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Combining Psychoeducation and Game-Based Learning to Enhance Learning Motivation Among Early Adolescents

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Abstract

Background: This study examines the effectiveness of psychoeducation and game-based learning in enhancing learning motivation among students at MTs Masyhudiyah. It was found that some students do not fully focus on their studies, joke around during class, and seek out other activities. These obstacles will have long-term consequences for the students, namely a decline in academic performance and a lack of commitment to their responsibilities. **Objective:** This study aims to identify the effectiveness of psychoeducation on goal setting using the SMART framework and game-based learning in the form of a snakes-and-ladders game in enhancing students' motivation to learn. **Method:** A pre-experimental quantitative study using a one-group pretest-posttest design involving 19 seventh-grade students in Class VII-A at MTs Masyhudiyah. Learning motivation was measured using a 24-item scale adapted from Anugraheni et al. (2019). The data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to determine whether there were differences between pretest and posttest scores. **Results:** The results of the study showed a significant difference in pretest-posttest scores following the implementation of the psychoeducation and game-based learning methods ($Z = -3.826$; $p < 0.001$; $r = 0.62$, large effect). All participants showed an increase in scores, with the mean score rising from 81.47 to 94.68. **Conclusion**: Learning motivation scores increased following the combined intervention. However, because this study did not include a control group, these findings are considered preliminary evidence and do not yet demonstrate a causal relationship; therefore, a quasi-experimental study or a randomized controlled trial is needed.

Keywords: Game-based learning; Learning motivation; Psychoeducation

Abstrak

Latar Belakang: Penelitian ini membahas efektivitas psikoedukasi dan *game-based learning* dalam meningkatkan motivasi belajar pada siswa MTs Masyhudiyah. Ditemukan bahwa sebagian siswa belum sepenuhnya memusatkan perhatian pada pembelajaran, bercanda selama proses belajar, dan mencari aktivitas lain. Hambatan ini akan berdampak jangka panjang pada siswa, yakni penurunan prestasi belajar dan tidak acuh terhadap tanggung jawab. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi efektivitas psikoedukasi penetapan tujuan dengan kerangka SMART dan *game-based learning* berupa permainan ular tangga dalam meningkatkan motivasi belajar siswa. **Metode**: Penelitian kuantitatif pra-eksperimen dengan desain *one-group pretest-posttest* pada 19 siswa kelas VII-A MTs Masyhudiyah. Motivasi belajar diukur dengan skala 24 aitem yang diadaptasi dari Anugraheni et al. (2019). Data dianalisis dengan Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test untuk melihat adanya perbedaan skor *pretest-posttest.* **Hasil**: Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya perbedaan skor *pretest-posttest* setelah diberikan metode psikoedukasi dan *game-based learning* ($Z = -3{,}826$; $p < 0{,}001$; $r = 0{,}62$, efek besar). Seluruh partisipan mengalami peningkatan skor, dengan rerata meningkat dari 81,47 menjadi 94,68. **Simpulan**: Skor motivasi belajar meningkat setelah intervensi gabungan. Namun, karena penelitian ini tidak memiliki kelompok kontrol, temuan ini dipandang sebagai bukti awal dan belum menunjukkan hubungan sebab akibat sehingga dibutuhkan penelitian kuasi-eksperimen atau *randomized controlled trial.*

Kata Kunci: *Game-based learning;* Motivasi belajar; Psikoedukasi

Introduction

Junior High School, which is generally aged between 12 and 15 years, is the stage of early adolescence, namely the transition phase of children's time to adolescence (Hurlock, 2011). Early teenagers are characterized by increased curiosity, need for self-recognition, and want to try challenging things. With this unique characteristic, students certainly need further assistance in the learning world so that the future and objectives are more directed. In addition, seventh-grade students are in transition from elementary school to junior high school, so they have additional academic demands and adjustments to ideal learning; students need high learning motivation.

Supported by Maslow's statement , that in learning, there is a strong and consistent motivation that the achievements of learning will be achieved to the maximum (Maslow, 1993). Instead, low learning motivation will undermine the student's learning process, consistent with low student learning outcomes. It is with this motivation to learn that students can follow their learning with a consistent spirit. Learning motivation is the drive or tendency of a person to achieve goals with persistence and passion in conducting their learning activities (Cherniss, 2001). Students with high learning motivation can be demonstrated through aspects of learning motivation, namely encouragement of goal achievement, commitment to achieve goals, learning initiative, and optimism.

Through this motivation for learning, students are able to follow the learning process with a consistent spirit, supporting the success of students' learning. In addition to aspects of learning motivation, there are also factors that affect student learning motivation, such as expectations or objectives that want to be achieved; learning skills as supportive learning that include observation, thinking, memory, and imagination; student condition physically and psychologically; conducive and pleasant environmental conditions; dynamic elements in learning and learning, covering dynamic student learning and association; and teacher teaching techniques, namely how a teacher can create learning situations that match students, material delivery techniques, and the ability to evaluate learning skills (Suralaga, 2025).

Based on observations and interviews conducted, there were indications of low learning motivation in MTs Masyhudiyah students characterized by low attention, joking excessively, and looking for other activities in the middle of learning. When focused on aspects of (Cherniss, 2001) learning motivation, MTs Masyhudiyah students have not fully internalised all four aspects. This gap is the reason for the authors to study further related student learning motivations. So, there needs to be interventions related to learning motivation to achieve maximum learning outcomes. With the behaviour shown, the motivational intervention of learning is not only informatively provided, but also actively involves the contribution of students.

In achieving motivation to learn, researchers provide interventions in the form of psychoeducation and game-based learning. Psychoeducation is a method of delivering materials to provide understanding, knowledge and skills so that they can deal with psychological problems more adaptively (Yusuf et al., 2024). Psychoeducation is given as a first step in giving self-awareness about the importance of learning motivation. So, through this awareness, students' learning motivation can increase. The Effectiveness of Psychoeducation is described by (Hasanah et al., 2026) that psychoeducation can improve the concept of learning motivation. The granting of skills set goals and learning strategies as part of psychoeducation is also given as a strong foundation before interventions involving students activation (Fitri & Ansyah, 2024). However, psychoeducation that focuses only on giving material is not enough to increase motivation to consistently learn. Students need fun learning methods and adequate learning facilities (Tumanggor et al., 2023); (Indrawati, 2021).

Furthermore, interactive activities are given to support deeper understanding of the material, namely game-based learning. Game-based learning (GBL) is a game-based learning model, with the aim of increasing student interest during learning (Fiqriah et al., 2025). This intervention is considered to be in accordance with the needs of students who experience learning boredom, as it increases the active involvement of students (Agustina & Joshua, 2024). In addition, this method is also found to be effective in improving learning motivation because it creates fun learning, which facilitates understanding (Luh et al., 2025). Some of the characteristics of game-based learning include designed to support the achievement of learning goals, each game is based on specific learning goals; the rules provisions as limitations during the learning process so that the initial goal is unforgettable; the existence of integrated feedback system as a student's positive reinforcement in achieving learning goals; and based on the voluntary participation of students to follow the

rules of the game (Fiqriah et al., 2025). These characteristics that strengthen the reason for the use of game-based learning as interventions increase learning motivation.

These two interventions are combined with the intention of providing a basic understanding of the motivation interactively, with the goal of first understanding the concept of learning motivation and the importance of having motivation to learn. Especially in addressing the lack of understanding of learning goals and awareness of the importance of learning, continued with game-based learning as an intervention involving student activation and increasing student interest to learn more motivation. This intervention is also an activity of releasing the saturation of students in learning (Hidayat et al., 2018) because it blends material with the game.

Theoretically, psychoeducation can be explained through goal-setting theory, which holds that specific goals direct attention and increase effort and persistence in achieving them (Locke & Latham, 2002). Setting spesific goals through the SMART framework (spesific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) (Doran, 1981) helps students turn abstract goals into more detailed ones. Psychoeducation can therefore be understood as a tool for mapping cognitive structure, that is, psychological understanding of learning motivation and the direction of learning goals.

Meanwhile, the implementation of game-based learning relates to self-determination theory: when the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, more autonomous motivation develops. Students' voluntary participation supports autonomy; immediate feedback on their answers and their own initiative increases feelings of competence; and combining the game with discussion supports relatedness with peers. The characteristics of game-based learning thus meet all three psychological needs for developing more autonomous motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, the effect of games on motivation needs to be tested in specific contexts and designs. By combining the two, psychoeducation theoretically provides understanding and a more specific direction of goals through the SMART framework, whereas game-based learning provides an active learning experience that trains initiative and optimism.

However, research that addresses psychoeducation and game-based learning as a combined intervention to increase learning motivation is limited. Research that has been conducted is still dominated by giving one of the interventions to increase learning motivation. In addition, this combination is based on the characteristics of students who are in transition periods, requiring interactive learning methods, as well as field findings that show the degree of student boredom with conventional learning methods.

Based on these conditions, this study will examine the effectiveness of psychoeducational interventions combined with game-based learning in increasing the motivation of MTs Mashhudiyah students. The two interventions collaborated as an effort to complement previous research that has studied psychoeducation and game-based learning separately.

Based on this framework, the hypotheses are as follows. H_0: There is no difference in students' learning motivation scores between the pretest and posttest after the psychoeducation and game-based learning intervention. H_1: There is a difference in students' learning motivation scores between the pretest and posttest after the intervention, with posttest scores expected to be higher than pretest scores.

Method

The study uses a quantitative pre-experimental approach with a one-group pretest-posttest design design. One group, in this case one class, received a pretest, the intervention, and a posttest. This design has no control group, so changes in scores cannot be attributed solely to the intervention: extraneous variables, namely history, maturation, and testing effects, cannot be ruled out (Creswell, 2014).

Class VII-A was used as the research group. Class VII-B was not used as a control group because of limited research time and conflicting class schedules. Selecting the participants in this way may also produce statistical regression toward the mean. The data collected will be analysed with the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test to see the difference in scores in the same group at different times in the group of students of the Masyhudiyah class VII-A MTs. Statistical analysis is done with the help of SPSS software version 27.

Sample or Population

The population in this study is the students of grade VII at MTs Masyhudiyah Giri, with a total of 42 students divided into two classes. Meanwhile, a sample of 19 students from one class was used. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, namely the determination of samples based on certain considerations.

The following consideration is that the average pre-test score of the class is lower than that of the class that is not used as a sample. The initial screening was given to all 42 students in the two classes. Based on the average class comparison score, class VII-A was selected as the research sample.

All students in Class VII-A (N = 19) participated in the study. The mean initial screening score was [M = 81,5] for Class VII-A and [M = 87] for Class VII-B. The participants comprised 8 girls and 11 boys, and most were aged 12 to 13 years.

Procedure

The intervention consisted of four sessions held once a week, not including the initial observations and interviews. It was delivered by the researcher using a module prepared beforehand. The pretest was administered before the intervention, and the posttest was administered after the fourth intervention session. The sequence of activities is described in Table 1.

Table 1. Sequence of the Psychoeducation and Game-Based Learning Intervention

Session	Activity	Media or materials	Duration
1	Psychoeducation: presentation of learning motivation material	PowerPoint slides	30 min
2	Game-based learning: group Snakes and Ladders game with learning motivation prompt questions	Snakes and Ladders board, dice, 10 question cards	60 min
3	Game-based learning: group Snakes and Ladders game with learning motivation prompt questions	Snakes and Ladders board, dice, 10 question cards	60 min
4	Psychoeducation: goal setting and learning strategies using the SMART framework	Worksheet "Kenali Diriku Dalam Belajar" ("Know Myself in Learning")	60 min

The psychoeducation session on learning motivation aimed to help students understand the definition of learning motivation, its importance in the learning process, and the factors that influence it; identify ineffective study habits; and recognize the importance of increasing their learning motivation. The session was delivered interactively so that students could be fully engaged in class.

The Snakes and Ladders game on learning motivation was played in groups of four to five students with the following rules. One player chose and answered a question from the question box, and the answer was validated by the group members and the researcher. A student who answered correctly could roll the dice and move the pawn according to the number rolled until reaching the finish. But, when the pawn lands on a square with a snake on it, the player must move back to the previous square according to the snake's path. The researcher then evaluated and reflected with the students to link learning motivation to their answers. The questions in the game were based on the learning motivation aspects of (Cherniss, 2001)

The last intervention, which involve the implementation of psychoeducation on goal setting and learning strategies used the worksheet "Kenali Diriku Dalam Belajar" ("Know Myself in Learning"). Students filled in the subjects they liked and disliked, their obstacles in learning, and a map of their learning goals using the SMART framework (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound)

Data Measurement

Pretest and posttest data were collected using motivational learning instruments adapted from the Learning Motivation Scale developed by Anugraheni et al., (2019), which has been tested for validity and reliability. The Scale is based on aspects of (Cherniss, 2001), which include the drive for goal achievement, commitment, initiative, and optimism. It consists of 24 items rated on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. The adaptation process involved modifying the item statements to align with the participants' characteristics and context.

Before being administered to the study participants, the instrument was first tested for validity and reliability. The item validity test used the corrected item-total correlation technique. All items showed an r

coefficient above 0,3 indicating that all items were deemed valid (Azwar, 2017). A reliability test using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was also conducted, yielding a value of $\alpha = 0.786$. Thus, the instrument was deemed reliable.

In terms of scoring, total scores range from 24 to 120, and higher scores indicate higher learning motivation. The categorization criteria used were hypothetical categorization (Azwar, 2017): the hypothetical mean was $\mu = 72$ [$(24 \times 1 + 24 \times 5)/2$] and the hypothetical standard deviation was $\sigma = 16$ [$(120 - 24)/6$]. Scores below 56 ($\mu - 1\sigma$) were categorized as low, scores from 56 to 88 as medium, and scores above 88 ($\mu + 1\sigma$) as high. Then, the data that has been collected will be processed using statistical software.

Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using software assistance (SPSS version 27) to compare pre-test and post-test scores, then conducted Wilcoxon Test to see the distribution of pre-test score differences and post-test scores in the same group so that an image of the effectiveness of the intervention was provided. The effectiveness of interventions is seen when the resulting Wilcoxon output is $p < 0.05$, and the negative or positive Z scores indicate the difference in the pre-test score and post-test learning motivation.

Result

Descriptive statistics for learning motivation scores are presented in Table 2. The mean score increased from 81.47 (SD = 12.70) at pretest to 94.68 (SD = 11.54) at posttest, with a mean gain of 13.21 (SD = 5.74; range = 5–29). All participants (N = 19) showed an increase in scores.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Learning Motivation Scores

Score	M	SD	Mdn	Range
Pretest	81,47	12,70	83,00	55 – 97
Posttest	94,68	11,54	96,00	72 – 112
Gain	13,21	5,74	12,00	5 - 29

Based on the score categories (Table 3), at pretest 1 student had low motivation, 11 had medium motivation, and 7 had high motivation. After the intervention, no student was in the low category, 6 students were in the medium category, and 13 students were in the high category.

Table 3. Distribution of Learning Motivation Categories

Category	Pretest, *n* (%)	Posttest, *n* (%)
Low (< 56)	1 (5,3)	0 (0,0)
Medium (56-88)	11 (57, 9)	6 (31,6)
High (> 88)	7 (36,8)	13 (68,4)

Table 4 shows increases in all four aspects of learning motivation. The aspects do not have the same number of items, so the size of the increase cannot be compared directly across aspects.

Table 4. Comparison Mean Pre-test and Post-test Aspects of Learning Motivation

Aspects	M *Pre-test*	Category	M *Post-test*	Category	Gain
Achievement of goals	13,73	Medium	15,4	High	1,67
Commitment	14,3	Medium	16,9	High	2,6
Initiative	22,7	Medium	26,6	High	3,9
Optimism	30,6	Medium	35,7	High	5,1

The results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test are presented in Table 5. There was a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores (Z = −3.826, p < .001) with a large effect size (r = .62). The effect size was calculated using the formula $r = |Z|/\sqrt{N}$, where (Z) represents the Wilcoxon test statistic and (N) represents the total number of observations ((N = 38), comprising 19 pre-test and 19 post-test scores). All participants had higher posttest than pretest scores. The negative sign of Z does not indicate a decrease in scores. The direction of change is read from the comparison of scores, which shows that all participants scored higher at posttest.

Table 5. Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Result

Statistic	***Posttest - Pretest***
Z	-3.826
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
r	0,62
Posttest > pretest (*n*)	19
Posttest < pretest (*n)*	0
Ties (*n)*	0

Discussion

Learning motivation is a fundamental need of students in a learning life. As (Suralaga, 2025) explains, motivation is an internal state that is capable of building, directing, and maintaining behavior Another opinion says that motivation is a condition that moves humans toward a specific goal, which is the view of Fillmore H. Stanford as cited in (Indriyanto, 2021). The findings of the study showed significant improvement in learning motivation scores after the participants received psychoeducational and game-based learning interventions. The mean learning motivation score increased from 81.47 to 94.68, and all participants showed an increase in their posttest scores. The results of the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test showed a sig. score of <0.001 and a Z score of -3.826, indicating a significant difference between pretest and posttest learning motivation. The negative values does not mean that scores decreased. The differences were computed as pretest – posttest, so higher posttest scores yield negative values

The first intervention conducted was psychoeducation. The psychoeducation component focused on the concept of learning motivation and on goal setting using the SMART framework. The learning motivation material served to build a basic understanding of learning motivation first, so that students would later better understand the more abstract concepts. Furthermore, psychoeducation on goal setting through the SMART framework focused on setting specific goals accompanied by a commitment to increase attention and effort (Locke & Latham, 2002)

In addition, writing down short-term goals can increase self-efficacy, which serves to strengthen students' confidence in their learning abilities (Schunk, 1990). Writing concrete goals with the SMART framework may help explain why the goal achievement aspect was attained and commitment increased. According to (Fitri & Ansyah, 2024); (Setyaningbudi et al., 2026), the implementation of motivational psychoeducation can provide direction and encouragement to students to achieve goals and build commitment in learning. These findings are in line with the motivational aspects of learning, namely goal achievement and commitment in learning.

Meanwhile, the study of game-based learning methods found an increase in student activity in learning after the game-based learning method was implemented (Suwiriyanti, 2024). The implementation of game-based learning with a snakes and ladders game as the medium and light motivational learning questions helps students bring up feelings of wanting to finish the game and encourages students active involvement (Fiqriah et al., 2025).

Through the process of answering questions, discussing, and participating actively, students' need for autonomy will be fulfilled (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This condition can encourage students to take the initiative

in expressing their opinions in front of their group mates without fear of being judged or blamed. Meanwhile, responses from peers and the researcher in giving feedback on students' answers can foster a sense of competence and a desire to try again (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). From the perspective of social interdependence theory, group learning fosters effort and the quality of relationships among friends (Johnson, 1999) namely, hearing peers who are able to convey their goals and share their views on learning provides vicarious experience, which is a source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and supports students' optimism. Theoretically, the implementation of game-based learning can foster the aspects of initiative and optimism in students.

In general, previous studies have tested a single component. For example, self-regulation psychoeducation for MTs (Islamic junior high school) students (Fitri & Ansyah, 2024), goal-setting psychoeducation (Setyaningbudi et al., 2026), and psychoeducational counseling for madrasah ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary school) students (Hasanah et al., 2026). Meanwhile, game-based learning studies include a snakes and ladders game in Hindu religion lessons (Suwiriyanti, 2024), and in grade 2 elementary school mathematics (Jannah et al., 2019), as well as interest and learning motivation material (Indrawati, 2021); (Fiqriah et al., 2025). There are significant differences in the learning media, educational level, and outcomes that distinguish those studies from the present study. In addition, a meta-analysis of gamification found low to moderate positive effects on cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects (Sailer & Homner, 2020), whereas other research found that games are more effective for learning and retention but do not provide significant motivation compared with conventional learning (Pieter Wouters, 2013)

This study produced higher learning motivation scores after the psychoeducation and game-based learning interventions were given. However, it is not known whether the increase was purely caused by the interventions, by psychoeducation alone, by game-based learning alone, or by a combination of both. The connection between the aspects and impacts in the discussion above is the result of theoretical exploration. To determine the impact in more detail, a four-group design is needed, namely: psychoeducation only, game-based learning only, a combination of both, and a control group.

The results of this study can also be used by guidance and counseling (BK) teachers and classrooms as an easy-to-apply intervention that does not require high costs for students, especially when students are bored with conventional teaching techniques. This intervention should preferably be used as a supplementary strategy alongside existing learning and be evaluated periodically because the findings of this study are still new. In its implementation, it should be carried out voluntarily and should not be forced on less active students. In individual counseling, this intervention cannot yet replace the effectiveness of individual counseling, especially for students with more complex problems.

However, the study also has limitations: the use of a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group can affect the validity of the resulting data through history, maturation, and testing effects (William R. Shadish, 2002). Selecting participants based on lower pretest scores may lead to regression to the mean and bias. In addition, the limited number of participants may also limit generalizability, and there was no follow-up after the increase in learning motivation scores. For future researchers, it is recommended to use a randomized controlled trial design with a control group, a larger sample, and follow-up measurements.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, this study provides preliminary evidence that student learning motivation increased following the implementation of SMART goal-setting psychoeducation combined with snake and ladder game-based learning. Theoretically, these findings support the view that strengthening cognitive structures through goal-setting, combined with active and stimulating learning experiences, can work synergistically to increase students' engagement and motivation to learn. In practice, this cost-effective series of interventions offers a practical, engaging alternative that guidance counselors can easily integrate into traditional counseling services.

However, this study has several limitations, notably the absence of a control group, a small sample size, a short intervention period, and class selection based on lower pre-test scores, which prevents establishing a direct causal relationship or isolating the specific contribution of each intervention component. Consequently, future research is recommended to employ quasi-experimental designs or randomized controlled trials with matched control groups including comparative conditions isolating psychoeducation

alone, game-based learning alone, and their combination along with longitudinal follow-ups to evaluate the long-term sustainability of the changes in learning motivation.

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