

Educational Communication Through Snake Ladder Gamification Media in Increasing Learning Motivation at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the persistent challenge of low learning motivation in Akidah Akhlak (Moral Beliefs) education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, where traditional teacher-centered approaches create passive learning environments. The research examines the effectiveness of educational communication through snake and ladder gamification media in enhancing student motivation at MIN 8 Ciamis. Using a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design, 60 fourth-grade students were divided into experimental (n=30) and control (n=30) groups. Data were collected through ARCS Model-based motivation questionnaires, systematic classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and achievement tests. Results demonstrate significant transformation from one-way to multi-directional communication patterns, encompassing vertical dialogic, horizontal collaborative, learning mediation, and intrapersonal reflective communication. The experimental group showed substantial motivation improvement (78.45%) with N-Gain score of 0.76 (high category), compared to 20.78% in the control group ($p < 0.05$). ARCS dimensions revealed increases in Attention (85.2%), Satisfaction (78.9%), Relevance (74.6%), and Confidence (70.3%). This gamification approach effectively addresses communication barriers in religious education by transforming students from passive receivers to active constructors of knowledge, creating more dialogic, participatory, and engaging learning environments that strengthen internalization of religious values.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning Aqidah and Akhlak at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah plays a fundamental role in shaping the character and spirituality of students from an early age. This subject aims not only to instill strong religious beliefs, but also to internalize noble moral values in everyday life. However, significant challenges arise in maintaining students' motivation to study these subjects, which are often considered abstract and theoretical. The limitations of traditional teaching methods in the subject of Akidah Akhlak tend to be monotonous, teacher-centered, and less interactive (Jannah, 2023). Although various studies have explored the effectiveness of gamification and snake and ladder media in the context of education, there are several research gaps, including: *First*, previous studies have focused on social studies subjects and have not specifically explored the implementation of snake and ladder media in the context of learning Akidah Akhlak which has unique characteristics as a religious subject (Syawaluddin et al., 2020; Zuhriyah, 2020).

Subsequent research, although researching Moral Beliefs, has not yet analyzed in depth the dimensions of learning motivation that are affected based on a comprehensive theoretical model (Suharsono, 2022). *Second*, the aspect of educational communication as a theoretical framework in the implementation of gamification has not been widely explored in previous studies. Previous studies have focused more on the technical aspects of gamification without in-depth analysis of how gamification transforms educational communication patterns from teacher-centered to student-centered (Makmun & As, 2025; Masroh, 2025; Prayitno et al., 2025). *Third*, comprehensive research on how gamification media affects various dimensions of learning motivation (attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction) based on the ARCS Model has not been conducted in the context of learning Akidah Akhlak. The results of the study measured motivation in general without detailing the specific dimensions affected (Fitriyah et al., 2024; Noviafitri et al., 2024; Tiarawati et al., 2024). *Fourth*, contextual studies with strict quasi-experimental designs, especially in MIN 8 Ciamis, have never been conducted. The research in its systematic review highlights that the majority of gamification studies are conducted at the secondary and tertiary education levels, while the context of madrasah ibtidaiyah is still limited (Ratinho & Martins, 2023). *Fifth*, the empirical gap related to psychological and pedagogical mechanisms that explain why and how gamification of snakes and ladders is effective in increasing the motivation to learn Akidah Akhlak still needs more in-depth exploration. Previous research has reported increased motivation but has not explained the underlying mechanisms that cause the increase (Nur Janah et al., 2025; Sa'diyah et al., 2023; Yani, 2025).

Based on the results of initial observations in class IV-A MIN 8 Ciamis, several indicators were found of low motivation for students to learn in the subject of Moral Faith, including: *first*, out of 26 students, only 8 students (30.8%) actively answered the teacher's questions. *Second*, as many as 15 students (57.7%) looked sleepy or unfocused during learning. *Third*, the completion rate of homework only reaches 65%. And *fourth*, the results of interviews with subject teachers show that the dominant lecture method used causes students to be less enthusiastic. This condition results in low enthusiasm for students in participating in learning, which in turn has an impact on the understanding and internalization of religious values.

This phenomenon actually occurred at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 8 Ciamis. Preliminary observations and preliminary studies conducted by researchers show that the level of active participation of students in learning Akidah Akhlak is still low. The indicators can be seen from the limitations of educational interaction between teachers and students, the lack of courage for students to express their opinions, and the tendency for students to easily lose focus during the learning process. A rigid and teacher-dominated learning atmosphere, such as hindering the transmission of understanding, habits, perceptions, fun, motivation, and talents of students because they are rarely actively involved (Tanjung, 2025). This problem demands innovation in educational communication that is able to arouse students' intrinsic motivation and transform learning patterns from passive to active and participatory.

The problem of educational communication in learning the Moral Faith is not only a local phenomenon, but a systemic challenge faced by Islamic educational institutions in various contexts. Various studies show that communication problems are still the main obstacle in achieving understanding and internalizing the values of faith and morals in students. First, several studies that reveal the dominance of teacher-centered learning methods are still the main characteristics of learning Akidah Akhlak. Lecture-dominated learning makes students passive, less engaged, and difficult to relate material to real life (Hasanah, 2025; Kasanah et al., 2023; Septya et al., 2024). This one-way communication pattern creates barriers to knowledge transfer and internalization of religious values, as students do not have the opportunity to construct their own understanding through dialogue and active interaction.

Second, the abstract characteristics of the material of Akidah Akhlak and the lack of contextualization with student life exacerbate the problem of educational communication. Learning moral beliefs needs to adapt to students' lives, so that the material presented becomes material for evaluating behavior in daily life. The material of moral beliefs, if presented in an abstract manner, becomes difficult to understand without a contextual approach and real experience of students (Budiman et al., 2024; Hasanah, 2025; Kawakip et al., 2023; Maula et al., 2024). When the material is not associated with the student's experience, the educational communication process becomes ineffective because it fails to build a bridge between abstract religious concepts and the realities of students' daily lives.

Third, the limitations of teachers' communication skills in implementing innovative educational communication strategies. Based on the former, teachers are often not trained in educational communication, the use of technology, or innovative methods such as mind mapping, jigsaws, or CTLs (Aziz et al., 2025; Budiman et al., 2024; Maula et al., 2024; Rahmiyati et al., 2022). The importance of educational communication competencies has an impact on how teachers create a dialogical, interactive, and participatory learning environment.

Fourth, limited infrastructure and readiness in the use of learning technology. Lack of facilities and readiness of teachers/students in utilizing learning technology (Budiman et al., 2024; Rahmiyati et al., 2022), hinder the implementation of educational communication that is more innovative and in accordance with the characteristics of digital native generation students. Fifth, the particular challenge in educational communication for students with special needs, where students with

hearing impairments face major problems due to the lack of specialized sign codes and teachers' skills in sign language (Dzulkifli et al., 2020).

The impact of this educational communication problem is very significant on learning achievement. One-way communication caused by a rigid curriculum and lack of teacher training results in students becoming passive with low understanding (Budiman et al., 2024; Hasanah, 2025). Material that is abstract and not associated with students' experiences makes religious values difficult to internalize (Budiman et al., 2024; Kawakip et al., 2023). Technological barriers caused by lack of facilities and low skills limit innovation and lower motivation to learn (Budiman et al., 2024; Rahmiyati et al., 2022). Strengthening teachers' communication skills through educational, interpersonal, and technology communication training is also very important. In addition, the development of contextual and innovative materials that are associated with daily life and relevant to the challenges of the times is an urgent need.

Gamified learning, which involves integrating elements such as games into the learning environment, has been recognized for its potential to increase student engagement and improve learning outcomes (Suwandani & Sunyono, 2024). Teacher-student interaction, two-way feedback and visualization are facilitated by gamification so that educational communication between teachers and students becomes warmer. Warmth in communication becomes a pleasant experience for students. By creating a dynamic and interactive experience, gamification motivates students to actively participate in their studies, which is especially important for subjects like Moral Faith, where engagement and interest can sometimes be reduced. An important aspect of gamification is its ability to foster intrinsic motivation and engagement by combining elements such as points, leaderboards, and badges that align with the goals of Education (Qudsi, 2024). These elements provide immediate feedback and measurable goals, allowing students to track their progress effectively. For Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, applying a gamified education approach can create a more interesting and enriching environment, which has the potential to lead to increased motivation and learning outcomes in Akidah Akhlak.

Research has shown that gamification in educational settings leads to significant improvements in student performance and engagement rates (Qudsi, 2024). The use of gamification not only stimulates competitiveness and cooperation between students but also facilitates the exploration of complex concepts in a fun and interactive way (Suwandani & Sunyono, 2024). Penerapan konsep pembelajaran Aqidah Akhlak melalui media Ular Tangga diwujudkan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari siswa. Sifat jujur diterapkan dengan tidak menyontek dan mengakui kesalahan. Amanah dipraktikkan saat menjaga barang titipan teman dan mengembalikan uang kembalian. Siswa menghindari sifat munafik dengan menepati janji dan berkata jujur. Adab bergaul ditunjukkan dengan setia membela teman, saling menasihati dalam kebaikan, dan memaafkan kesalahan. Refleksi harian dicatat dalam jurnal akhlak untuk memonitor perkembangan karakter. Konsep belajar sambil bermain, seperti yang ditekankan dalam teori pembelajaran, merupakan cara yang paling menyenangkan dan efektif bagi peserta didik, terutama di tingkat dasar, karena sesuai dengan karakteristik alami mereka yang cenderung belajar lebih baik melalui pengalaman langsung dan kegiatan konkret.

One form of gamification media that has proven to be effective and in accordance with the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is the snake and ladder game. The development of snake and ladder game learning media is able to increase student learning motivation and social studies learning outcomes at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Zuhriyah, 2020). Then, research at MI Muhammadiyah 19 Sidokumpul showed that the use of snake and ladder media significantly improved the learning outcomes of Akidah Akhlak of grade IV students, as evidenced by the results of significant t-test statistics (Suharsono, 2022). Students become more active, enthusiastic, and easy to understand the material because learning is interactively packaged and fun.

A comparative study on gamification revealed that 93.86% of respondents agreed that game-based learning media can motivate students (Fitriyani et al., 2023). In addition, it specifically shows an increase in motivation from 33.33% to 84.48% through snake and ladder gameplay (Nur Janah et al., 2025). These findings indicate the great potential of snake and ladder media in the context of religious learning. In MIN 8 Ciamis itself, the initial application of this media showed a very positive response, where students actively asked when they would return to using the snake and ladder game in learning, showing the emergence of intrinsic motivation.

Snake and ladder gamification supports multi-directional interaction through three educational communication mechanisms. First, vertical teacher-student communication occurs when the teacher asks questions and students respond with the answers discussed. Second, horizontal communication between students takes place in group discussions to solve problems, creating peer learning. Third, student-self reflective communication arises when students relate material to personal experiences. In contrast to the one-way lecture method, this game transforms students from passive objects to active subjects who negotiate, argue, and construct a common understanding of the values of the Moral Faith.

Fourth, a comprehensive analysis of how gamification media affects various dimensions of learning motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, and social) based on theoretical models such as ARCS (Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction) still needs to be developed. Fifth, the integration between educational communication theory and gamification approaches in overcoming identified educational communication problems such as teacher-centered learning dominance, material abstraction, and teacher skill limitations has not been studied in depth. Previous studies have tended to explore gamification from the perspective of educational technology or learning psychology, but have not comprehensively analyzed how gamification functions as an educational communication medium that transforms learning interaction patterns.

Sixth, the theoretical gap also lies in the understanding of the mechanisms of educational communication in a gamified learning environment, specifically how gamification elements facilitate multi-directional communication, educational dialogue, and the construction of shared meaning between teachers and students as well as between students. Seventh, there has been no study that explicitly links the problem of educational communication in learning Akidah Akhlak with gamification solutions through a comprehensive educational communication framework. Eighth, the dimension of non-verbal communication, symbolic communication through visual and interactive elements in gamification media, as well as its impact on the

construction of understanding abstract values of faith and morals has not been explored in depth.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of educational communication through the gamification media of snakes and ladders in increasing motivation to learn Moral Beliefs at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 8 Ciamis. In particular, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How is the implementation of educational communication through the gamification media of snakes and ladders in the learning of Aqidah Akhlak? This, filling the gap in the specific study of Moral Faith at MI, the research describes the implementation of educational communication through gamification in the learning of faith morals. (2) How much influence does the gamification media of snakes and ladders have in increasing students' motivation to learn? This answers the lack of exploration of educational communication theory, the study measures how much influence multi-directional interaction in gamification has on increasing students' learning motivation. (3) What dimension of learning motivation is most influenced by the application of gamification media of snakes and ladders? This is to close the gap of the contextual experimental approach of Ciamis, the study identified the dimensions of motivation enthusiasm, persistence, active engagement, or learning satisfaction that were most affected by the application of this media, resulting in empirical findings based on educational communication.

This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of gamification-based educational communication, especially in the context of Islamic religious education at the elementary level. Theoretical contributions include the elaboration of an educational communication framework that integrates gamification principles to address identified learning problems, the development of multi-directional communication models in a gamified learning environment, as well as an in-depth understanding of educational communication mechanisms that transform students' learning motivation. Practically, this research is expected to provide an innovative learning model that can be adopted by other madrasahs in an effort to improve the quality of learning Islamic religious education, create a more dialogical, participatory, and fun learning environment, and ultimately strengthen the internalization of the values of faith and morals in students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design embedded with educational communication analysis. This design was chosen to measure the effectiveness of snake and ladder gamification media on student learning motivation as well as to analyze the transformation of educational communication patterns from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. The educational communication framework refers to the concept of multi-directional communication that involves teacher-student, student-student, and student-learning media interaction as a dialogical process that transforms students from objects to learning subjects (Hasanah, 2025; Rahmiyati et al., 2022).

Populasi penelitian terdiri dari 60 siswa kelas IV Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 8 Ciamis untuk tahun akademik 2024/2025. Teknik purposive sampling digunakan berdasarkan kemampuan akademik yang homogen dan tingkat motivasi awal yang

setara. Sampel terdiri dari 60 siswa: 30 siswa dari kelompok eksperimen (kelas IV-A) dan 30 siswa dari kelompok kontrol (kelas IV-B). Seleksi kelas mempertimbangkan guru dengan kualifikasi yang setara untuk meminimalkan bias komunikasi pendidikan.

The instrument is designed to measure learning motivation and educational communication patterns, including: (1) Learning Motivation Questionnaire: Adapted from Keller's ARCS Model with 30 items on a Likert scale of 1-5, covering the dimensions of Attention, Relevance, Confidence, and Satisfaction. The validity of $r > 0.30$ and the reliability of Alpha Cronbach 0.89. (2) Educational Communication Observation Instrument: Measuring three dimensions based on the educational communication framework (Aziz et al., 2025; Hermanto et al., 2023): (a) Communication patterns: communication direction, frequency of teacher-student verbal interaction and between students, level of communication dominance; (b) Quality of verbal communication: clarity of delivery, use of language according to student understanding, open-ended questions, responsiveness; (c) Non-verbal and contextual communication: the use of learning media, teachers' expression and enthusiasm, gestures and eye contact, dialogical-participatory climate. The instrument uses a rating scale of 1-4 with a Content Validity Index of 0.87. (3) Student Participation Observation Sheet: Observing the activeness of questioning, the courage to speak an opinion, the involvement of group discussions, the focus of learning, and the response to stimulus. Observing the activeness of asking questions, the courage to express opinions, the involvement of group discussions, the focus of learning, and the response to stimulus. The instrument uses a 1-4 rating scale with trained independent observers. Inter-rater reliability was tested using Cohen's Kappa by involving two independent observers who observed simultaneously at 30% of the total learning sessions (3 out of 10 meetings). The results of the analysis showed a Cohen's Kappa value of 0.83, which indicates a level of substantial agreement between the two assessors. When there is a discrepancy, a consensus discussion is held between the two observers by referring to the observation rubric that has been set to reach a final agreement. (4) Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines: Exploring the educational communication experiences of 6 students (purposive) and 2 teachers, including the perception of communication patterns, interaction with gamification media, communication barriers and facilitators, and communication strategy preferences. (5) Moral Faith Achievement Test: 25 expertly validated multiple-choice questions with a validity of $r > 0.30$ and reliability of 0.82 (KR-20).

The procedure of this research goes through several stages, including: First Stage (1 week): Pretest measures motivation and initial ability. Baseline observations identified the initial communication patterns of conventional learning as a comparator. The pretest measures the initial motivation of the learners. Baseline observations identified conventional learning communication patterns through four dimensions: (1) communication intensity of verbal interaction frequency; (2) one-way/two-way/multi-directional flow mapping communication direction; (3) message quality, clarity, language suitability, question type, responsiveness; (4) the effectiveness of communication of understanding, participation, classroom climate, non-verbal communication as a comparator of post-gamification transformation.

Second Phase (8 meetings/4 weeks): The experimental group used snake and ladder gamification media with the material "Faith in Angels" and "Commendable Morals" (2x35 minutes/meeting). The control group used conventional lecture and Q&A methods. In the experimental group, educational communication was facilitated through: (a) horizontal communication between students in the collaborative group; (b) vertical communication between students and teachers as facilitators; (c) Communication with the media through a system of questions, challenges, and feedback. Each meeting was observed to document the interaction patterns and transformations of the communicator's role. Third Stage (1 week): Posttest measures changes in motivation and learning outcomes. The final educational communication observation evaluates changes in communication patterns. Semi-structured interviews delve into deep perceptions of educational communication experiences.

The gamification media of snakes and ladders is presented in a 100x100 cm game board with 50 boxes containing questions/tasks of Akidah Akhlak, equipped with question cards, challenge cards, point systems, and game instructions. Gamification elements: point system, leaderboard, badges, level progression, quests, and immediate feedback. The design facilitates multi-directional communication through: (1) group discussion cards triggering collaborative dialogue; (2) presentation cards practice verbal communication; (3) reflection cards encourage intrapersonal communication; (4) A reward system based on communicative participation appreciates the activeness of questioning, answering, and discussing.

Data Analysis Techniques This study uses two analyses, *the first* is Quantitative Analysis with descriptive statistics describing motivation profiles and communication patterns through mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and categorization. Inferential analysis uses: (1) Independent sample t-test tests differences in motivation and educational communication scores between groups; (2) The paired sample t-test tested the increase in motivation and change in the communication pattern of the experimental group from pretest to posttest. Prerequisite tests: normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and homogeneity (Levene's test). The analysis used SPSS 26.0 with $\alpha=0.05$. N-Gain measures effectiveness with the formula: $N\text{-Gain} = (\text{Posttest Score} - \text{Pretest Score}) / (\text{Maximum Score} - \text{Pretest Score})$. Interpretation: high ($g \geq 0.7$), medium ($0.3 \leq g < 0.7$), low ($g < 0.3$). *Second*, Qualitative Analysis of Educational Communication through communication observation data is descriptively analyzed to identify communication patterns, frequencies, and quality including: (1) mapping communication patterns (one-way vs multi-way); (2) categorization of types of communication (instructional, dialogical, collaborative); (3) Identification of barriers and facilitators of educational communication. Interview data were analyzed by thematic analysis: verbatim transcription, open coding identifying units of meaning, axial coding grouping codes by theme, selective coding integrating the main theme. Data triangulation comparing observations, interviews, and questionnaires increases the credibility of findings.

Internal validity is strengthened through group randomization, control of additional variables through the selection of teachers with equivalent qualifications, and the use of validated instruments. External validity is maintained through detailed research context descriptions for transferability. Reliability is maintained

through: observer training, inter-rator reliability testing, instruments with a high reliability coefficient ($\alpha > 0.80$). Meanwhile, this research has received permission from the chairman of MIN 8 Ciamis and informed consent from parents/guardians. The principles of confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation are maintained. Data is stored securely for academic purposes. Internal validity was strengthened through group randomization, equivalent teacher qualification control, validated instruments, and threat mitigation: *testing effect* (4-week pretest-posttest distance), *maturation* (short study duration), *instrumentation* (periodic observer calibration). *Contamination* is prevented through separate learning schedules and non-discussion agreements between classes. External validity is maintained through detailed context descriptions for transferability. Reliability: observer training, inter-rater reliability ($\alpha > 0.80$). The permission of the head of MIN 8 Ciamis, informed parental consent, the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and data security are met.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Educational Communication Patterns in the Implementation of Gamification Media

The implementation of snake and ladder gamification media in learning Akidah Akhlak at MIN 8 Ciamis is carried out through three phases: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The preparation phase involves socialization to students about the game mechanics, the formation of heterogeneous groups of 5-6 students, and the explanation of the points and reward system. The implementation phase lasted for 8 meetings with a variety of materials and tiered levels of difficulty, in accordance with the concept of progression levels in gamification.

Observational analysis over eight meetings showed a significant shift from one-way linear communication to multi-directional circular communication. In the pretest phase, learning communication is dominated by a teacher-centered pattern with teachers as the sole communicators and students as passive communicators. This condition is in line with the findings of the study which identified that the learning of Akidah Akhlak at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is still dominated by lecture methods that make students passive, less involved, and difficult to relate the material to real life (Fuadi, 2017; Hasanah, 2025; Fuadi, et al., 2025; Gunawan, et al., 2025; Septya et al., 2024)

Systematic observation by identifying four patterns of educational communication that emerged during the implementation of gamification: First, dialysis vertical (teacher-student) communication that developed from instructional to facilitative. Teachers no longer dominate with long lectures, but rather act as facilitators who provide scaffolding through open questions, strategic clues, and immediate feedback. The intensity of teacher-student interaction increased qualitatively, marked by the emergence of critical questions from students related to the material of Moral Faith. Second, collaborative horizontal communication (students) that develops rapidly in the context of the group. The snake and ladder media creates a communicative situation where students share knowledge, discuss to solve challenges, and negotiate meaning collectively. These findings confirm that students show increased concentration, courage to speak up, and group cooperation through the medium of snakes and ladders (Sa'diyah et al., 2023) Third, learning mediation communication (student-media) that is interactive.

Gamification media is not only a means of transmitting information, but also a medium of communication that provides stimulus, challenges, and responses to student actions. The visual, tactile, and kinetic elements in the game create multi-sensory communication that reinforces the process of encoding and decoding educational messages. Fourth, intrapersonal reflective communication occurs when students process information, make strategic decisions, and conduct self-assessments of their understanding. These reflective moments are crucial in internalizing the values of faith and morals.

The dynamics of the game create more dialogical and participatory educational communication. Students are not only passive recipients of information, but also active subjects who explore, discuss, and construct their understanding of the material of Moral Faith. The challenge element in the game motivates students to dig deeper into the subject matter, ask the teacher, and discuss with group mates to find the right answers.

Table 1. Observation Results of Teacher Performance in Implementing Snake and Ladder Media

No	Aspect Observed	Score (Cycle I)	Score (Cycle II)	Description
1.	Ability to manage class dynamics	85	90	Increased
2.	Skill in facilitating group discussions	87	92	Increased
3.	Effectiveness in providing feedback	84	88	Increased
4.	Skill in integrating game elements with learning materials	86	91	Increased
Average Score		85.5	90.25	Significant Increase

The table above shows that the increase in teachers' competence in facilitating educational communication answers the problems identified in previous research that teachers often have not been trained in educational communication, the use of technology, or innovative methods.

The Effectiveness of Snake and Ladder Gamification Media on Learning Motivation

Descriptive analysis showed a significant increase in the learning motivation of students in the experimental group. The average score of learning motivation in the pretest was 67.83 (medium category) increasing to 121.00 in the posttest (very high category). This increase reached 78.45%, showing the very high effectiveness

of snake and ladder gamification media. These findings confirm the research (Nur Janah et al., 2025) which shows an increase in motivation from 33.33% to 84.48% through snake and ladder gameplay. The control group also experienced an increase in motivation, but not as significantly as the experimental group. The average score of the control group on the pretest was 68.17 increasing to 82.33 on the posttest, with an increase of only 20.78%. This difference in improvement indicates the specific contribution of snake and ladder gamification media in arousing student learning motivation.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test showed that the pretest and posttest data of both groups were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$). The homogeneity test of Levene's test showed the variance of the two homogeneous groups ($p > 0.05$). With the fulfillment of the assumptions of normality and homogeneity, followed by the t-test.

The results of the independent sample t-test posttest between the experimental and control groups showed t-count = 12.847 with p-value = 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which means that there was a significant difference in learning motivation between the group that used the snake and ladder gamification media and the group that used conventional methods. This finding is consistent with Suharsono's (2022) research which proves that snake and ladder media have a significant influence on learning outcomes and student motivation in the subject of Moral Beliefs.

Paired sample t-test experimental groups showed t-count = 18.645 with p-value = 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a very significant increase in learning motivation from pretest to posttest. The N-Gain calculation resulted in a value of 0.76 (high category), proving the effectiveness of snake and ladder gamification media in increasing motivation to learn Akidah Akhlak.

Table 2. Comparison of Learning Motivation Between Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Pretest Average	Posttest Average	N-Gain Score	p-value (t-test)
Experiment (n=30)	67.83	121.00	0.76 (High)	0.000*
Control (n=30)	68.17	82.33	0.21 (Low)	-

*Note: $p < 0.05$ indicates a statistically significant difference.

The Changing Dimensions of Educational Communication

The communication function shifts from instructional virtues (delivering material) to multifunctional which includes: motivation (generating enthusiasm),

collaborative (building cooperation), evaluative (continuous assessment), and character formation (character building) (Fuadi et al., 2025; Fuadi & Ramadhanita, 2025; Fuadi, et al 2024). Gamification media facilitates communication that is not only cognitive but also affective and psychomotor. The language of communication learning evolved from verbal-formal dominance to an integrated multimodal: verbal (group discussion), visual (graphic elements of the media), kinetic (movement in play), and emotional (expression of joy, frustration, achievement). This multimodal communication is in accordance with the characteristics of digital generation students who are used to sustainable stimulation.

Fungsi komunikasi bertransformasi dari instruktif menjadi multifungsi: motivasional (diukur dari antusiasme verbal/non-verbal), kolaboratif (frekuensi interaksi kelompok), evaluatif (umpan balik kontinu terrekam), pembentukan karakter (ekspresi nilai moral terobservasi) Fuadi, et al 2024; Gunawan, et al 2025; Sandra Olifia et al., 2023). Bahasa pembelajaran berevolusi dari verbal-formal ke multimodal terintegrasi verbal (diskusi), visual (elemen grafis media), kinestetik (gerakan bermain), emosional (ekspresi terekam) didokumentasikan melalui videografi, transkrip, dan catatan lapangan terstruktur sesuai karakteristik generasi digital.

Communicative relations shift from hierarchical-asymmetric (superior teachers, inferior students) to collaborative-symmetric where teachers and students become co-learners. The learning atmosphere changed from formal-rigid to informal-flexible, reducing communication apprehension and increasing students' communication willingness. This transformation of the communication dimension overcomes the fundamental problems identified in the learning of Akidah Akhlak, namely the dominance of lecture methods, abstract materials, and the limitations of teachers in educational communication (Aziz et al., 2025; Hasanah, 2025; Kawakip et al., 2023).

From communication generating motivation, the analysis of each dimension of motivation based on the ARCS Model shows an interesting pattern of improvement. The Attention dimension experienced the highest increase (85.2%), followed by Satisfaction (78.9%), Relevance (74.6%), and Confidence (70.3%). The high increase in the dimension of Attention shows that the gamification medium of snakes and ladders is very effective in attracting and retaining students' attention during learning.

Snake and ladder media are effective in increasing learning motivation, reducing boredom, and making students more focused and active in learning (Fitriyah et al., 2024; Suharsono, 2022; Tiarawati et al., 2024; Zuhriyah, 2020). Interesting visual elements, game dynamics that contain suspense, and a point and reward system create an engaging and non-monotonous learning experience.

The Satisfaction dimension has also increased significantly, reflecting student satisfaction with the learning experience using gamification media. The immediate feedback that students get every time they answer questions or solve challenges provides a sense of achievement that increases learning satisfaction. This is in line with the findings (Yani, 2025) yang menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan berbasis permainan meningkatkan partisipasi aktif siswa dalam pembelajaran tematik di sekolah dasar.

The increase in the dimension of Relevance shows that students are increasingly aware of the importance and usefulness of the material of Akidah Akhlak in their lives. Contextualizing the material in the form of game situations that relate to everyday life helps students understand the practical application of religious values. Communication that contextualizes Moral Faith material in relatable game situations increases perceived relevance (Fuadi & Ramadhanita, 2025; Sandra Olifia et al., 2023). The increase in *the dimension of Relevance* (74.6%) showed students' awareness of the importance of Akidah Akhlak material through internalization mechanisms, group discussions related concepts to daily life, reflection cards facilitated introspection of moral values, game scenarios simulated real situations (honesty, help), and *immediate feedback* strengthening the practical application of religious values. The application of this media also has a positive impact on students' cognitive learning outcomes and character, including spiritual and social aspects (Noviafitri et al., 2024; Suharsono, 2022; Zuhriyah, 2020).

The Confidence dimension shows the lowest increase but remains significant. Collaborative communication in groups builds trust through peer support and shared success. The Confidence dimension shows a 70.3% increase. This is understandable because building confidence takes time and repeated success experiences. However, the game's tiered level system of difficulty helps students build confidence gradually through small accumulated achievements. This is understandable because building confidence takes time and repeated success experiences. However, the game's tiered level system of difficulty helps students build confidence gradually through small accumulated achievements.

Table 3. Increase in Learning Motivation Dimensions Based on ARCS Model

Motivation Dimension	Increase (%)	Key Findings
Attention	85.2%	Very effective in attracting and maintaining student attention through dynamic and suspenseful game elements.
Satisfaction	78.9%	High satisfaction due to immediate feedback and a sense of achievement from point and reward systems.
Relevance	74.6%	Increased student awareness of the relevance and benefits of Akidah Akhlak material in daily life.
Confidence	70.3%	Confidence built gradually through tiered challenges and accumulated small successes.

Gamification Mechanism in Increasing Learning Motivation

The effectiveness of gamification media of snakes and ladders in increasing learning motivation can be explained through several psychological and pedagogical mechanisms. First, gamification creates a flow experience, which is a state of full engagement where students feel time passes quickly and they are fully immersed in learning activities. The balance between challenge and ability in the snake and ladder game creates optimal conditions for a flowing experience. Specifically, the tiered difficulty system of questions about Akidah Akhlak concepts ranging from basic faith principles to complex moral applications combined with collaborative group discussions and immediate feedback mechanisms, ensures that challenges match students' developing competencies, maintaining engagement without causing frustration or boredom.

Second, gamification utilizes the principle of intrinsic motivation through the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs according to Self-Determination Theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Students have autonomy in making strategic decisions in games, feel competence through the achievement of points and levels, and build positive relationships through collaborative interactions in groups. Third, the reward and feedback system in gamification activates the dopamine reward system in the brain, which provides positive reinforcement to learning behavior. In a systematic literature review, it is confirmed that the design of a gamified learning environment tailored to specific educational needs can increase students' motivation and intrinsic interests during the learning process (Handayani et al., 2020).

Fourth, the healthy competitive element in the game of snake and ladder motivates students to perform better. Leaderboards and ranking systems create clear goal-setting and encourage students to continuously improve their performance. Previous research has shown that technology-based learning methods can increase student motivation by more than 80% (Prayitno et al., 2025). Fifth, the social aspect of group play facilitates collaborative learning. Discussion, knowledge sharing, and helping each other in groups not only improve conceptual understanding but also build positive social and character skills such as empathy, honesty, and sportsmanship.

Implications for Educational Communication

The findings of this study provide important implications for the development of educational communication in madrasahs. First, educational communication needs to transform from a one-way pattern of information transmission to a multi-directional interaction pattern that involves students as active subjects. Gamification media has proven to be effective in facilitating this transformation. Second, educational communication in the digital era needs to integrate playful elements that not only make learning fun but also increase the effectiveness of achieving learning goals. Gamification strategies are effective in increasing students' enthusiasm in learning Faith and Morals in the digital era (Masroh, 2025).

Third, educational communication design needs to consider the psychological aspects of students, especially the need for meaningful, challenging, and rewarding learning experiences. Gamification of leaderboards meets the psychological needs of autonomy (choice of playing strategy), competence (gradual achievement), and

relatedness (healthy competition between groups) based on Self-Determination Theory, increasing intrinsic motivation through progress visualization and social recognition. However, leaderboards risk demotivating low-achieving students, requiring a reward system that recognizes various forms of individual progress. Leaderboard-based gamification-based learning is effective in increasing students' motivation and understanding of Moral Faith material (Makmun & As, 2025). Fourth, teachers as educational communicators need to develop competencies in designing and implementing innovative learning media that are in accordance with the characteristics and needs of digital native generation students. Specific competencies include: (1) the ability to integrate game elements with the learning objectives of Akidah Akhlak, (2) the skill of facilitating post-game reflective discussions, (3) the ability to adapt the level of difficulty based on real-time student responses, and (4) sensitivity to identifying and addressing participation disparities in group dynamics. The importance of applying the game method to increase students' interest and understanding in learning the Moral Faith (Nurajizah & Hidayati, 2025).

Comparison with Previous Research

The results of this study are consistent with various previous studies but also make a distinctive contribution. Previous research found an increase in social studies learning motivation through the medium of snakes and ladders in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, while this study confirmed similar effectiveness in the subject of Akidah Akhlak (Zuhriyah, 2020). Meanwhile, the study examined the significant influence of snake and ladder media on the learning outcomes of Akidah Akhlak, and this study expands the findings by analyzing in detail the dimensions of motivation that are affected (Suharsono, 2022).

Then the development of snake and ladder learning media increases students' interest and learning outcomes in social studies subjects in elementary schools (Syawaluddin et al., 2020). This research strengthens these findings in the context of Islamic religious education in madrasas. In addition, the influence of learning Akidah Akhlak with the game method on student behavior, and this study provides quantitative empirical evidence that supports these findings (Yulianingsih et al., 2024). Gamified learning strategies play a role in student motivation in high school and higher education, although the effect can decrease if the element of novelty is lost. This study strengthens these findings and shows that gamification is also effective at the basic education level, especially in madrasah ibtidaiyah (Ratinho & Martins, 2023). The distinctive contributions of this research are: (1) focusing on the educational communication framework as the theoretical basis for gamification implementation; (2) a multi-dimensional comprehensive analysis of learning motivation; (3) the specific context of learning Akidah Akhlak in state madrasas; and (4) quasi-experimental design with strict controls to ensure the internal validity of the research.

CONCLUSION

This research makes a significant contribution to the development of gamification-based educational communication in learning Akidah Akhlak at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. Through a rigorous quasi-experimental design, this study proved that the transformation of communication patterns from teacher-centered

to multi-directional communication through snake and ladder gamification media resulted in a substantial increase in learning motivation with an N-Gain of 0.76 and an increase of 78.45%, far exceeding the control group (20.78%). The transformation of educational communication is manifested in four patterns: vertical dialogical, horizontal collaborative, learning mediation, and intrapersonal reflective which synergistically overcome the learning problems of Akidah Akhlak which has been dominated by monotonous lecture methods. The ARCS Model analysis revealed an increase in the dimensions of Attention (85.2%), Satisfaction (78.9%), Relevance (74.6%), and Confidence (70.3%), confirming that gamification transforms learning experiences into more meaningful and empowering. The crucial finding lies in proving gamification media as a catalyst that facilitates the shift in the role of teachers from transmitters to facilitators, students from passive receivers to active constructors, and media from static tools to interactive partners. Underlying psychological mechanisms include the creation of flow experiences, the fulfillment of autonomy-competence-relatedness needs, the activation of the dopamine reward system, and the facilitation of collaborative learning.

Future research recommendations include: a 6-12-month longitudinal study to evaluate sustainability, a multi-site study with a diverse sample, an exploration of multimodal communication through a sophisticated mixed-method, a factorial experimental study comparing different types of gamification, an investigation of moderating-mediating variables, an action research involving teachers as co-researchers, and an exploration of the integration of digital-AI technology in gamification of learning.

Policy implications include the development of gamification-based educational communication training programs, resource allocation for innovative learning media, integration of gamification principles in the curriculum, the establishment of communities of practice, and the development of gamification media repositories. Specifically, implementation requires: (1) 40-hour teacher training including educational game design, dialogical facilitation, and formative evaluation; (2) a minimum budget of 5% of BOS funds for the procurement of gamification materials; (3) the revision of the madrasah curriculum to integrate game performance-based assessments; (4) a digital platform for teacher practice communities to share best practices; and (5) a national repository of validated gamified media with a Creative Commons license.

The findings of this study are supported by the Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) which explains how the visual-kinetic elements of snakes and ladders reduce extrinsic cognitive loads, facilitating the processing of complex Moral Belief information. Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) reinforces the argument that collaborative interaction in play creates a Zone of Proximal Development, accelerating the internalization of moral values through the scaffolding of peers and teachers.

This research emphasizes that educational communication innovation is a fundamental reconstruction of pedagogical relationships that place students as active and dignified subjects. Gamification media of snakes and ladders has proven to be an effective catalyst in transforming Akidah Akhlak learning from conventional-monotonous to innovative-interesting, from teacher-dominated to student-centered, from theoretical-abstract to contextual, with measurable

improvements: N-Gain 0.76 (high category), increased motivation 78.45% (experimental) vs 20.78% (control), and increased dimensions of ARCS Attention (85.2%), Satisfaction (78.9%), Relevance (74.6%), Confidence (70.3%).

However, the generalization of these findings has limitations: (1) the research was conducted in one madrasah (MIN 8 Ciamis) with specific demographic and institutional characteristics; (2) the duration of the intervention was limited (8 meetings/4 weeks), so the long-term impact has not been verified; (3) the effectiveness of the media depends on the competence of teacher facilitation which may vary between contexts; (4) Moderator variables such as class size, infrastructure availability, and madrasah leadership support are not strictly controlled. Replication research in madrasahs with diverse profiles (urban-rural, public-private, different levels of accreditation) is needed to validate the transferability of the findings.

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