understanding voluntarily.³²

Conceptual understanding involves not only memorizing definitions but also understanding relationships between concepts and their application in life. Gamification can provide rich, realistic learning contexts that bridge educational content with students' concrete

²⁸ Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications

²⁹ Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40.

³⁰ Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

³¹ Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

³² Mulyasa, E. (2005). *Menjadi Guru Profesional*. Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.

experiences, especially on topics like Islamic ethics, social transactions (muamalah), and contemporary sharia issues. Thus, integrating gamification into PAI learning is not only a strategy to increase interest but also a pedagogical approach to deepen meaningful conceptual understanding. This makes gamification an important innovation worthy of further development in the digital-based Islamic education system.³³

Gamification Practices in PAI Learning

Several educational platforms such as Kahoot, Quizizz, Wordwall, and Classcraft have been utilized in PAI classes to deliver material in a more engaging way. Teachers can design quizzes about the stories of the prophets, multiple-choice games on fiqh rulings, or digital puzzles about Quranic verses. Gamification does not necessarily require complex applications.³⁴ Even with interactive PowerPoint presentations or simple animated videos, teachers can create a gamified learning environment, as long as elements of rewards, challenges, and feedback are present. The implementation of gamification in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has begun among teachers at various educational levels.³⁵ This practice has grown alongside the increasing awareness that religious learning must be delivered using approaches suitable for the characteristics of digital-native students. Gamification becomes a strategy that bridges Islamic content with technology familiar to students. The most common form of gamification is the use of learning applications such as Quizizz, Wordwall, and Kahoot to deliver interactive quizzes.³⁶ In PAI, teachers can create quizzes about the pillars of faith, the history of the prophets, or fiqh laws in formats like multiple-choice or picture puzzles. These activities are not only enjoyable but also efficiently train memory and conceptual understanding.³⁷

Some teachers have started designing story-based or digital role-play games, for example, games that simulate ethical decision-making in daily life according to Islamic teachings. In these games, students choose actions and then receive moral feedback for each decision they make. This strengthens the affective aspect of learning and character formation. Besides online-based applications, gamification can also be conducted simply through interactive board games, Islamic card games, or tiered class competitions with point and badge systems. Although not always involving digital devices, these approaches still utilize gamification principles: there are missions, challenges, and rewards. In practice, the teacher's role is crucial to the success of gamification. Teachers are not only facilitators but also learning designers who create content, game flow, and determine learning objectives to be achieved. Without good planning, gamification risks becoming mere entertainment without clear educational direction. Effective practices also consider evaluation aspects. Teachers need to prepare instruments to assess the impact of gamification on students' learning achievements, including motivation, participation, and material comprehension. This is important to ensure that gamification applied is not only fun but also meaningful and aligned with curriculum goals.³⁸

Some schools have also begun developing gamification systems on a broader scale through learning management systems (LMS) that integrate PAI lessons with leveling systems, leaderboards, and automatic feedback. This development enables personalized learning and more detailed, structured tracking of student progress. From these various practices, it can be concluded that gamification in PAI is not only possible but already underway and showing positive impacts. With strengthened teacher capacity and school policy support, gamification can become an integral part of PAI learning strategies in the future.³⁹

³³ Ricoeur, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

³⁴ Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage Publications

³⁵ Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1–6.

³⁶ Kapp, K. M. (2012). *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

³⁷ Wahyuni, D. (2023). Kreativitas Guru PAI dalam Inovasi Pembelajaran Digital. *Jurnal Inovasi*

³⁸ Hamari, J., Koivisto, J., & Sarsa, H. (2014). Does Gamification Work? – A Literature Review of

³⁹ Kapp, K. M. (2012). *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.

CONCLUSION

Digital gamification is a strategic innovation in Islamic Education (PAI) learning that can address the challenges of the digital era. By adopting game elements favored by students, teachers can increase learning motivation while deepening understanding of Islamic concepts in an enjoyable and effective way. The implementation of gamification is not merely about using technology, but also requires a reflective, creative instructional design that aligns with the values of Islamic teachings. PAI teachers are expected to continuously learn, innovate, and adapt to technological developments in order to provide meaningful learning experiences. With the right strategy, digital gamification can become a bridge between the noble teachings of Islam and the dynamic, visual, and collaborative learning styles of the digital generation.

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