

Implementation Of Game Based Learning Strategies To Improve Student Understanding In PAI Learning At Cowek II Elementary School

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Abstract: This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of Game Based Learning (GBL) in improving students' understanding of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects at SDN Cowek II. The research method used is qualitative with data collection techniques through observation and in-depth interviews. Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and verification. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of the GBL strategy is able to create an interactive and enjoyable learning atmosphere, and encourage students to be more active and confident in understanding religious material. This strategy not only improves the cognitive aspect, but also has a positive impact on the affective and social aspects of students.

Keywords: Implementation; Game Based Learning; Student Understanding; Islamic Religious Education.

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas penerapan *Game Based Learning* (GBL) dalam meningkatkan pemahaman siswa terhadap mata pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di SDN Cowek II. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi dan wawancara mendalam. Analisis data menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan strategi GBL mampu menciptakan suasana belajar yang interaktif dan menyenangkan, serta mendorong siswa untuk lebih aktif dan percaya diri dalam memahami materi keagamaan. Strategi ini tidak hanya meningkatkan aspek kognitif, tetapi juga berdampak positif pada aspek afektif

dan sosial siswa.

Kata Kunci: Implementasi; Game Based Learning; Pemahaman Siswa; Pendidikan Agama Islam.

A. Introduction

Primary school education is an important foundation in a child's academic journey, focusing not only on knowledge transfer but also on attitude formation, character strengthening and the development of fundamental learning skills. In practice, learning at this level is often not fully geared towards fostering students' independence, innovation, democratic spirit and responsibility, making it difficult to achieve holistic educational goals. Therefore, it is important to develop good learning habits such as discipline, perseverance, responsibility and a positive attitude towards learning from an early age. These positive habits can provide constructive stimulation, improve the quality of the learning process, and have a long-term impact on students' academic success and character building. (Makki and Aflahah 2019)

Education is a guidance process that aims to form individuals who are independent, responsible, innovative, and have noble character. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a strategic role in shaping students' spiritual and moral values. PAI not only conveys theoretical religious teachings, but also instills faith, morals, and the application of Islamic values in everyday life. (Siregar et al. 2024) This is in line with Allah's words in Surah Al-Mujadilah verse 11, which emphasizes that Allah will elevate the degrees of those who believe and have knowledge. The verse shows that faith and knowledge are two important elements that must go hand in hand in forming a noble person.

Learning approaches that predominantly use lectures and passive discussions tend to be teacher-centered and lack active student participation. As a result, many students feel bored and lose their enthusiasm for learning. Although the lecture method has historical roots dating back to the time of Prophet Muhammad SAW as a form of conveying knowledge, in practice today it is often less effective if not accompanied by

interactive skills such as question and answer, which can increase student engagement in learning. (Rohayah et al. 2024)

Learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) should not only focus on delivering religious material, but also creating an interactive, fun, and contextual learning atmosphere with the needs and daily lives of students. The main goal is that religious values are not only understood cognitively, but also internalized and practiced in daily behavior. Learning that actively involves students will make them feel more involved, better understand the material, and more motivated in the learning process.

In this context, it is important for teachers to understand each student's learning style so that the learning strategies applied can be more effective and appropriate. Understanding learning styles not only helps teachers design the right approach, but also helps students recognize their potential and the way of learning that suits them best. This will have a positive impact on students' overall self-development and academic success,(Wibowo 2016) As in MAN 17 Jakarta, learning is still dominated by the lecture method which tends to be boring and less interesting, thus reducing student interest and participation in the teaching and learning process. This condition indicates the need for a more interactive and fun learning approach. One potential alternative is Game Based Learning, which is believed to be able to increase students' curiosity, engagement and understanding. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Game Based Learning implementation in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning, especially in terms of material understanding and students' active participation. (Naashir and Hindun 2023)

Innovative and creative learning approaches are needed to overcome low student participation in the learning process. Game Based Learning (GBL) is one method that has been proven effective in improving student understanding, motivation and engagement. Through the use of specially designed game elements, GBL creates a learning environment that is fun, interactive and relevant, allowing students to understand abstract concepts in a more concrete way. In the context of learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI), GBL is very suitable because it is in line with Islamic values that teach enthusiasm and joy in studying. Based on research at SDN Cowek II, it was

found that some students were passive, lacked confidence, and were reluctant to interact or ask questions in learning PAI. This hampers understanding and learning outcomes. Therefore, the application of GBL is seen as an effective solution to create a more pleasant learning atmosphere and encourage students to participate actively.

Game Based Learning (GBL) has great potential in improving concept understanding, including in science learning and Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This method allows students to learn through direct experience, making the material easier to understand and religious values easier to internalize. (Widiana 2022) Problems such as low student active participation and lack of understanding of PAI materials indicate the need for a more innovative approach. Therefore, this study raises the title “Application of Game Based Learning Strategy to Improve Students' Understanding in PAI Learning at SDN Cowek II”, with the aim of providing learning solutions that are more interesting, effective, and able to increase students' motivation and understanding of religious materials.

B. Methods

The methodology used in this research is qualitative research that aims to examine the strategy of implementing game-based learning (GBL) in Islamic religious education. Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's framework, which includes three main steps: data reduction, in which the researcher summarizes and selects relevant information; data presentation, which organizes information into a clear and understandable format; and data verification, to confirm the accuracy and consistency of the results. This methodology allowed the researcher to investigate the experiences of students and teachers in detail, as well as gain an understanding of the challenges and successes encountered in the implementation of GBL, thus offering a valuable perspective for the future advancement of educational methods. (Kurniati, Khasanah, and Mufid 2023)

This research seeks to explore how a game-based learning (GBL) approach can enhance students' understanding and engagement in the educational process. Data were collected through comprehensive interviews and direct classroom observations to gain

an in-depth understanding of the learning dynamics. This technique was chosen so that the researcher can capture the processes and interactions that occur during teaching and learning activities naturally and completely.

This study used a qualitative approach to explore the application of game-based learning at SDN Cowek II. Another reason for using a qualitative approach is that this study focuses on planning activities, which include preparation for PAI learning, implementation of PAI learning through game-based learning or GBL methods to improve student understanding, as well as factors that facilitate or hinder PAI learning with a game-based approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and other methods commonly used in qualitative research.

In qualitative research, the presence of researchers indicates their active involvement in the data collection process, which includes direct observation and interviews at the research location, namely the UPT Education Unit of SDN Cowek II. This allows researchers to engage directly with PAI teachers at SDN Cowek II, so that they can gain a deeper understanding of the context and experiences under study, as well as collect data or information from students of SDN Cowek II for analysis. Therefore, the presence of researchers can affect the dynamics of interactions and the results of the study, so it is important to consider the extent of their involvement in the observed situation.

This research was conducted at the location of the UPT Education Unit of SDN Cowek II, which is located in Sempu Hamlet, Cowek Village, Purwodadi Subdistrict, Pasuruan Regency, East Java 67163.

The data sources in this study consist of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly from interviews with teachers and students at SDN Cowek II regarding the application of Game Based Learning (GBL) strategies in learning. Secondary data (Wibawa et al. 2020) is information that has been collected by other parties, such as statistics and research reports, which are used to support the arguments in the study. This research uses observation, interviews, and documentation to evaluate the effectiveness of the application of GBL in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI).

Data collection methods in this study include observation, interview, and documentation. Observation was conducted to evaluate students' activities and their participation in learning using the Game Based Learning (GBL) strategy, as well as to assess students' understanding of the material. Interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers at SDN Cowek II to find out the planning, implementation, and impact of the GBL strategy in learning. Documentation was used to record learning outcomes and strengthen research findings. These three methods were used to assess the effectiveness of GBL implementation in improving students' understanding in Islamic Education learning.

Data analysis in this study followed the approach proposed by Miles and Huberman, (Thalib 2022) which includes several main steps. First, data reduction was conducted by identifying and summarizing important information, as well as discarding irrelevant details for the research focus. This process aims to find components that can improve students' understanding of PAI learning through the Game Based Learning (GBL) strategy. Furthermore, data presentation was done by organizing the collected data in an easy-to-understand format, such as tables, graphs, or structured narratives, which aimed to provide a clear picture of the research findings related to the planning, implementation, and impact of GBL. Finally, conclusion drawing was done by analyzing the data to identify emerging patterns and themes, which were then used to provide insights into the effectiveness of GBL implementation in improving students' understanding in PAI learning at SDN Cowek II.

C. Results and Discussion

Game Based Learning (GBL) Strategy Planning

The planning of Game Based Learning (GBL) strategy in PAI learning at SDN Cowek II is organized through a series of structured steps, taking into account the needs of students, the characteristics of the material, and the learning conditions in the classroom. In this planning process, teachers not only rely on the preparation of formal learning tools, but also identify student learning needs informally through classroom observations, light dialogue, and reflection on the implementation of previous learning.

Teachers realize that PAI learning cannot be delivered only by the lecture method because the characteristics of the material that is value, moral, and spiritual require a more applicable understanding. Therefore, the planning of game-based learning strategies is designed with an orientation on strengthening student participation, improving memory, and creating a fun learning atmosphere.

The initial step of planning is done by mapping materials that tend to be challenging for students to understand, especially materials that contain abstract concepts and memorization. Teachers mapped that materials such as daily prayers, ablution sequences, prayer movements, stories of apostles, to the concept of qada and qadar need different handling. Furthermore, teachers choose the type of game that they feel is most appropriate to facilitate student understanding based on age and grade level.

In addition to choosing the type of game, teachers also plan the implementation time, how to present the questions, student grouping, and evaluation strategies. In planning, teachers also pay attention to the diversity of activities in learning, from opening activities that attract students' attention, to reflection sessions to strengthen post-game understanding. Teachers have also prepared a mechanism for monitoring student activity, including anticipatory steps for students who do not participate, by providing small tasks that invite participation.

This planning is flexible and adaptive, adjusted to the dynamics of the class and the development of students' interests. Teachers avoid monotonous game patterns, by constantly looking for variations of games and creative forms of question delivery. This is done to avoid boredom and maintain student enthusiasm in every meeting.

In other words, the planning of the GBL strategy at SDN Cowek II is not just about choosing a method, but is the result of a reflective process that considers the character of the learners, the challenges of the material, and the desire to create a more meaningful learning experience.

The GBL strategy planning carried out by teachers at SDN Cowek II is in line with John Dewey's theory which emphasizes the importance of “learning by doing” or learning through experience. Dewey argues that direct experience in learning will form a deeper and more meaningful understanding for students. In this case, the use of games

in PAI learning is a means for students to experience the learning process directly, not just passively receiving information.

Teachers not only design learning formally, but also involve students actively through observation and dialogue, which reflects the student centered approach as emphasized by Dewey. Flexible and adaptive planning shows an awareness that each class has different dynamics, and teachers need to create a learning environment that is democratic and relevant to students' lives.

Implementation of Game Based Learning (GBL) Strategy

The implementation of the GBL strategy at SDN Cowek II takes place in an interactive and participatory atmosphere. The teacher starts the learning process with an explanation of the material that is packaged in a concise and communicative manner, then proceeds with the implementation of the planned game.

The implementation is not only fun-oriented, but directed to gradually build concept understanding. Each game begins with a clear explanation of the rules of the game, the division of heterogeneous groups, and the preparation of varied questions. The teacher positions himself as a facilitator who observes student involvement, directs the course of the game, and provides stimulus in the form of lighter questions to encourage participation.

The types of games used vary, ranging from simple guessing, arranging cards, matching pictures, to group quizzes. In the ablution sequence game, for example, students not only play with the cards, but are also asked to explain the steps in front of their friends, creating a collaborative learning atmosphere and strengthening self-confidence.

Competitive games, such as group quizzes on the signs of doomsday or the story of the apostle, are conducted by prioritizing the values of sportsmanship and cooperation. The teacher always emphasizes that the game is not to find a winner, but to train understanding and build togetherness.

In the final stage of implementation, the teacher provides space for reflection through open discussion. In this session, the teacher reviews the students' answers, provides corrections in a non-judgmental way, and provides additional explanations in

simple language for easy understanding. The teacher also provides opportunities for students to ask questions, so that learning truly becomes dialogic.

With consistent implementation, the implementation of GBL at SDN Cowek II is not only a variation of learning, but also part of a fun learning culture, fostering activeness, and building students' courage in expressing opinions.

The implementation of the GBL strategy carried out by the teacher is in line with John Dewey's theory which emphasizes that learning must involve direct experience (experiential learning) so that students can build understanding actively. Activities such as arranging the order of ablutions, matching pictures, and group quizzes create a contextual and participatory learning atmosphere, in accordance with the principle of "learning by doing" which is at the core of Dewey's thinking.

In addition, the implementation of GBL also illustrates the principles in constructivism theory, where students construct their knowledge through interaction with the learning environment. The games designed not only facilitate concept understanding, but also encourage reflection and discussion, which are important parts of the constructive process in learning. The teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding students to think critically and find their own understanding of the PAI material being studied.

Impact of Game Based Learning (GBL) Strategy

The implementation of the GBL strategy in PAI learning at SDN Cowek II shows a broad impact, both from the cognitive, affective, and social aspects. The most obvious impact is seen in the increase in students' enthusiasm in participating in learning. Students who previously tended to be passive became more active, began to dare to ask questions, answer questions, and engage in group discussions.

In terms of understanding the material, GBL helps students remember and understand concepts that were initially difficult. In lower grade students, the game helps overcome the difficulty of memorization and the sequence of worship steps. In upper grade students, GBL facilitates the understanding of abstract concepts by simplifying the material into a more concrete and digestible form.

In addition to the impact on understanding, the application of GBL also fosters self-confidence. Students who were usually hesitant to perform began to dare to speak

in front of friends, especially when asked to answer questions or explain the results of group work. Healthy competition in the games also shapes sportsmanship character, where students learn to accept defeat gracefully and encourage other friends.

Another positive impact is the creation of a pleasant and not boring learning environment. Students regard PAI lessons as something to look forward to, not a burdensome lesson. Social interaction is also increasingly built, especially through group game activities that require cooperation, discussion, and mutual respect for opinions between friends.

Teachers also felt that after the implementation of GBL, the classroom atmosphere became more dynamic. The teacher is no longer the only center, but rather a facilitator who facilitates student exploration. From the evaluation, the teacher found that students understood the material more quickly after going through a game session followed by a discussion.

However, teachers also realize that these positive impacts do not come without challenges. Some students who are still passive need special attention, and variations of the games must continue to be pursued so as not to cause boredom. Therefore, teachers continue to evaluate each implementation of GBL to find the best pattern that can optimally involve all students.

Overall, the impact of the implementation of the GBL strategy in PAI learning at SDN Cowek II is very positive, proving that this strategy is not just an alternative, but can be the main method in building student understanding, increasing activeness, strengthening social character, and creating a fun and meaningful learning experience.

The positive impact that arises from the implementation of the GBL strategy is in line with the views of John Dewey, who believes that the learning process will be more meaningful when students are directly involved in contextual and social activities. Through games that demand cooperation, discussion and reflection, students not only acquire knowledge, but also develop social and emotional skills.

In addition, the theory of constructivism also seems relevant in this context. Students construct their understanding actively through play experiences and interactions, rather than passively receiving information. GBL facilitates this process by

providing space for exploration, critical thinking, and collaboration, which ultimately strengthens mastery of the material and positive attitudes towards PAI learning.

D. Conclusion

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has an important role in shaping the character and morals of students from an early age. However, in practice, learning PAI in elementary schools still faces various challenges, especially in terms of students' motivation and understanding of the subject matter. Many teachers still use the lecture method as the main approach, which tends to be one-way and less interesting for elementary school students who are at the concrete cognitive stage of development. This can have an impact on students' low active participation and understanding of PAI lessons.

The application of GBL strategies in Islamic Education learning is expected to be able to overcome student boredom, increase learning motivation, and ultimately improve student understanding of the subject matter. Therefore, this research is important to find out the extent to which the effectiveness of the application of Game Based Learning strategies in improving student understanding in learning Islamic Religious Education at SDN Cowek II.

The Game Based Learning (GBL) strategy in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SDN Cowek II shows positive results in improving students' understanding, engagement, and motivation to learn. Through careful planning and selection of game media in accordance with the characteristics of the material and the needs of students, the learning process becomes more fun, interactive, and meaningful. Teachers do not only act as material deliverers, but also as facilitators who guide students in active and contextual learning experiences.

The results showed that GBL had a significant impact on students' cognitive, affective, and social aspects. Students became more active, confident, and able to understand religious concepts more concretely. Despite some challenges, such as varying levels of participation and game saturation, teachers were able to make evaluations and adjustments to improve the effectiveness of this method. This finding

reinforces the relevance of the constructivist approach and John Dewey's learning theory that emphasizes the importance of learning by doing and experiential learning. Therefore, GBL can be one of the strategic alternatives in innovating PAI learning that is more contextual, participatory, and fun for elementary school students.

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