The MURDER Strategy Based on Gamification to Enhance Students' Interest in Islamic Education and Character Building

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Article info	Abstract
	Low student interest in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building at the vocational high school (SMK) level remains a challenge, especially under conventional, teacher-centered approaches. This study aimed to enhance students' learning interest by applying the gamified MURDER strategy in the classroom. Using the Kurt Lewin Classroom Action Research model, the research was conducted in two cycles comprising planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. Data were collected through observation, questionnaires, interviews, tests, and documentation. Findings showed a significant increase in student learning interest, with student activity rising from 65.5% (pre-cycle) to 95.5% (cycle II), and teacher activity from 81.1% to 95.5%. Students responded positively, describing the learning as more engaging, interactive, and confidence-building. The gamified MURDER strategy proved to be an effective alternative for improving both student interest and instructional quality in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building, and it is recommended for broader use in character-focused, student-centered learning contexts. ***Keywords:*** *MURDER Strategy, Gamification, Learning Interest, Islamic Religious Education, Character Building*

Abstrak

Minat belajar peserta didik terhadap mata pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti di tingkat SMK masih rendah, terutama dalam model pembelajaran konvensional yang kurang melibatkan siswa secara aktif. Penelitian ini bertujuan meningkatkan minat belajar siswa melalui penerapan strategi MURDER berbasis gamifikasi. Penelitian menggunakan model Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) Kurt Lewin dalam dua siklus yang meliputi perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, angket, wawancara, tes, dan dokumentasi. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan minat belajar siswa; aktivitas siswa meningkat dari 65,5% (pra-siklus) menjadi 95,5% (siklus II), dan aktivitas guru dari 81,1% menjadi 95,5%. Respons siswa sangat positif; mereka merasa pembelajaran lebih menarik, interaktif, dan membangun rasa percaya diri. Strategi MURDER berbasis gamifikasi terbukti efektif meningkatkan minat dan kualitas pembelajaran PAI dan Budi Pekerti, serta layak diterapkan dalam pembelajaran lain yang berfokus pada penguatan karakter dan keterlibatan aktif siswa.

Kata Kunci: Strategi MURDER, Gamifikasi, Minat Belajar, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Budi Pekerti

INTRODUCTION

Education is a conscious effort to help students reach their fullest potential in all aspects of life spiritual, religious, personal, intellectual, moral, and social (Hidayat et al., 2018). This is achieved through the intentional design of learning environments that foster these qualities (Romiyati et al., 2023). Education plays a strategic role in shaping individuals who are not only intellectually competent but also morally upright. It also functions to develop the whole potential of a person, including spiritual and social aspects, as emphasized in Islamic teachings (Iqbal et al., 2024).

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is not solely aimed at instilling spiritual values, but also at shaping responsible, tolerant individuals with commendable character (Achmad, 2024). This aligns with the Islamic view that education is a central pillar for nurturing a generation that is faithful, knowledgeable, and righteous in conduct (Sapitri & Maryati, 2022). The learning process plays a key role in this development, involving collaboration between students, teachers, and supportive environments. How these parties experience the learning process ultimately determines the achievement of educational goals and outcomes (Dedy Herawan & Sudarsana, 2017).

From an Islamic perspective, education is a holistic human development process, where knowledge, action, and ethics are inseparable, as emphasized in the Qur'an (Harun, 2021). Therefore, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education must integrate the spiritual, intellectual, moral, and social dimensions of the learner (Nur'aini & Hamzah, 2023).

However, preliminary observations and information obtained from Islamic Religious Education and Character-Building teachers at Grade XI of SMK Negeri 2 Palopo indicate that students' learning interest in general subjects outside their vocational major such as Islamic Religious Education is still relatively low. Most students prefer to focus on subjects related to their specialization, as they perceive them to be more relevant to future career paths. Consequently, student engagement in IRE classes is minimal. Some exhibit passive behavior and a lack of interest in the subject. Inconsistent class attendance is also common, which disrupts the overall learning process.

The lack of student interest in IRE is not always due to the teaching methods used by instructors but is often influenced by internal factors such as students' perception of the subject's importance, low motivation, and the tendency to devalue non-major subjects (Kartika & Arifudin, 2024). External factors also play a role, including limited learning media, unconducive classroom environments, peer distractions, and high noise levels (Handayani et al., 2017; Mashburn et al., 2008; Sulfikram et al., 2023). In this context, the use of innovative instructional media becomes essential. Gamification as a game-based learning approach has been proven effective in increasing motivation and student engagement, including in early childhood education (Mukarromah & Agustina, 2021). Media based on digital applications are also relevant in the digital era, particularly in enhancing students' literacy and learning

interest (Bastin, 2022; Murro Nuril Chasanah & Hasibuan, 2024; Rafita & Puspa Juwita, 2025).

Several studies emphasize the importance of developing digital and web-based media in Islamic education (Fathia & Kamilia, 2024; Hasriadi, 2022). Tools such as smart cards and Macromedia Flash have been effectively used to strengthen comprehension of abstract materials, including in subjects like Akidah Akhlak and Arabic (Boonroungrut et al., 2022; Muhaemin & Wahyuni, 2021). Without instructional innovation, students may struggle to focus, comprehend materials, and achieve optimal learning outcomes.

Therefore, a learning strategy is needed to address these challenges and enhance students' interest. One such strategy is MURDER (Mood, Understand, Recall, Digest, Expand, Review), which, when integrated with gamification media, is designed to create a more interactive, enjoyable, and effective learning experience (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2021; Shortt et al., 2023; Wulan et al., 2024). A study by Suriyah et al., (2022) showed that MURDER significantly improved student achievement in Islamic Religious Education. Similarly, Afifah et al., (2023) found the strategy effective in enhancing both mathematics achievement and learning interest by fostering active student participation.

Learning interest plays a critical role in educational success, particularly when a contextual approach is used (Iskandar et al., 2025; Rehny & Sari, 2023). When lessons are linked to students' real-life experiences, their interest increases because the content feels relevant and meaningful (Fathia & Kamilia, 2024). With the support of engaging instructional media such as gamified and interactive applications learning becomes more impactful and encourages greater student involvement. Based on this background, to improve students' learning interest in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building at Grade XI of SMK Negeri 2 Palopo, the researcher deems it necessary to conduct a classroom action research study aimed at identifying and implementing strategies and media that can significantly enhance students' learning interest.

METHODS

This study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach aimed at increasing students' learning interest in Islamic Religious Education and Character Building through the implementation of the MURDER strategy integrated with gamification-based media. The research adopted Kurt Lewin's action research model, which consists of four key stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The study was conducted over two cycles, with each cycle comprising two meetings and being evaluated continuously to assess the effectiveness of the interventions.

Subjects, Location, and Duration

The research subjects were 14 male students of Class XI Listrik B at SMK Negeri 2 Palopo, 12 of whom identified as Muslim. The study was conducted at SMK Negeri 2 Palopo, located on Jalan Dr. Ratulangi, Kelurahan Balandai, Kecamatan Bara,

Palopo City, South Sulawesi. The research was carried out during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, specifically from February to April 2025.

Research Procedure

The research process followed the stages outlined in Kurt Lewin's model. The planning stage involved curriculum analysis and the identification of prior learning obstacles. Based on this, a learning strategy was designed by combining the MURDER approach with gamification media as an innovative instructional model.

The acting stage involved the direct application of the designed strategy in classroom instruction. Observations were carried out to monitor student engagement, media usage, and implementation fidelity. The reflecting stage focused on analyzing the observational results to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention and determine necessary improvements for the subsequent cycle.

The research was deemed successful if it met the following criteria: increased student participation in learning activities, positive responses to the learning strategy (as measured by questionnaires), and improved academic performance as evidenced by comparison of pre-test and post-test scores. If these indicators were not met, the research would proceed to the next cycle with revised interventions.

Research Instruments

Data were collected using observation sheets, questionnaires, interviews, tests, and documentation. Observation sheets recorded both student and teacher activities during instruction. The questionnaire was developed to measure students' interest in learning the topic of etiquette in using social media. Interviews were conducted to gather in-depth insights from both students and teachers about their experiences with the MURDER strategy and gamified learning media. The pre-test and post-test measured instructional effectiveness. Documentation including photographs, student work samples, and instructional modules served as supporting evidence for the data collected.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were obtained through direct observation, semi-structured interviews, Likert-scale questionnaires, and learning achievement tests. Documentation was used to enhance data validity by triangulating field findings. Observations focused on students' behaviors, engagement, and participation. Interviews captured the perceptions of students and teachers. Questionnaires provided quantitative data on student interest, while tests measured changes in academic outcomes.

Data Analysis Techniques

Both qualitative and quantitative descriptive methods were employed for data analysis. Qualitative data from observations, interviews, and documentation were analyzed thematically to identify emerging patterns and trends. Quantitative data from questionnaires and tests were analyzed using percentage and mean score calculations.

To assess learning improvement, the average class scores from pre-tests and post-tests were compared. Student success was evaluated based on the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKTP), where a score of 75 was considered the passing threshold. The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was used via SPSS version 30 to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores, given that the paired data were non-normally distributed. A significance level of ≤ 0.05 indicated a meaningful difference and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observation sheets used during both cycles of the research, there was a significant increase in student engagement during the Islamic Religious Education and Character Building lessons. In Cycle I, student activity percentage reached 76.25%, which falls into the "Fair" category. After reflection and improvement in Cycle II, this percentage increased to 86.25%, classified as "Good."

Table 4.1 Percentage of Student Activity Observation Scores

Cycle	Score Percentage	Category
Cycle I	76.25%	Fair
Cycle II	86.25%	Good

This indicates that the application of the MURDER strategy integrated with gamified media had a positive impact on student engagement. Improvements were also observed in the clarity of instructions and students' active participation during lessons.

Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire was used to measure students' interest in learning before and after the implementation of the learning strategy. In Cycle I, the average percentage score for student interest was 78.75%, which is categorized as "Moderate." In Cycle II, the score increased to 88.75%, classified as "High."

Table 4.2 Recapitulation of Students' Learning Interest Questionnaire Scores

Cycle	Average Score (%)	Category
Cycle I	78.75%	Moderate
Cycle II	88.75%	High

This improvement shows that integrating gamification elements such as point systems and interactive challenges can increase student enthusiasm and motivation toward the subject matter.

Test Results (Pre-test and Post-test)

To assess student learning outcomes, a pre-test and post-test were administered. The average pre-test score was 68.21, categorized as "Moderate." After the intervention, the average post-test score increased to 82.14, categorized as "High."

Table 4.3 Pre-test and Post-test Score Comparison

Test Type	Average Score	Category
Pre-test	68.21	Moderate
Post-test	82.14	High

This increase indicates that the MURDER strategy combined with gamification was effective in enhancing students' comprehension and retention of the material.

Hypothesis Testing

To determine the statistical significance of the difference between pre-test and post-test results, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was conducted using SPSS version 30. The test result showed a significance value (Sig.) of $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating that H_0 is rejected and H_1 is accepted. Thus, there is a statistically significant difference in students' interest and learning outcomes before and after the implementation of the MURDER strategy integrated with gamified media.

The findings of this study affirm that the implementation of a gamified learning strategy particularly a structured one like the MURDER strategy positively impacts student interest and academic achievement. The observed increase in participation, interest scores, and post-test performance aligns with the findings of (Suriyah et al., 2022). who reported that the MURDER strategy effectively enhances learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education. Additionally, Afifah et al., (2023) emphasized that active student involvement through the MURDER strategy contributes to increased learning motivation. Gamification elements support engagement theory by providing enjoyable and interactive learning mechanisms, as discussed by (Mukarromah & Agustina, 2021). This study demonstrates that contextually adapted instructional innovations, enriched with digital media, are not only necessary but also impactful in improving student learning outcomes, both affective and cognitive, particularly in the context of Islamic religious education.

CONCLUSION

The classroom action research conducted in Grade XI at SMK Negeri 2 Palopo demonstrates that the implementation of the MURDER strategy integrated with gamification effectively enhances students' learning interest in Islamic Religious Education and Character Development. This strategy successfully fostered greater student engagement, strengthened intrinsic motivation, and created a more interactive and enjoyable learning environment. Observations, questionnaires, and test results revealed consistent improvement in student involvement and academic performance. Students also responded positively to the learning process, showing increased enthusiasm and confidence in expressing their opinions. These findings indicate that combining a structured instructional strategy with gamification elements offers a promising alternative to deliver relevant and engaging education aligned with the learning characteristics of the digital generation.

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