

## **STRENGTHENING STUDENTS' LEARNING MOTIVATION AT *MADRASAH IBTIDAIYAH* THROUGH THE INTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL GAMES AND DIGITAL LEARNING MEDIA IN THEMATIC LEARNING**

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### **Abstract**

Learning motivation is a fundamental factor that influences student engagement in the learning process, especially at *the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level*. In practice, thematic learning in the classroom still often shows a low level of student participation due to the use of monotonous methods and lack of providing meaningful learning experiences. This study aims to analyze how the integration of traditional games and digital learning media can strengthen student learning motivation in thematic learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, with the research context at MI Darullughah Wal Karomah (MI DWK), Indonesia. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to observe learning activities and student engagement in the classroom, while interviews were conducted with teachers and students to gain an in-depth understanding of the learning experience. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and interpretation of research findings. The results of the study indicate that the integration of traditional games and digital learning media in MI DWK is able to create a more interactive and participatory learning atmosphere. Students showed increased engagement through discussion activities, group work, and participation in games integrated in thematic learning. Digital media also strengthens students' conceptual understanding through more visual and engaging presentation of material, thus contributing to increased learning motivation.

**Keywords :** learning motivation, traditional games, digital media, thematic learning, *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Learning motivation is one of the main determinants of the success of the educational process at the elementary school level, including *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*. From an educational psychology perspective, learning motivation is not only understood as a student's drive to participate in learning activities, but as a psychological energy that directs, maintains, and intensifies student involvement in the learning process (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In the context of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, learning motivation has a strategic position because students are in a developmental phase that is very close to the world of play, exploration, social interaction, and the formation of long-term learning attitudes. Therefore, thematic learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* ideally is not only oriented towards delivering material, but also able to provide a learning experience that is contextual, enjoyable, participatory, and in accordance with the characteristics of child development.

At the practical level, the implementation of thematic learning still faces quite serious pedagogical issues, especially when the learning process is still dominated by conventional methods, one-way material delivery, and a lack of learning activities that provide space for active student participation. This condition has an impact on low learning motivation, which is evident through a passive attitude in class, low involvement in discussions, limited courage to express opinions, and a tendency for students to quickly get bored during the learning process (Sari et al.

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, 2021). A similar phenomenon was also found in the context of thematic learning at MI Darullughah Wal Karomah, where students still need learning strategies that are closer to the world of play, local culture, and visual-interactive experiences so that their learning engagement can increase more meaningfully. Theoretically, this problem can be understood through *self-determination. theory* which emphasizes that learning motivation develops when students' basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and social connectedness are met in the learning process (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Monotonous learning tends to weaken these three needs because students do not have enough space to experience learning success, take an active role, and build productive social relationships. Within the *game - based framework, learning*, play activities can strengthen students' cognitive, emotional, and social engagement because games provide challenges, interactions, rules, feedback, and enjoyable learning experiences (Plass et al., 2015). Meanwhile, the use of digital learning media can strengthen students' attention and understanding through visual, audio, and multimedia presentation of materials when used pedagogically and integrated with meaningful learning activities (Clark & Mayer, 2016; Schindler et al., 2017). Thus, the theoretical gap in this study lies in the suboptimal integration between learning motivation theory and *game-based learning, learning, culturally responsive pedagogy*, and digital *learning* in one complete thematic learning design in the context of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*.

Several previous studies have shown that games, digital media, and local culture have important contributions to improving the quality of learning. Sari et al. (2021) found that implementing educational games in thematic learning can increase students' learning motivation because learning activities become more participatory and enjoyable. et al. (2016) also showed that the game-based approach learning can increase learning engagement, while Plass et al. (2015) emphasized that games in learning can activate students' cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions. In the context of traditional games, Fauzi (2025) showed that integrating kite games into geometry learning at Islamic elementary schools can improve students' conceptual understanding and participation, while Yasa and Yasa (2025) found that traditional games in elementary school/Islamic elementary school learning in the digital era can instill the values of cooperation, responsibility, and honesty. Another finding from Schindler et al. (2017) and Sung et al. (2016) showed that digital technology can improve *student engagement*, learning motivation, and learning outcomes of elementary school students when used appropriately in the learning process.

Although these studies have made important contributions, most studies still consider traditional games, educational games, digital media, and local wisdom as standalone approaches. Research on educational games generally places more emphasis on *game-based aspects*. While research on traditional games is more focused on cultural preservation, character building, or increasing student participation, research on digital learning media tends to emphasize technological aspects, visualization of materials, and increased engagement without deeply linking them to the potential of local culture as a learning resource. This gap indicates the need for studies that specifically analyze the integration of traditional games and digital learning media as an integrated pedagogical strategy to strengthen student learning motivation in thematic learning in Islamic elementary schools.

The novelty of this research lies in the effort to integrate traditional games and digital learning media as a hybrid pedagogical model that connects local culture, gaming experiences, and learning technology in the context of thematic learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*. Different from previous studies that tend to discuss traditional games or digital media separately, this research positions both as a complementary learning strategy: traditional games play a role in providing contextual, collaborative, and life-related learning experiences for students, while digital media serves to strengthen concept visualization, learning attention, and learning appeal. This novelty is important because it offers a direction for the development of thematic learning that is not only adaptive to technological developments, but also remains rooted in local cultural values and the developmental characteristics of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* students. Based on the phenomena, theoretical gaps, and results of previous research, this study aims to analyze how the integration of traditional games and digital learning media can strengthen students' learning motivation. in learning thematic approach in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*. Specifically, this research is directed to understand the form of integration of traditional games and digital media in the learning process, identify student responses and involvement during learning activities, and interpret the contribution of this approach to strengthening student learning motivation at MI Darullughah Wal Karomah.

## METHOD

Research This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design and a case study research type that aims to understand in depth the phenomenon of student learning motivation in the context of thematic learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, especially through the integration of traditional games and digital learning media. The case study type is used because this research focuses on one particular educational context, namely the practice of thematic learning at MI Darullughah Wal Karomah, so that the phenomenon studied can be analyzed intensively, contextually, and in depth. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research seeks to interpret social realities, student

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learning experiences, and pedagogical dynamics that occur in a natural learning environment. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore the meaning, perceptions, and dynamics of interactions that occur in the learning process more comprehensively compared to a quantitative approach that is oriented towards measuring variables statistically ( Creswell & Poth , 2018). Therefore, a qualitative approach with a case study type is relevant to examine pedagogical practices related to student learning motivation in thematic learning contextually and in depth. The research was conducted at MI Darullughah Wal Karomah (MI DWK), Indonesia, as the observation location during the thematic learning activities. This location was selected based on the consideration that MI DWK is an Islamic elementary education institution that actively implements thematic learning and has learning dynamics that allow the integration of traditional games and digital media. The research subjects included the class teacher and a number of students directly involved in the learning process. Informants were selected purposively, considering their involvement in learning activities and their ability to provide information relevant to the research focus. In qualitative research, purposive informant selection is a common strategy used to obtain in-depth and meaningful data regarding the phenomenon being studied ( Patton , 2015).

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observations were conducted on the classroom learning process at MI DWK to observe the dynamics of interactions between teachers and students, the forms of learning activities carried out, and student responses to learning activities involving traditional games and digital learning media. Through this participatory observation , researchers were able to obtain an empirical picture of the level of student engagement during the learning process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with class teachers and several students to explore their views on learning experiences, perceptions of thematic learning, and obstacles encountered in the learning process. Semi-structured interviews provided researchers with flexibility to explore information that emerged during the interview process while maintaining the focus of the research ( Kvale & Brinkmann , 2015). In addition, documentation was used to supplement the research data through various sources such as learning activity notes, photographs of class activities, and school documents relevant to the thematic learning process at MI DWK.

The data analysis in this study followed the qualitative data analysis procedures developed by Miles, Huberman , and Saldaña (2014), which include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing meaning from the research findings. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused the data obtained from the field by identifying information relevant to the research focus. This process aims to simplify the data without eliminating the main meaning contained therein. The next stage is data presentation, which is carried out through the preparation of a systematic descriptive narrative so that the patterns, relationships, and dynamics that emerge in the learning process can be understood more clearly. In the interpretation stage, the researcher interpreted the research findings by linking them to the theoretical framework regarding learning motivation, games in learning, and the integration of digital learning media in the context of thematic learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah .

## RESULTS

### Initial Conditions of Student Learning Motivation in Thematic Learning

The initial state of student motivation in thematic learning indicates suboptimal engagement. Observation, interview, and documentation data show that learning is still dominated by a one-way interaction pattern, with the teacher as the center of material delivery and the textbook as the primary resource. Students mostly listen, while responses to teacher questions come only from a small number of relatively academically confident students. This situation indicates that the majority of students are not actively engaged in the learning process. Observations show that student attention tends to decline when learning takes place through a repetitive pattern of lectures and written exercises. Some students are seen talking with their deskmates, fiddling with writing instruments, or displaying a lack of interest in the material. This situation indicates low intrinsic learning motivation, especially when students do not feel personally involved in the learning activities (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Learning that does not provide space for active participation makes learning activities more perceived as an academic obligation than an engaging and meaningful experience.

These findings were reinforced by teacher and student interviews. Teachers reported that only a small percentage of students actively answered questions or participated in discussions, while others tended to be passive and await instruction. Teachers also considered the limited variety of teaching methods a barrier to creating a lively classroom atmosphere. From the students' perspective, learning was considered monotonous because it consisted primarily of reading books and completing written assignments. Some students expressed greater enthusiasm when learning activities provided opportunities for movement, play, and interaction with peers. These needs align with the learning characteristics of elementary school-aged children, who require integrated cognitive, social, and emotional activities ( Plass et al. , 2015). Learning documentation shows that thematic activities before the intervention were

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still centered on textbooks, teacher explanations, and practice exercises. While these activities still serve an academic purpose, the dominance of repetitive patterns has the potential to reduce student interest in the material. This condition aligns with the findings of Sari et al. et al. (2021) showed that thematic learning with minimal variation can make students passive and less motivated. Schindler et al. (2017) also emphasized that student learning engagement is greatly influenced by interactive, engaging learning designs that provide space for active participation.

## Designing the Integration of Traditional Games and Digital Learning Media

The design of the integration of traditional games and digital learning media was carried out in response to low student learning motivation in thematic learning. This design was compiled based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation that showed the need for a more participatory, contextual learning strategy that is appropriate to the characteristics of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students. Traditional games were chosen as a medium for social interaction and direct learning experiences, while digital media was used to strengthen students' initial attention and conceptual understanding.

Interviews with teachers revealed that games had been used in learning, but had not been systematically designed as part of a thematic strategy. Teachers assessed that students were more enthusiastic when learning involved movement, cooperation, and light competition. Based on these considerations, traditional games were selected with attention to their suitability to the material, student characteristics, and the game's potential to foster social interaction and collaboration. Games were positioned not merely as recreational activities, but as pedagogical tools to connect subject matter with direct learning experiences. This view aligns with Plass, Homer, and Kinzer (2015), who explained that games in learning can increase cognitive and emotional engagement through challenges, interactions, and active learning experiences.

Digital learning media is designed to introduce concepts before students engage in game activities. Teachers use simple digital devices to display images, animations, or short videos related to the learning theme. This stage aims to build students' attention, clarify initial concepts, and help them understand the relationship between the material and the game activities. The learning process is then structured sequentially, starting with an introduction to concepts through digital media, followed by traditional games, and then reinforcing meaning through the teacher's guidance as a facilitator.

From a culture-based pedagogical perspective, the use of traditional games provides contextual value because students learn through activities closely related to their social lives. Gay (2018) explains that learning that integrates local culture can increase the relevance of learning experiences and strengthen the connection between the material and everyday life. At the same time, digital media enriches the presentation of material visually and interactively, thus increasing student attention and engagement during the learning process (Clark & Mayer, 2016).

## Implementation of Thematic Learning Based on Traditional Games and Digital Media

The implementation of thematic learning based on traditional games and digital media was carried out based on a pedagogical design developed from initial findings. The activity began with the use of digital media to introduce basic concepts related to the learning theme. The teacher displayed relevant images, illustrations, and short videos to provide students with a preliminary overview before engaging in the game activities. At this stage, students appeared more focused, with some asking spontaneous questions, and others showing greater attention to the visual material than to purely verbal explanations. This phenomenon aligns with Clark and Mayer (2016), who emphasized that multimedia can enhance attention and comprehension because information is presented through complementary sensory channels.

After the digital introduction, the teacher divided students into small groups to participate in traditional games tailored to the thematic material. Students were explained the rules of the games, the learning objectives, and how the activities relate to the lesson concepts. Throughout the games, students actively engaged in discussions, collaborated, and completed group challenges. This interaction demonstrated student engagement, not only physically but also cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

Interviews with teachers revealed a more lively classroom atmosphere compared to previous sessions. Previously passive students began to engage in group activities, answer questions, and express their opinions. Student interviews also indicated that game-based learning was perceived as more enjoyable because it provided opportunities to learn with peers, move around, and understand the material through hands-on practice. Classroom documentation revealed students engaging in more discussions, helping each other, and displaying more enthusiasm during the activities.

a game-based perspective In learning, these dynamics demonstrate the function of games as an interactive and meaningful learning medium. Plass, Homer, and Kinzer (2015) explain that games can increase cognitive and

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emotional engagement because they involve challenges, collaboration, and immediate feedback. The integration of digital media at an early stage also strengthens students' conceptual understanding before they enter play activities. Sung, Chang, and Liu (2016) state that digital technology can increase learning engagement when used to enrich interactive and contextual experiences.

## Changes in Student Learning Motivation after Learning Implementation

Changes in students' learning motivation were evident through increased attention, participation, and social interaction during learning. Observation data showed that students were more focused on following teacher instructions, were active in group discussions, and participated in games that were part of thematic activities. Some students who had previously rarely participated began to confidently answer questions and express their opinions. These behavioral changes indicate increased learning motivation, reflected in more active student engagement during the learning process.

Interviews with teachers reinforced these findings. Teachers reported that the classroom atmosphere became more dynamic, students were more enthusiastic, and some began to show initiative without having to wait for direct instruction. Meanwhile, students stated that learning felt more enjoyable because the games made learning activities less boring. One student mentioned that group work in the games helped them understand the material through peer support. Learning documentation also showed increased discussion, collaboration, and expressions of enthusiasm during the activities.

From the perspective of learning motivation theory, these changes can be understood as an indication of increased intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2020) explain that intrinsic motivation develops when individuals feel meaningfully engaged in the activities they undertake. When learning provides space for students to interact, collaborate, move, and experience the joy of learning, psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and social connectedness are better met.

The integration of traditional games also strengthens motivation by providing a learning experience that is close to students' culture and social lives. Local games make learning feel more familiar, contextual, and relevant to children's worlds. Gay (2018) emphasized that utilizing local cultural elements in learning can increase the relevance of students' learning experiences. Furthermore, digital media helps build initial attention through visual illustrations and short videos before students engage in game activities. Schindler et al. (2017) showed that digital technology can increase student engagement when used to enrich interactive learning experiences. Empirically, the integration of traditional games and digital learning media shifted thematic learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* from a passive pattern to a more participatory, collaborative, and contextual learning process.

## Discussion

Research findings regarding the implementation of the integration of traditional games and digital learning media in thematic learning at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* shows a number of important pedagogical implications for the development of learning practices at the elementary education level. These implications are not only related to the selection of learning methods, but also touch on aspects of learning design, classroom interaction strategies, and the use of learning resources relevant to the characteristics of student development. In the context of elementary education, effective learning is not solely determined by the systematic delivery of material, but rather by the teacher's ability to design learning experiences that can foster students' emotional, cognitive, and social engagement simultaneously. The results of this study indicate that the integration of traditional games and digital learning media can be a potential pedagogical approach in enriching thematic learning practices in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*.

One of the pedagogical implications emerging from this research relates to the importance of designing learning that centers on student learning experiences. Thematic learning is essentially designed to provide a holistic learning experience through the integration of various subjects within a single, contextual theme. However, in practice, this approach is often implemented through instructional teaching methods that provide little space for active student participation. The results of this study indicate that when learning is designed through activities involving traditional games, students tend to be more active participants in the learning process. Play activities allow students to learn through direct experience, social interaction, and exploration of their learning environment. From a *game-based theory perspective*, learning, play activities in learning are able to increase students' cognitive and emotional involvement because games present elements of challenge, cooperation, and immediate feedback on the actions taken by students (Plass et al., 2015). Another implication emerging from this research relates to the use of local culture as a learning resource in the learning process. Traditional games used in learning activities serve not only as a means of entertainment but also as a pedagogical medium that connects students' learning experiences to the social and cultural contexts they are familiar with. This approach aligns with the concept of *culturally relevant games*. responsive

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*Pedagogy* that emphasizes the importance of utilizing local cultural elements as part of a learning strategy that is relevant to students' lived experiences (Gay, 2018). When learning accommodates students' cultural experiences, the learning process is no longer understood as an activity separate from everyday life, but rather as an experience that has personal meaning for students.

In addition to utilizing local culture, the integration of digital learning media into learning activities also shows significant pedagogical implications. In this study, digital media was used as a means to strengthen students' conceptual understanding before they engaged in traditional game activities. The use of digital media allows teachers to present learning materials through visual and multimedia representations that are more engaging than solely verbal delivery. Research by Clark and Mayer (2016) shows that the use of multimedia media in learning can improve student understanding if designed based on appropriate multimedia learning principles. In the context of this study, digital media serves as a link between abstract learning concepts and concrete learning experiences through game activities.

Another pedagogical implication relates to the changing role of teachers in the learning process. The implementation of traditional game-based learning and digital media demonstrates that teachers are no longer the sole source of information in learning activities. Instead, teachers function as facilitators who design learning environments that enable students to learn actively through social interaction and exploration of learning experiences. This changing role reflects the constructivist learning paradigm, which positions students as active subjects in the learning process. From a social constructivist perspective, knowledge is not solely transmitted from teacher to student, but is constructed through social interactions and learning experiences experienced by students in the learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978).

The findings of this study also demonstrate that the integration of traditional games and digital learning media has the potential to strengthen social interactions in thematic learning activities. Game activities conducted in groups enable students to learn through collaboration, communication, and mutual assistance in understanding the learning material. The social interactions that emerge during these learning activities not only increase student engagement but also help them develop social skills that are essential for their development as individuals. Schindler et al. (2017) explained that social involvement in learning is an important factor influencing students' learning motivation, because interaction with peers can strengthen a sense of ownership of the learning activities undertaken.

In the context of developing learning practices in *Islamic elementary schools*, the integration of traditional games and digital learning media also shows potential as a pedagogical strategy that can bridge local cultural values with developments in educational technology. This approach allows teachers to utilize learning resources available in students' social environments while simultaneously utilizing digital technology as a means to enrich their learning experiences. Thus, thematic learning functions not only as a means to deliver subject matter but also as a space for students to develop more contextual, interactive, and meaningful learning experiences within the basic education process.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that student motivation in thematic learning at an *elementary school* is still suboptimal. Lecture-dominated learning, the use of textbooks, and written assignments make students passive, unenthusiastic, and easily bored during the learning process. This situation indicates the need for more varied, participatory pedagogical strategies that are tailored to the learning characteristics of elementary school students.

The integration of traditional games and digital learning media has been proven to create a more engaging, interactive, and contextual learning experience. Traditional games encourage students to learn through movement, cooperation, and hands-on experience, while digital media helps clarify concepts through visualization. The implementation of both approaches increases students' attention, participation, and social interaction in thematic learning, thus being a relevant pedagogical strategy for strengthening student learning motivation in *Islamic Elementary Schools*.

## RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* teachers are advised to develop thematic learning that integrates traditional games and digital media more systematically so that students' learning experiences become more participatory, enjoyable, and contextual. Future research can expand the study to other types of traditional games, different elementary education contexts, and use more diverse methodological approaches, such as classroom action research or quantitative experiments, to more measurably test the effect of integrating traditional games and digital technology on student learning motivation and learning outcomes.

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## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DECLARATION

The author states that in the process of writing this article he has utilized artificial intelligence technology (*Artificial Intelligence*). *Intelligence* (AI) is used to a limited extent as an aid in some technical aspects of writing. AI is used to assist with language editing, sentence structure improvement, academic clarity, and grammar refinement to ensure manuscripts meet the standards of good scientific writing.

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