



SCOPING REVIEW: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DIGITAL GAME-BASED LEARNING IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Putri Regina Meiliya Sari¹, Abdul Muhid²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, Surabaya
Correspondence Email: putrireg28@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the implementation of digital Game-Based Learning in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and its contribution to the development of students' critical thinking skills. The background of this study stems from the need to create interactive, engaging, and technologically relevant learning experiences. This research adopts a scoping review approach, analyzing 23 selected articles based on inclusion criteria through a search strategy on Google Scholar. The analysis categorizes findings into five main focus areas: impact on critical thinking, effectiveness of digital platforms, enhancement of interest and motivation, use of interactive media, and challenges and opportunities in implementation. The results indicate that the implementation of Game-Based Learning can enhance students' active participation, learning interest, and critical thinking skills. Platforms such as Kahoot, Quizziz, Wordwall, and visual media like Canva and game-based digital modules have proven effective in supporting meaningful learning processes. However, challenges such as limited access to technology and teachers' readiness remain obstacles. The discussion emphasizes that game-based learning strategies hold significant potential for improving the quality of IRE in the digital era. Therefore, future research is recommended to explore the long-term effects of Game-Based Learning on students' analytical and problem-solving skills across various subjects.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the digital age, the field of education faces a significant challenge in equipping students with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of modern life. Critical thinking skills have become increasingly essential, given the overwhelming flow of information and the growing demand for accurate data analysis and evaluation. One innovative approach that has emerged in response to these challenges is game-based learning, which is designed to enhance students' active participation in learning while simultaneously fostering their critical thinking abilities (Muhid, 2021). Game-based learning is an enjoyable instructional model that utilizes game-based approaches to deliver educational content. This model places a strong emphasis on student engagement in the learning process (Barz et al., 2024). However, it also presents challenges, such as dependence on technology and limited access for certain students. Furthermore, not all members of Generation Z share the same learning preferences, making it necessary to tailor this approach to individual needs.

Various studies have demonstrated that the implementation of digital game-based learning holds significant potential for improving learning outcomes and critical thinking skills. For instance, the use of PowerPoint-based educational games has been shown to be effective in enhancing Islamic Religious Education learning outcomes among third-grade elementary students compared to conventional methods (Hamka et al., 2023). Additionally, game-based learning media for Islamic Religious Education has proven to be valid, practical, and effective in increasing student engagement, comprehension, and learning outcomes (Zainuddin et al., 2023). The use of Islamic-themed smart board games has also been found to enhance student engagement, concentration, and enthusiasm in Islamic Religious Education classes (Saskiah, 2023).

Game-based learning is not only effective in boosting student engagement, but also plays a strategic role in shaping a morally upright generation through the integration of religious values, Pancasila, culture, and national education—achieved through teaching approaches, role modeling, and habituation (Kulsum & Muhid, 2022). Furthermore, the Think-Pair-Share (TPS) method has been shown to be significantly more effective than conventional teaching methods in enhancing university students' critical thinking skills in Islamic studies, as supported by statistical evidence (Kurjum, Muhid & Thohir, 2020). These findings strengthen the notion that the use of innovative learning strategies can make a tangible contribution to the development of students' critical thinking skills.

The impact of game-based learning on student activity and achievement has also been widely noted. This method, when applied as an alternative teaching solution in heterogeneous classrooms, has been shown to improve learning effectiveness (Pranata, 2023). Moreover, this learning model has demonstrated positive effects on student activity and achievement (Putri et al., 2024; Wiseza et al., 2023). In Qur'anic learning, the implementation of game-based learning has been shown to improve student learning outcomes at TPQ Raudhatul Qur'an Tungkop, Aceh Besar (Rahmayanti, 2023).

The use of digital applications in game-based learning continues to evolve significantly. One example is the use of the Kahoot application as a digital game-based learning medium in

the Islamic Cultural History subject, which has proven effective in increasing student participation and learning outcomes (Samudera, 2020). Furthermore, the implementation of digital educational quiz media has also shown a positive impact on improving student academic achievement in the current digital era (Awalia & Mustafa, 2024).

Based on these findings, this study aims to conduct a scoping review to evaluate the effectiveness of digital game-based learning in enhancing students' critical thinking skills. This research will map and analyze existing literature on the topic to inform the design of more relevant and responsive learning strategies that address students' needs. It is expected that the results of this review will provide meaningful contributions to educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers in developing more effective, engaging, and digitally aligned instructional methods suited to the characteristics of today's generation.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a scoping review, a literature review method aimed at identifying and mapping the available evidence related to a specific topic. This method was chosen to explore the scope and characteristics of research concerning digital game-based learning and students' critical thinking skills within the context of Islamic religious education. Data sources were obtained from a range of relevant journal articles, undergraduate theses, and conference proceedings.

The literature search strategy was conducted through academic databases, particularly Google Scholar, using a combination of the following keywords: (critical thinking OR problem solving OR analytical thinking) AND (game-based learning OR game-based) AND (digital OR electronic) AND (Islam OR Islamic Religious Education OR PAI). The search process and inclusion criteria are outlined in Table 1 and data were screened in accordance with the process illustrated in Figure 1.

Tabel 1. Kata Kunci Pencarian Literatur

<i>Critical Thinking</i>	AND	<i>Game Based Learning</i>	AND	Digital	AND	Islam
OR		OR		OR		OR
Problem Solving		Game-Based		Elektronic		Islamic Religious Education
OR						OR
Analytical Thinking						PAI

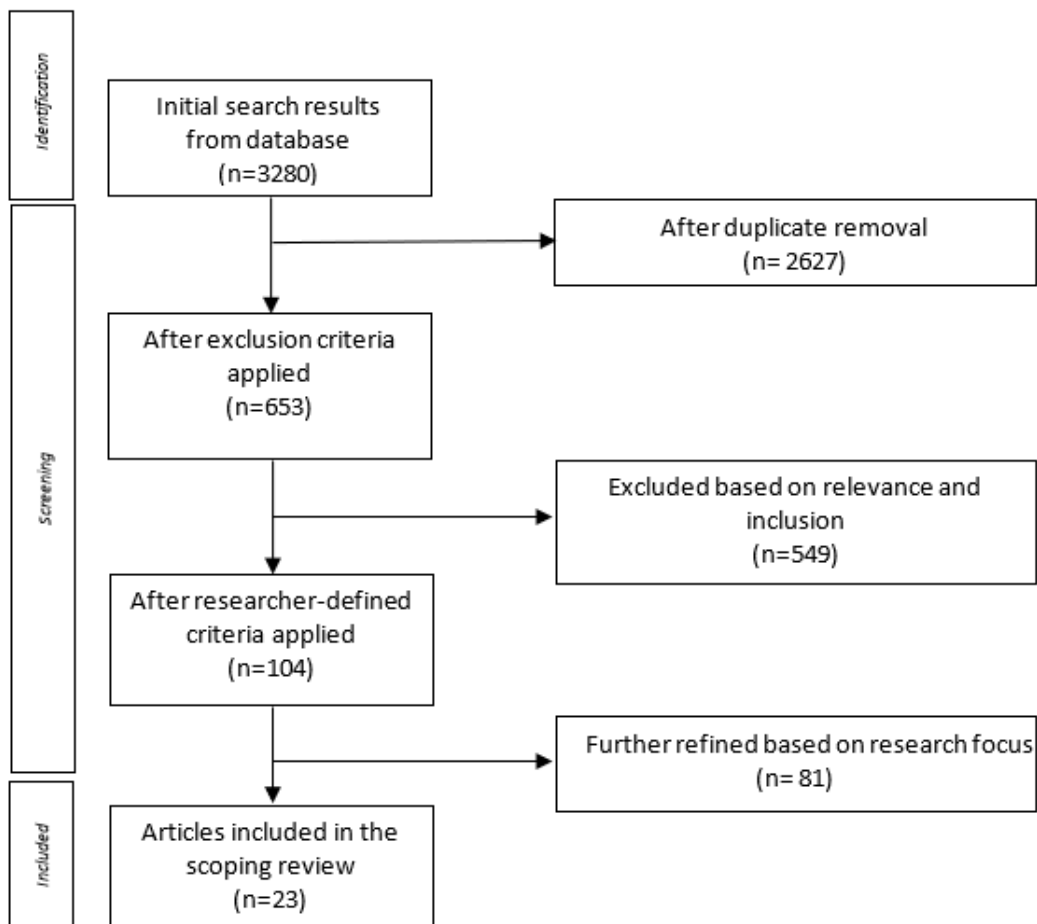


Figure 2. Literature Selection Based on PRISMA

A total of 23 articles were analyzed through an in-depth data extraction process from each source. The analysis technique involved identifying patterns across findings, comparing results from previous studies, and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of implementing game-based learning in developing students' critical thinking skills. This analytical process aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of digital game-based learning in enhancing students' critical thinking abilities. The findings were then synthesized into a systematic narrative.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Based on the selection process conducted in this study, a total of 23 articles were identified as relevant to the research topic, as summarized below:

Table 2. Mastery of Learning Outcomes – Pretest Results

[1] The implementation of the game-based learning method through the Ular Tangga Pintar Islami educational board game in Islamic Religious Education at SDN 2 Cantigi Kulon has been proven to enhance student engagement, enthusiasm, and active responses during the learning process. This educational game effectively integrates cognitive and psychomotor aspects, thereby creating a more enjoyable and interactive learning environment that supports the holistic achievement of learning objectives. (Saskiah, 2023)	[2] The implementation of the game-based learning model using the board game "Snakes and Ladders" in Islamic Religious Education at SD Negeri 21 Kota Pagar Alam has proven effective in increasing student motivation and learning outcomes. The study results showed a significant improvement, with 80% of students achieving scores above the Minimum Mastery Criteria in the second cycle of implementation. (Yarida et al., 2024)
[3] The implementation of game-based learning in Islamic Religious Education at SMPN 35 Semarang through various educational games has been proven effective in developing the 4C+S skills, namely Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication, Collaboration, and Spirituality. This approach not only encourages students to think critically and creatively but also equips them with confident communication skills, active collaboration, and strengthened spiritual awareness. (Lisa & Muthohar, 2024)	[4] This study revealed that the implementation of a digital game-based learning model using Kahoot in Islamic Religious Education at SMA Negeri 15 Bandar Lampung did not show significant effectiveness in increasing students' learning interest. Based on statistical test results, no meaningful difference was found between the experimental and control groups, indicating that the use of Kahoot in this context has not yet been able to provide a better impact on students' learning motivation. (Novitriani et al., 2024)
[5] The development of a game-based learning method in the Islamic Religion course at a vocational higher education institution using Thiagarajan's 4D model has proven effective in increasing student engagement. Validation results from experts and field trials demonstrated that this approach encouraged students to be more enthusiastic, actively participate in discussions, and be confident throughout the learning process. (Muluk & Athaillah, 2023)	[6] This study demonstrates that the implementation of the Game-Based Learning method in Islamic Religious Education at SMPN 3 Waru successfully improved student achievement. Compared to the conventional lecture method, which tends to be monotonous, the use of educational games such as "hide and seek answer" proved more effective in enhancing students' motivation and learning outcomes. The results showed a significant increase in the mastery level, from 57% in class VIII D to 93% in class VIII E. (Rahmatullah & Sukmawati, 2024)

[7] The use of the Kahoot application in evaluating Islamic Religious Education at SMA Negeri 2 Padang has proven effective in increasing student interest and facilitating teachers in the evaluation process. Despite some challenges in its usage, this application remains an innovative alternative for digital-based learning assessment. (Ma'ruf & Alfurqan, 2022)	[8] This study examines the effectiveness of Game-Based Learning in Islamic Religious Education at SMP PGRI 2 Balikpapan. The method has been proven to enhance students' understanding, motivation, and social skills through the use of digital quizzes and simulations. However, the main challenges identified were technological limitations and the need for adequate teacher training. The recommendations include improving technological facilities, providing teacher training, and fostering closer collaboration with students' parents. (Fitriana & Yusuf, 2025)
[9] The use of the Game Marbel Muslim Kids in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has been proven effective in creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere, improving students' understanding, and making the learning process more engaging and interactive (Aini & Muhid, 2022).	[10] This study analyzes the influence of digital game-based learning media on the learning motivation of early childhood education (PAUD) students in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Perumahan Kalegowa Block C 17. Using a correlational quantitative method, the results indicate a significant effect, albeit only 1.5%. Other factors that may affect learning motivation were not further explained in this study (Ashadi, 2024).
[11] The development of game-based learning media in Islamic Religious Education has been proven valid, practical, and effective in enhancing students' understanding. Moreover, the implementation of this media succeeded in making the learning process more engaging and less monotonous for students (Zainuddin et al., 2023).	[12] This study analyzes the use of Kahoot as an evaluation tool in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Swasta An-Nizam Medan. The use of Kahoot was proven effective in creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere, increasing student interest, and facilitating teachers in conducting interactive evaluations (Azmi & Kasduri, 2023).
[13] This study developed an educational game, Arabic Muslim Adventure (AMA), for learning Arabic vocabulary using the Research and Development (RnD) 4D model. The results indicate that AMA is highly feasible for use, with expert media assessment scoring 97.64%, expert material assessment at 97.14%, and student response reaching 89% (Hastani et al., 2024).	[14] This study examined the effect of digital game-based learning media on the Arabic language learning interest of 10th-grade students at MA Miftahul Huda. Using an experimental method, regression analysis results showed a significant influence of 89.6% (Afaria, 2020).

[15] This study demonstrated that the use of PowerPoint-based game learning media can improve learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) among 3rd-grade students at SD Negeri 294 Lempa. The results showed that the experimental class achieved an N-Gain Score of 59.40 (categorized as fairly effective), while the control class only scored 38.16 (ineffective) (Hamka et al., 2023).	[16] This study developed Al-Quran Hadith learning media based on Canva and Quizizz at SMP IT As-Sajadah Pekanbaru. The results showed that this media was effective in increasing students' interest, motivation, and understanding, as well as receiving positive responses from the students (Sari et al., 2024).
[17] Game-based learning at Madrasah Aliyah Perguruan Mu'allimat has been proven to improve students' understanding, interest, and cooperation in the subject of Islamic Cultural History. However, the implementation of this method still faces several challenges, particularly related to limited time and technology (Nisa et al., 2025).	[18] This study examines the use of interactive Wordwall in the evaluation of Islamic Religious Education at SD N 17 Gurun Laweh. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the results show that Wordwall is effective in increasing student engagement during evaluations. However, there are still some challenges in its implementation (Zalillah & Alfurqan, 2022).
[19] Game-based learning makes Arabic language learning more engaging, interactive, and effective by encouraging active student participation. This approach has been proven to enhance students' comprehension, speaking skills, and learning motivation through creative and collaborative educational games (Kuswoyo, 2024).	[20] Game-based learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has been proven effective in developing students' creativity. This classroom action research demonstrated a significant increase in students' creativity and motivation after participating in two cycles of game-based learning. This approach provides an interactive and enjoyable learning experience and serves as an innovative alternative to enhance the effectiveness of PAI learning in schools (Hajroh & Subhi, 2023).
[21] The use of educational games such as Kahoot and Quizizz in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMPN 1 Krian has increased students' motivation, understanding, and participation. This implementation creates an effective and interactive learning experience that is relevant to the digital era (Abdillah et al. 2024).	[22] The use of a digital module based on Game-Based Learning has proven effective in increasing student engagement in Al-Qur'an Hadith learning at MTs Terpadu Berkah Palangkaraya. This research, which employed the Research and Development (R&D) method using the 4D model, showed a 95.8% increase in student activity, making this digital module an innovative alternative for learning in the digital era (Saputri & Jasiah, 2024).
[23] Game-based learning has great potential to enhance students' motivation and understanding in Islamic Religious Education. This study produced an interactive and engaging educational game that can be used as an effective learning media (Septiani, 2025).	

DISCUSSION

The implementation of digital game-based learning has a positive impact on the development of students' critical thinking skills across various subjects, including Islamic

Religious Education (PAI) and the Arabic language. This learning approach enables students to actively participate in the learning process by integrating engaging and challenging game elements. Digital game-based learning can enhance students' critical thinking skills by encouraging them to analyze, evaluate, and solve problems within an interactive and enjoyable environment [1][3][6][8][21]. As Redjeki (in article [6]) states, this approach can optimize learning when combined with appropriate teaching materials. Learning environments designed to resemble games provide experiences that are not only cognitively stimulating but also emotionally engaging. When students are involved in challenging game scenarios, they are motivated to explore various strategies, consider the consequences of each action, and make decisions based on available information— all of which are essential components in the development of critical thinking.

The interactivity offered by media such as Kahoot, Quizizz, or Wordwall provides additional benefits by increasing students' motivation and participation during the learning process [7][12][16][21]. These platforms allow teachers to create a competitive yet enjoyable learning atmosphere, which boosts students' enthusiasm. As one study indicates, interactive tools can enhance student engagement by making learning both enjoyable and educational, fostering a deeper connection with the material [7]. Furthermore, interactivity facilitates immediate and adaptive learning through direct feedback. Research has shown that when students receive instant results on their answers, they are better able to identify mistakes, reflect on their decisions, and refine their understanding [16]. This reflective process accelerates the learning cycle and strengthens critical thinking skills continuously, as it encourages students to think critically about their learning choices. Moreover, students learn to take responsibility for their own learning process, as they are not merely passive recipients of information but actively involved in knowledge construction through well-designed digital game dynamics, which enhances their autonomous learning skills [12][21].

However, the effectiveness of this method is not always uniform. Some studies indicate that the implementation of digital game-based learning is ineffective in improving critical thinking skills if the design is poor or focuses solely on entertainment without clear integration of learning objectives. As one report suggests, when digital tools are not carefully aligned with educational goals, their effectiveness in fostering critical thinking is diminished, leading to minimal learning outcomes [4]. For instance, a study on the use of Kahoot in PAI learning at SMA Negeri 15 Bandar Lampung found no significant difference between the experimental and control classes, suggesting that digital media alone is insufficient to develop critical thinking without appropriate teaching strategies. Furthermore, other studies highlight implementation challenges such as limited technology access, insufficient teacher training, lack of curriculum integration, and resistance to changes from traditional teaching methods. These obstacles can hinder the potential benefits of digital game-based learning, as evidenced in multiple research findings that emphasize the importance of proper infrastructure and support for both educators and students [8][17].

The effectiveness of game-based learning also depends heavily on the students' education level. At the elementary school level, digital game-based learning tends to be

more successful in enhancing students' motivation and interest rather than deeply developing critical thinking skills [2][10][15][18]. As some studies indicate, at this stage of development, children's metacognitive abilities are still in early stages, making it more challenging to engage them in complex critical thinking tasks [2]. Learning at this level focuses more on reinforcing basic conceptual understanding, fostering enjoyable learning habits, and introducing moral and religious values through engaging and fun approaches. It has been observed that the use of games can effectively enhance engagement and promote positive attitudes toward learning, but its impact on deep critical thinking remains limited [10]. Therefore, game-based learning at the elementary level primarily serves as a tool for introducing and habituating thinking processes rather than as a main instrument for training complex analytical skills, as it provides a more accessible and engaging environment for foundational learning [15][18].

At the secondary and tertiary education levels, game-based learning shows much greater potential in developing students' critical thinking abilities. This is due to the enhanced cognitive and metacognitive capacities that allow students to engage in deep reflection, identify cause-effect relationships, and construct logical arguments based on data or context [5][9][11][22]. As research has shown, these levels of education are characterized by greater cognitive maturity, which enables students to tackle more complex tasks that involve critical analysis and reasoning [5]. At these levels, game-based learning is often more effective when combined with problem-based learning or project-based learning approaches, as both require active student involvement in solving real-world problems that demand logical reasoning, alternative evaluation, and decision-making. Studies have highlighted that such combinations lead to deeper engagement and stronger critical thinking development [9]. Thus, game-based learning functions not only as a supplementary tool but also as a crucial element in strategies aimed at developing higher-order thinking skills, enhancing students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and make informed decisions in various contexts [11][22].

Regarding the design of learning media, researchers have employed various approaches. Some studies develop specialized game applications such as Marbel Muslim Kids or Arabic Muslim Adventure, specifically designed to improve religious concept understanding and critical thinking skills in the context of Islamic education [9][13]. As one study suggests, these tailored applications can enhance subject-specific knowledge while simultaneously fostering critical reflection on key concepts [9]. Meanwhile, other research emphasizes the use of widely accessible digital platforms like Kahoot, Wordwall, and Quizizz to support student interactivity during teaching and learning processes [7][12][18]. These platforms, though more general in nature, are effective in promoting student engagement and facilitating active participation, which are essential for critical thinking development. The choice of media also influences the achievement of learning objectives, where games featuring adaptive elements and varying cognitive challenges have proven more effective in encouraging critical thinking. It has been observed that games with built-in adaptability allow students to progress at their own pace, offering the right balance of challenge and skill development [12].

Digital game-based learning can support the development of students' critical thinking skills; however, its effectiveness greatly depends on several supporting factors such as meaningful instructional design, appropriate media selection, teacher readiness in managing digital learning, and adequate technological infrastructure at schools. Research indicates that when these factors are aligned, the learning process becomes more impactful, leading to better critical thinking outcomes [7][18]. Additionally, the teacher's role is vital in facilitating reflective discussions after game activities so that students can externalize their thinking processes and understand the connection between the game and the targeted competencies. Studies highlight that teachers who guide post-game reflections significantly improve students' ability to articulate their thought processes and connect game-based learning with real-world problem-solving [13][18].

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of digital game-based learning has been proven to enhance students' critical thinking skills, particularly in concept-based subjects such as Islamic Religious Education. Various digital platforms, including Kahoot, Quizizz, and Wordwall, have demonstrated their effectiveness in increasing students' interest, motivation, and active participation in the learning process. Additionally, the use of interactive media such as Canva and game-based digital modules contributes to enriching the learning experience, making it more enjoyable and meaningful. Despite challenges in implementation, such as limited access to technology and teacher readiness in utilizing digital media, this study confirms that game-based learning holds significant potential for developing students' critical thinking skills in the digital era. Future research is recommended to explore the long-term impact of game-based learning on students' analytical abilities and problem-solving skills across various subjects.

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