

The Implementation of Game-Based Learning in Islamic Education: A Conceptual Review and Analysis of Effectiveness

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the implementation and effectiveness of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The study employs a qualitative method using a literature review approach, involving the collection of data from various books, scientific journals, research articles, and relevant academic documents. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis by examining and interpreting various concepts and research findings related to the application of Game-Based Learning in PAI instruction. The results indicate that GBL is an innovative learning approach capable of creating an interactive, enjoyable, and student-centered learning environment. The implementation of GBL in Islamic Education has proven effective in enhancing learning motivation, interest in learning, student engagement, and understanding of religious concepts. Additionally, the use of educational games—both digital and non-digital can also develop 21st-century skills such as creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking. Nevertheless, the implementation of GBL still faces several challenges, such as limited technological resources and teachers' lack of competence in designing game-based learning materials. Therefore, adequate resources, teacher creativity, and effective instructional management are necessary to ensure that the implementation of Game-Based Learning in Islamic Education runs optimally and meaningfully.

Keywords: Game-Based Learning; Islamic Religious Education; literature review; innovative learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a systematic process aimed at developing students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and character. In contemporary educational development, the success of learning cannot be measured solely by students' ability to memorize material; it must also take into account their engagement in the learning process, conceptual understanding, and ability to apply knowledge. Advances in digital technology encourage educators to design learning experiences that are more interactive, participatory, and aligned with instructional objectives. In this context, Islamic

Religious Education (PAI) has unique characteristics because it is oriented not only toward the mastery of religious knowledge but also toward the formation of moral character and the practice of Islamic values. Therefore, innovations in PAI instruction must strike a balance between cognitive achievement, the development of attitudes, and the application of religious values in daily life.

One of the challenges in teaching Islamic Education is linking conceptual understanding of Islamic teachings with learning experiences that encourage students' active engagement. Instruction dominated by one-way explanations has the potential to limit students' opportunities to explore the material, engage in discussion, and receive feedback if it is not balanced with participatory activities. Nevertheless, the lecture method cannot automatically be considered ineffective, as its success depends on the objectives, content, and teaching strategies. The main issue is how teachers select an approach that can accommodate the characteristics of Islamic Education content while providing students with opportunities to understand and apply religious concepts. Thus, learning strategies are needed that not only capture students' attention but also support the measurable achievement of learning objectives.

One approach that can be used to meet these needs is *Game-Based Learning* (GBL), a learning approach that utilizes games as part of instructional design to achieve learning objectives. Prensky (2001) discusses the use of digital games as a learning approach that integrates game elements with educational content. However, the effectiveness of GBL cannot be adequately assessed based solely on the level of enjoyment or interest among students. A meta-analysis by Barz et al. (2024) shows that *digital game-based learning* interventions have a positive effect on overall learning outcomes, with varying effect sizes on cognitive, affective-motivational, and metacognitive outcomes. These findings indicate that the impact of GBL needs to be analyzed based on the dimensions of learning outcomes being measured, not merely based on the use of games in learning activities.

GBL can be implemented through both digital and non-digital games, such as interactive quizzes, card games, puzzles, simulations, and group challenges. In Islamic Education (PAI) instruction, these activities can be used to explore concepts of faith, the history of Islamic civilization, the rules of reciting the Qur'an, and ethical issues requiring moral judgment. Zainuddin et al. (2023), for example, developed game-based learning media for Islamic Education (PAI) content and assessed the feasibility, practicality, and effectiveness of these media. This study indicates that the development of educational games for PAI has become part of efforts toward learning innovation. However, the use of applications such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, Wordwall, or Genially does not in and of itself constitute a comprehensive implementation of GBL. The use of these applications must be evaluated based on instructional objectives, game rules, challenges, feedback, and the relevance of the activities to the material being studied. This distinction is important so that the analysis focuses not only on the technology used but also on the quality of the instructional design.

Research on game-based learning shows that outcomes can vary depending on game characteristics, subject matter, and the indicators used. Flemman (2024), through a systematic review of 25 empirical studies on digital games, identified various game characteristics associated with cognitive outcomes, attitudes, and behavior. The review also explains that learning progress can be assessed through in-game feedback systems, player activity data, or pre- and post-learning tests. Meanwhile, Li et al. (2024) show that gamification is associated with increased intrinsic motivation as well as perceptions of autonomy and social connectedness, but its impact on perceptions of competence is relatively limited. Although GBL and gamification are distinct concepts, both studies emphasize the importance of differentiating between instructional design, learner experiences, and the intended learning outcomes. Therefore, evaluating the effectiveness of GBL requires considering the alignment between game characteristics and learning objectives.

In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), research on the implementation of GBL has also expanded. Septiani and Jamaludin (2025) conducted a literature review on the implementation of GBL in Islamic Education (PAI) courses during the 2023–2024 period. The study explored the

potential of GBL to enhance student engagement, understanding of religious material, and critical thinking skills. In addition, Septiani (2025) discussed the relevance of GBL in PAI learning through a literature review and case studies at a number of Islamic educational institutions. These studies show that GBL has gained attention as an alternative learning strategy for PAI. However, the existence of previous studies also calls for further research to explain its distinct contributions, rather than merely repeating descriptions of the benefits of games and the use of digital applications.

The research gap addressed in this article lies in the need to connect three aspects that are often discussed separately: game design characteristics, dimensions of learning effectiveness, and the unique nature of Islamic religious education objectives. Studies on the effectiveness of GBL generally identify changes in learning outcomes, while studies on the application of GBL in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) describe the use of games in specific subject matter. However, to produce a more focused conceptual understanding, these findings need to be synthesized by considering the relationship between game mechanisms and the types of competencies intended to be developed. For example, quiz games can help test recall of religious terms or facts, but they may not be sufficient to develop the ability to reason about moral issues, understand the meaning of Islamic values, or apply them in daily life. These differences highlight the need for an analytical framework that does not equate improved test scores with the achievement of all Islamic Religious Education learning objectives.

Based on this gap, the novelty of this study lies in the development of a conceptual synthesis that links GBL design, dimensions of effectiveness, and the characteristics of Islamic Education learning objectives. The synthesis was conducted by examining how game elements—such as challenges, rules, feedback, and interaction—relate to learning outcome indicators, which include content understanding, motivation, engagement, and the interpretation of religious values. This study also considers factors that support and limit implementation, including the alignment of games with the subject matter, teacher readiness, student characteristics, and the availability of resources. Through this approach, the research not only summarizes previous findings but also seeks to develop an analytical framework that can be used to assess the alignment between game design and Islamic Education learning objectives. This novelty represents a conceptual contribution that must be developed through a systematic process of literature selection, comparison, and synthesis.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze the implementation of *Game-Based Learning* (GBL) in Islamic Religious Education through a conceptual review and synthesis of previous research findings regarding its effectiveness. This study focuses on the characteristics of GBL implementation, the dimensions of reported learning outcomes, the alignment of game design with Islamic Religious Education learning objectives, and the factors that support and limit its implementation. The research findings are expected to provide a theoretical contribution in the form of an analytical framework for a more targeted understanding of GBL's effectiveness, as well as a practical contribution in the form of guidance for teachers in selecting and designing game activities that align with Islamic Religious Education (IRE) content and learning objectives.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method using a library research approach through an integrative literature review to analyze the implementation of Game-Based Learning (GBL) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction and its effectiveness based on previous research. Data sources included empirical research articles, scientific journals, academic books, systematic reviews, and relevant meta-analyses. The literature search was conducted via Google Scholar, ERIC, Garuda, and DOAJ using the keywords “Game-Based Learning,” “Islamic Religious Education,” “Islamic Religious Education,” “learning effectiveness,” and “learning outcomes.” Literature was selected based on its relevance to the research focus, the clarity of methodological information, and its contribution to the study of GBL in learning. Publications from 2021–2026 were prioritized to obtain an overview of the latest research developments, while classic sources

were used to strengthen the conceptual foundation. The selection process involved reviewing titles, abstracts, and full texts. Data collection was conducted through documentation, recording the authors, year of publication, research objectives, game design, effectiveness indicators, key findings, and research limitations. An integrative literature review approach was used to systematically synthesize findings from various types of publications (Snyder, 2019; Whitemore & Knafl, 2005).

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis through the stages of coding, grouping information, comparing findings, and interpretation (Bowen, 2009; Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis focused on three aspects: the characteristics of GBL implementation; the dimensions of learning effectiveness, which include cognitive outcomes, motivation, engagement, and understanding of religious values; and the factors supporting and hindering its application in Islamic Education (PAI). Findings from various studies were compared to identify patterns, similarities, differences, and research gaps. The validity of the study's results was ensured through an examination of source credibility, a comparison of findings across studies, and transparent documentation of the analysis process. If the literature review is conducted systematically, the report may follow the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). The results of the analysis are then presented in the form of a narrative synthesis to explain the relationship between game design, indicators of effectiveness, and PAI learning objectives without generalizing the results of specific studies to the entire learning context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Concepts and Characteristics of Game-Based Learning in Islamic Education

The results of the conceptual review indicate that Game-Based Learning is a learning approach that incorporates games into instructional design to achieve specific learning objectives. In this approach, games serve not only as a form of entertainment but also as a learning environment that enables students to interact with the material, face challenges, receive feedback, and evaluate the outcomes of their actions. Prensky (2001) explains the use of digital games to support the learning process, while Plass et al. (2015) emphasize that game-based learning must be understood through the interrelationship between cognitive, behavioral, affective, and sociocultural aspects. Thus, the success of GBL cannot be assessed solely based on visual appeal or student enjoyment but must also be evaluated based on its contribution to the achievement of learning objectives.

The key characteristics of GBL include clear game objectives, rules, challenges, interactions, feedback, and task-completion mechanisms. These elements can help students understand the consequences of their decisions, correct mistakes, and try different strategies. Plass et al. (2015) explain that game elements can support the learning process through cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social engagement. These findings reinforce the view that game design needs to integrate pedagogical elements with game mechanics. Conversely, the use of points, badges, and leaderboards alone is not sufficient to demonstrate a comprehensive implementation of GBL.

Distinguishing between GBL and gamification is also important in the analysis of Islamic Education (PAI) learning. Deterding et al. (2011) define gamification as the use of game design elements in a non-game context. In GBL, games serve as the primary environment or activity for achieving learning objectives, whereas gamification can incorporate game elements into learning activities that continue to take place in a non-game format. This distinction is relevant when teachers use apps such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, Wordwall, or Genially. The use of these apps can only be evaluated based on their instructional design, not merely on the app's name or features.

In Islamic Education (PAI) instruction, the characteristics of GBL must be adapted to the objectives and nature of the material. Quizzes can be used to assess conceptual understanding; matching games can help students connect terms with their meanings; and simulations and case scenarios can be used to discuss the application of Islamic values in specific situations. Saskiah (2023) discusses the use of GBL to strengthen the learning process in Islamic Religious Education. Meanwhile, Zulkefli and Jamil (2024) examine the principles, impacts, and barriers to implementing

GBL in Islamic education. Both studies highlight the importance of aligning game design with the principles of Islamic education, rather than simply adopting popular learning technologies.

Based on this synthesis, GBL in Islamic Education can be understood through three interrelated components: game design, the learning process, and educational objectives. Game design encompasses rules, challenges, and feedback. The learning process encompasses participation, discussion, problem-solving, and reflection. Meanwhile, educational objectives include understanding religious material as well as the ability to interpret and apply Islamic values. These three components form the basis for a more comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of GBL.

Analysis of the Effectiveness of Game-Based Learning in Islamic Education

The results of the literature synthesis indicate that the effectiveness of GBL needs to be analyzed based on several dimensions, particularly cognitive learning outcomes, motivation, student engagement, and understanding of the material. A key finding in the international literature comes from the meta-analysis by Barz et al. (2024), which reported a moderate positive effect on overall learning outcomes ($g = 0.54$) and cognitive outcomes ($g = 0.67$). The effect on affective-motivational outcomes was smaller ($g = 0.32$), while metacognitive outcomes showed no significant effect. These findings suggest that GBL has the potential to support learning achievement, but its impact is not uniform across all dimensions of learning.

These findings are consistent with the meta-analysis by Wouters et al. (2013), which found that educational games yielded better learning outcomes and knowledge retention than conventional instruction in the studies reviewed. However, the study did not find significant differences in motivation between the two approaches. Wouters et al. also found that educational games tend to yield better learning outcomes when combined with other teaching methods, used over multiple sessions, and involve group work. This comparison suggests that the effectiveness of GBL does not stem solely from the game elements but also from how the games are integrated with learning strategies.

In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), these findings have important implications. Quiz games can help students remember terms, understand basic concepts, and receive immediate feedback. However, mastery of religious facts does not necessarily indicate the ability to understand the meaning of Islamic values or apply them in daily life. Therefore, indicators of effectiveness must be differentiated based on the type of competency to be achieved. In the Qur'an and Hadith curriculum, for example, teachers can assess the accuracy of students' understanding and application of concepts. In the ethics curriculum, evaluation should include case studies, the reasoning behind decision-making, and student reflection.

A special study on Islamic Education (PAI) by Septiani and Jamaludin (2025) identified the potential of GBL to increase student engagement, strengthen understanding of religious material, and foster critical thinking skills. A study by Zulkefli and Jamil (2024) also discussed the potential of GBL to increase enthusiasm and academic achievement in Islamic education, while identifying limitations in resources, curriculum alignment, and the need for teacher competency development. Both studies reinforce the relevance of GBL in the context of Islamic education. However, since neither study constitutes a controlled experiment covering all levels and subjects of Islamic Education (PAI), the findings are better suited to illustrating potential and patterns of implementation rather than to concluding universal effectiveness.

Thus, the results of the study indicate that the effectiveness of GBL in Islamic Education must be evaluated based on the relationship between learning objectives, game mechanics, and the outcome indicators used. Increases in motivation, test scores, and participation are distinct outcomes. An improvement in one indicator does not automatically prove an improvement in the others. An assessment that distinguishes between these aspects can provide a more accurate picture of the benefits of GBL while avoiding overly broad claims.

Implementation of Game-Based Learning in Islamic Education

Effective implementation of GBL requires interconnected instructional planning, game execution, and evaluation. During the planning stage, teachers need to determine the competencies to be achieved, learner characteristics, content, game formats, and success indicators. This stage is important because games suitable for testing memory are not necessarily suitable for training reasoning or moral reflection. Plass et al. (2015) explain that game design for learning must take into account the interrelationships between cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social processes. Therefore, game selection should be based on instructional objectives, not merely on the popularity of the app.

During the implementation phase, teachers can use both digital and non-digital games according to learning needs. Card games, puzzles, group quizzes, and board games can be used without relying entirely on electronic devices. Meanwhile, digital applications can provide immediate feedback and make it easier for teachers to identify answers that students have not yet understood. Zainuddin et al. (2023) examined the development of GBL media for Islamic Education (PAI) content, while Syifaurrehman et al. (2025) discussed the integration of information technology and GBL through the use of Zep Quiz. These studies reveal a variety of ways games are applied in religious education. However, the use of technology must still take into account device access, network availability, and teacher readiness.

After the game is played, teachers need to evaluate the learning process and outcomes. Evaluation may include comprehension tests, observations of participation, group discussions, reflections, and assignments that apply the concepts. Combining several forms of evaluation is important because game scores provide only limited information about the competencies being assessed. For example, a high quiz score may indicate mastery of specific material, but it is not sufficient to conclude that students have internalized the values of honesty, responsibility, or compassion. In the context of Islamic Education, teachers need to distinguish between knowing a value, understanding the reasoning behind it, and demonstrating its application in real-life situations.

The findings of Wouters et al. (2013)—that educational games yield better results when combined with other teaching methods—support the use of GBL as part of a learning sequence, rather than as a standalone activity. Teachers can begin a lesson with a brief explanation, follow it with a game, and then conclude the activity with discussion and reflection. This structure gives students the opportunity to test their understanding through games and deepen their understanding of the material through discussion after the game is over.

Thus, the implementation of GBL relevant to Islamic Education is not merely about incorporating quizzes into instruction, but rather about designing learning experiences that connect games with understanding and reflection. The teacher's role remains crucial in guiding discussions, correcting misconceptions, and ensuring that competition does not overshadow the educational goals. Games should serve as a means to achieve competencies, not the ultimate goal of learning.

Factors Supporting and Hindering the Implementation of GBL

The results of the literature review indicate that the implementation of GBL is influenced by the appropriateness of game design, teacher competence, student characteristics, and the availability of resources. Zulkefli and Jamil (2024) identified resource constraints, curriculum alignment, and the need for professional development as barriers to the implementation of GBL in Islamic education. These findings are consistent with those of Septiani and Jamaludin (2025), who also highlighted resource constraints and technological readiness in Islamic education (PAI). Both studies indicate that successful implementation depends not only on the availability of applications but also on teachers' ability to integrate games into the learning process.

Another factor to consider is the suitability of the game for the characteristics of the subject matter. Material that emphasizes the introduction of terms, facts, or sequences of events is relatively easy to integrate with quizzes and matching games. Conversely, material that requires moral reasoning, contextual understanding, or religious reflection calls for more complex designs, such

as case studies, simulations, and structured discussions. These differences represent conceptual implications that need to be further tested through empirical research. Games that are effective for one type of content cannot automatically be considered effective for all PAI content.

In addition, the competitive element must be managed appropriately. Points, rankings, and rewards can increase students' engagement, but an excessive emphasis on winning can divert their focus from understanding the material. Sailer and Homner (2020), through a meta-analysis on gamification in learning, demonstrated that the impact of game elements must be assessed based on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral outcomes. Since gamification differs from GBL, these findings cannot be directly applied to all forms of educational games. However, the study supports the need to evaluate the function of each game element, rather than assuming that all elements always provide the same benefits.

To overcome these obstacles, teachers need to design games aligned with learning objectives, provide non-digital alternatives, offer clear instructions and feedback, and facilitate reflection after the game. Schools can also support implementation through teacher training and the provision of appropriate resources. These strategies can help ensure that GBL remains focused on educational goals, including the development of understanding and attitudes relevant to Islamic Education (PAI) learning.

Synthesis of Findings and Conceptual Novelty of the Research

Based on a review of the literature, there are three main patterns in the application of GBL. First, GBL has the potential to support cognitive learning outcomes through activities that require students to recall, understand, and apply information. Second, games can increase engagement through challenges, interactions, and feedback, although increased motivation does not always correlate with improved learning outcomes. Third, the effectiveness of GBL depends on how well the game design aligns with instructional objectives and the characteristics of the content. These patterns align with the findings of Barz et al. (2024), Wouters et al. (2013), and Sailer and Homner (2020). However, the results of studies on gamification need to be distinguished from those on GBL because the two have different design characteristics.

In Islamic Education (PAI) instruction, these three approaches must be interpreted with the goals of religious education in mind. Games that help students master religious facts or concepts do not necessarily lead to a deep understanding of moral values and their application. A study by Zulkefli and Jamil (2024) emphasizes the importance of aligning GBL with the pedagogical principles of Islamic education, while Syifaurrahmah et al. (2025) discuss the integration of technology and games in Islamic Education (PAI) instruction. Both studies support the importance of game design that is relevant to the content and context of Islamic education.

Based on this synthesis, this article proposes a conceptual analytical framework consisting of three dimensions. The first dimension is game design, which includes objectives, rules, challenges, interactions, and feedback. The second dimension is the learning process and outcomes, which include cognitive understanding, motivation, engagement, and reflection on the material. The third dimension is alignment with Islamic Education (PAI) objectives, which includes an understanding of Islamic teachings and the ability to connect religious values to real-life contexts. This framework is a proposed synthesis to guide the evaluation of game-based learning (GBL); it is not a model that has been empirically validated.

The conceptual contribution of this study lies in establishing the alignment between game design, effectiveness indicators, and Islamic Education learning objectives as the basis for analysis. This framework can help teachers and researchers distinguish between a game's success in improving test scores and its success in supporting learning that fosters understanding and reflection on religious values. However, the validity of this framework still needs to be tested through further research, particularly studies that compare various types of games, PAI materials, and learning outcome indicators.

The findings indicate that GBL is worth considering as an alternative strategy for Islamic Education instruction, but its effectiveness cannot be generalized to all contexts. Its implementation must be accompanied by instructional planning, the selection of appropriate games, diverse forms of assessment, and reflection following the play activities. With this approach, games can serve as a means to support the achievement of learning objectives, rather than merely making learning activities more engaging.

CONCLUSION

Game-Based Learning (GBL) has the potential to be an innovative learning approach in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) because it can increase student engagement, support understanding of the material, and create an interactive learning experience. Based on a literature review, the effectiveness of GBL is influenced by how well the game design aligns with learning objectives, the characteristics of the subject matter, and the needs of students. In PAI instruction, the success of GBL cannot be measured solely by student enthusiasm or test scores; it must also take into account students' understanding of Islamic values and their ability to apply these values in daily life.

The implementation of GBL must be supported by teacher competence, the availability of resources, and appropriate evaluation strategies. Teachers need to integrate games with material explanations, discussions, reflections, and assessments so that the learning process remains focused on achieving educational goals. This study offers a conceptual framework that links game design, dimensions of effectiveness, and the characteristics of Islamic Education learning objectives. However, since this study is based on a literature review, further research through empirical testing is needed to measure the effectiveness of GBL across different subject matter, educational levels, and learning conditions.

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