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**Game-based learning: Strengthening Islamic religious education learning process**

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**ABSTRACT**

A pleasant situation in the learning process is one of the things that must be considered in the implementation of the learning process, including in Islamic Religious Education subjects. The implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning at SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon has been running smoothly but is still experiencing deficiencies in terms of student involvement. Therefore, efforts need to be made by teachers to increase student involvement. One effort that can be made is to use the game-based learning method, or game-based learning carried out through the smart snakes and ladders game, so that students are more enthusiastic and active in participating in the learning process. This article aims to describe the form of reinforcement carried out in Islamic Religious Education subjects wrapped in educational games using Islamic smart snakes and ladders games. This game involves cognitive and psychomotor skills that go hand in hand with concentration and questions about Islamic Religious Education learning materials. Students are asked to participate in the game of snakes and ladders and answer questions given by the teacher based on the flow of the game. Efforts to strengthen the subject of Islamic Religious Education with the game-based learning method using Islamic smart snakes and ladders are proven to be able to create a happy atmosphere for students, so that they are enthusiastic about participating in the learning process actively and responsively.

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**ABSTRAK**

Situasi yang menyenangkan pada proses pembelajaran merupakan salah satu hal yang harus diperhatikan dalam pelaksanaan proses pembelajaran, termasuk dalam mata pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam. Pelaksanaan pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam di SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon telah berjalan dengan lancar namun masih mengalami kekurangan dari sisi keterlibatan peserta didik. Maka dari itu, perlu dilakukan upaya yang dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa oleh guru. Salah satu upaya yang dapat dilakukan adalah dengan menerapkan metode Game-based Learning atau pembelajaran berbasis permainan yang dilakukan lewat permainan ular tangga pintar sehingga para peserta didik lebih bersemangat dan aktif mengikuti proses pembelajaran. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan bentuk penguatan yang dilakukan pada mata pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam yang dibalut dengan permainan edukasi menggunakan permainan ular tangga pintar islami. Permainan ini melibatkan kognitif dan psikomotor peserta didik yang berjalan beriringan dengan konsentrasi dan pertanyaan-pertanyaan seputar materi pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam. Peserta didik diminta untuk berpartisipasi dalam permainan ular tangga dan menjawab pertanyaan yang diberikan oleh guru berdasarkan alur permainan. Upaya penguatan pada mata pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam dengan metode Game-based Learning menggunakan ular tangga pintar islami ini terbukti dapat menciptakan suasana gembira bagi peserta didik, sehingga peserta didik antusias mengikuti proses pembelajaran secara aktif dan responsif.

**Kata Kunci:** Antusiasme belajar; gamifikasi; pembelajaran berbasis permainan; permainan edukasi; ular tangga.

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a process that involves interactions between educators and students. In Indonesia, the implementation of education has become a mandate of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, 1945. The Indonesian government's policy requires every citizen to pursue education (Hafidz, 2018). To fulfill this mandate, various learning models and methods can be utilized to facilitate the educational process. However, education in Indonesia is not exempt from challenges and issues that must be addressed, particularly during this transitional period following the pandemic (Lestariyanti, 2020). Many students have expressed feelings of boredom with the learning environment, which previously took place through distance learning, and this has been proven to cause a decline in students' enthusiasm for learning (Putri & Nur, 2022; Rahiem, 2020). This situation has led to online learning processes receiving less attention from students, compounded by post-COVID-19 recovery conditions, resulting in the phenomenon of learning loss (Nugraha, 2022).

Ideally, learning should provide students with enjoyable experiences (Raztiani & Permana, 2019). Creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere is one of the essential aspects that must be considered in implementing the learning process (Hazmi, 2019). Teachers, as the primary facilitators of the learning process, need to make efforts to implement creative learning alternatives that can be applied to create an enjoyable atmosphere during classroom learning activities, including through the development of learning media using gamification methods (Afifah et al., 2019; Mar'atusholihah et al., 2019; Widiana, 2019; Lutfi et al., 2021). Research conducted by Anggraini et al. (2021) titled "Implementation of HOTS-Based Mathematics Learning Media with the Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL) Method in Elementary Schools," stated that interactive learning processes can motivate students to become more active, create an enjoyable atmosphere, and foster spaces for the development of students' talents, interests, and creativity that support their psychological well-being, and that such efforts should consistently be pursued by all parties within the school environment, particularly teachers.

Teachers can utilize various combinations of media and learning methods to create diverse and engaging learning environments, thereby enhancing students' motivation to learn (Arianti, 2018). Learning tools or media are crucial aspects in the educational process, providing stimulation that supports students' intellectual, physical, mental, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual development (Fatimah et al., 2023). The aspect of learning methods also significantly influences the implementation of learning practices (Nasution, 2017). This significant influence necessitates that the media and methods used in the learning process be adapted to students' abilities to ensure they can continue learning effectively (Ramli, 2015). The implementation of diverse learning models is expected to create different and more enjoyable experiences for students (Marlaili, 2022). By creating an enjoyable atmosphere, it is anticipated that students will derive greater satisfaction from their learning process. The cheerful atmosphere created by teachers is expected to increase students' enthusiasm, fostering sustained motivation throughout the learning process. This learning process is not limited to distance learning systems but also applies to conventional face-to-face learning as part of adaptation efforts in post-COVID-19 learning practices.

*Game-based learning refers to the utilization or application of games for more serious purposes, including educational objectives. In this context, the educational objectives are intended to provide helpful assistance as educational tools within all possible learning processes (Winatha & Setiawan, 2020). The game-based learning method is highly favored due to its engaging nature and its ability to stimulate curiosity, particularly among elementary school students (Kusuma et al., 2022). Game-based learning can lead both students and teachers toward enjoyable learning experiences, where students encounter various types of instructions and game rules that must be followed. This game-based learning method has also been proven to increase students' motivation in learning activities (Kurniawan et al., 2022), capture attention (Taka, 2019), and create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere (Anggraini et al., 2021). This is because the method has been shown to foster competitiveness, confidence, the ability to grasp lessons*

quickly, enthusiasm, and to reduce the emotional burden felt by students, as the nature of games is perceived to be more enjoyable, providing a relaxed impression and containing immersiveness (Sakdah *et al.*, 2022). According to Newman, the immersive nature of a game refers to the subject's emotions or feelings that generate a desire to be involved or participate in the game (Laurentia & Haryadi, 2021). Moreover, the game-based learning method can also begin with understanding the rules and mechanics of a game and then relating these rules and mechanics to scientific concepts relevant to the game (Wijaya *et al.*, 2021).

This interactive method of game-based learning is ideal for use at the early childhood education level, elementary school level, and even at the junior high school level, as today's students often easily become bored, particularly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, during which learning was conducted online. One example is at UPTD SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon, which was one of the target schools for the Kampus Mengajar Batch 5 program. The Kampus Mengajar program is part of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative, which focuses on community service in education by directly involving university students in the implementation of learning activities in schools (Komara & Hadiapurwa, 2023).

The game-based learning method can contribute to creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere, particularly in Islamic Religious Education subjects. Although the learning implementation at UPTD SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon had been running well previously, further efforts from teachers were still needed to enhance student engagement in the learning process. As previously stated, learning through the game-based learning method can provide students with enthusiasm and new experiences. Additionally, this method can create an enjoyable learning environment for students throughout the learning process..

One of the efforts that can be carried out by the Kampus Mengajar student team at UPTD SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon is the use of the game-based learning method through the Snakes and Ladders game. The implementation of educational games, such as the snakes and ladders game, has also been previously conducted by Syaikhu *et al.* (2022), as stated in their research. The results of the study indicated that the Snakes and Ladders game method applied to elementary school-aged students in learning mathematics subjects proved to be effective. This effectiveness was demonstrated by a percentage of 97.26%, as determined from the questionnaire results distributed to the students. The aspect of effectiveness primarily refers to the increase in students' learning motivation and the enhancement of their enthusiasm for learning. It was also mentioned that there was an increase in the percentage from the learning condition without the game method to after its implementation. The difference was evident in the percentage increase from 76.38% to 85.78%, indicating an improvement in learning effectiveness of nearly 10%. As a comparison with the aforementioned study, which also utilized the game-based learning method through the Snakes and Ladders game, this community service activity focuses on implementing the game-based learning method in the form of the Snakes and Ladders game in the Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam) subject.

Several aspects need to be considered in learning based on the educational snakes and ladders game. These aspects include motivation, interactivity, and entertainment, ensuring that the role of educational games as a learning medium remains aligned with the learning objectives to be achieved (Rahma & Nurhayati, 2021). These aspects will later influence the learning outcomes of the students, reflected in the increase or decrease of their grades. The influence of motivation on learning activities can enhance students' abilities and skills, and assist them in solving problems both individually and within groups. Additionally, the entertainment aspect contained within the game also aims to transform the feelings of boredom and drowsiness experienced during classroom learning into enthusiasm and high concentration.

Learning that utilizes the educational snakes and ladders game as a medium can increase students' engagement and learning outcomes. Moreover, the snakes and ladders game is more student-friendly and easily accessible during the learning process (Novita & Sundari, 2020; Anam & Priharto, 2021), particularly in this case within the Islamic Religious Education subject. The Islamic smart snakes and ladders game

serves as an effort to enhance the learning process for students at UPTD SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon, allowing them to experience an enjoyable learning environment. Furthermore, it can increase students' enthusiasm and participation in their learning activities. Therefore, based on the background described above, this article aims to illustrate the form of reinforcement conducted in the Islamic Religious Education subject, presented through an educational game utilizing the Islamic smart snakes and ladders game. Thus, the output or objective of this community service activity is to demonstrate the impact of applying the game-based learning method through the snakes and ladders game in the Islamic Religious Education subject and how it influences students' learning enthusiasm at UPTD SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon.

## METHODS

The method employed in this community service activity is Classroom Action Research (CAR). By using this method, the Kampus Mengajar student team can conduct observations and determine the efforts that can be taken to address the problems encountered in the implementation of learning activities. The types of data collection techniques used include observation, classroom action, and documentation. The data were sourced from learning activities conducted outside the classroom but still within the scope of the Islamic Religious Education subject through observation and documentation.

The classroom action data collection technique is a scientific activity carried out by an individual responsible for a group of learners by providing actions aimed at enhancing the capacity and professionalism of the relevant parties (Azizah, 2021). In this community service activity, the classroom action technique was implemented in preparing an implementation schedule, focusing on two sessions per week, which was carried out in conjunction with the researcher's program within the Kampus Mengajar Batch 5 activities. This was integrated into classroom learning through several actions, such as providing students with questions and imposing consequences when they answered questions incorrectly.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Strengthening the Learning Process of Islamic Religious Education Through the Islamic Snakes and Ladders Game on Students' Learning Enthusiasm**

The community service activity was conducted in the environment of UPTD SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon, Cantigi sub-district, Indramayu regency. This service activity was conducted over a six-month period, from February to July 2023. This activity represents an implementation of one of the programs initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia, namely the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, with one of its sub-programs being the Kampus Mengajar program. This program was implemented as part of the government's effort to strengthen and promote the application of its newest curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum. The community service activity was conducted in parallel with the implementation of the individual literacy program work of the Kampus Mengajar Batch 5 team.

The participants or target group in this individual literacy program were students within the relevant age group, as part of the implementation of this community service activity. A total of 60 students participated in the core activity of the Islamic snakes and ladders educational game. In its implementation, a schedule was arranged to conduct the game sessions twice a week. This was done due to the high enthusiasm of the students who were eager to try the Islamic Snakes and Ladders game-based learning method. One of the reasons the researcher initiated this program work using the game-based learning method through the Islamic snakes and ladders game was that the results of observations and analyses conducted by the researcher showed that most students from grades 3 to 6 were no longer attending religious schools, which were typically held from midday to the afternoon.

As with the general rules of Snakes and Ladders, players in this Islamic version of the game consist of four or more players. The difference in this Islamic snakes and ladders game lies in the fact that each player had their team formed to assist and answer each question periodically provided by the facilitator according to the square occupied by the student during the game. In its implementation, 50% of the students were able to answer questions related to religious knowledge. However, they were able to listen and pay attention to their peers answering questions so that when it was their turn, those who were initially unable to answer could be assisted by focusing and understanding each question they encountered. The students were required to answer the given questions, and if they could not, they would receive a sanction in the form of reading short surahs from the Qur'an and then attempting to answer the previous question until it was answered correctly. Furthermore, each student could directly face the problems and challenges presented, allowing them to practice problem-solving and take responsibility for the decisions they made. These decisions included answering questions, discussing them with their team members, taking responsibility for the sanctions received for incorrect answers, and other related actions.



**Figure 1.** Implementation of the Smart Islamic Snakes and Ladders Educational Game in Grade 4  
*Source: Author's Documentation 2023*

The activity depicted in **Figure 1** above was participated in by 29 grade 3 students, conducted on Friday during the break between scout extracurricular activities, and was divided into five teams.



**Figure 2.** Implementation of the Smart Islamic Snakes and Ladders Educational Game in Grade 3  
*Source: Author's Documentation 2023*



**Figure 3.** Implementation of the Smart Islamic Snakes and Ladders Educational Game in Grade 5  
*Source: Author's Documentation 2023*



**Figure 4.** Implementation of the Smart Islamic Snakes and Ladders Educational Game in Grades 3 and 4  
*Source: Author's Documentation 2023*

The implementation of problem-solving, as illustrated in **Figures 2, 3, and 4**, has had a positive impact on the students, enabling them to receive early education in simple conflict management skills. Furthermore, the application of problem-solving itself has honed the students' abilities and skills to become trustworthy leaders who are capable of resolving problems swiftly. In addition, based on the analysis, it was found that the aspect of material comprehension during the learning process also demonstrated positive results among the students, as indicated by their ability to explain the material to their peers in a manner that was easily understood and absorbed. Therefore, discussions within teams and decision-making processes have become benchmarks for the successful implementation of problem-solving skills among students through the Smart Islamic Snakes and Ladders learning media. Over time, the students have been able to sharpen their skills in understanding questions and gradually improve their problem-solving abilities, which have shown noticeable differences.

Several challenges were encountered by the researcher during the implementation of this game-based learning program, including insufficient preparation, such as the absence of a structured schedule for each class's participation in the Islamic Snakes and Ladders game learning activity. This issue was also caused by the students' enthusiasm, which exceeded the researcher's expectations, thereby necessitating the arrangement of a participation schedule to accommodate the students' enthusiasm and ensure that as many students as possible could experience enjoyable learning through this activity.

## Discussion

The implementation of the game-based learning method through the Islamic version of Snakes and Ladders proceeded effectively. The aspects conveyed during the learning practice were retained by 50% of the students. These aspects included learning enthusiasm, material comprehension, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. These aforementioned aspects were successfully instilled within the students to a considerable extent. Among these, the aspect that showed the most significant improvement compared to the students' previous conditions at SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon was their learning enthusiasm. Previously, the students at SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon did not receive Islamic religious education, resulting in a decline in learning motivation for the majority of them. However, after the dissemination of information regarding the planned implementation of an Islamic snakes and ladders game-based learning program, the majority of the students expressed their interest in participating, even though the program was conducted during their days off.

When compared to the findings of previous research titled "Development of Electronic Snake and Ladder Mathematics Learning Media in Game-Based Learning," conducted in 2022 by Syaikhu *et al.* (2022), several differences can be observed. These differences lie in the percentage levels of students' learning motivation. In the aforementioned study, the percentage of students' active responses and enthusiasm reached 97.26% as evidenced by questionnaire results. In contrast, the success rate of increasing students' enthusiasm in this community service program reached 50%. However, both percentages similarly indicate that learning programs utilizing educational games have been proven effective in enhancing students' learning motivation.

Based on the explanation above, it can be understood that the outcomes generated from this community service program through Islamic Religious Education learning at SDN Cantigi Kulon 2 include a notable improvement in the students' self-confidence, aligning with the findings of Francisca *et al.* (2020), which state that the educational snakes and ladders game can serve as an alternative method for increasing students' self-confidence. Additionally, this game also enhances students' learning motivation, as highlighted in several other studies that describe an increase in students' learning motivation when using game-based learning methods (Jones *et al.*, 2019; Marcella *et al.*, 2022).

It is expected that such efforts will continue to be pursued by the school to create an enjoyable learning environment while ensuring that learning activities align with the existing curriculum as the transition from online to offline learning progresses in the future.

## CONCLUSION

The pandemic, which has persisted for nearly four years, particularly in Indonesia, has caused significant changes across all sectors of life, including the education sector. The COVID-19 pandemic provided all parties within the educational environment, from educators to students, with a new experience in the form of distance learning. As the spread of the virus has now decreased, distance learning is being gradually replaced by face-to-face learning systems. With this change, both educators and students need to adapt to learning habits that were previously carried out differently over a prolonged period. In light of this, it is necessary to renew and adjust the learning system through more advanced and relevant learning methods so that students can regain their enthusiasm for learning across all subjects, particularly in Islamic Religious Education. One of the learning methods that educators can implement is the game-based learning method, which can be achieved through the Islamic version of the game of Snakes and Ladders.

Overall, the implementation of the game-based learning method, or learning through the Islamic version of Snakes and Ladders, proceeded smoothly and was proven to increase the learning enthusiasm of the majority of students at SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon. The learning process in Islamic Religious Education, which had previously been halted and led to a lack of student engagement, was addressed by integrating the

Islamic Snakes and Ladders game method during the reimplementation of learning activities. Consequently, the Islamic Religious Education learning process at SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon proceeded more effectively, accompanied by an increase in both student enthusiasm and their understanding of the subject matter in Islamic Religious Education.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author affirms that the data and content of this article are free from plagiarism.

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