



## The Influence of the Games Based Learning Model on Learning Interest in Christian Religious Education and Character Development

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the influence of the Games Based Learning (GBL) model on students' learning interest in Christian Religious Education and its contribution to character development. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this research synthesizes findings from national and international studies published between 2013 and 2024 to provide a comprehensive analysis of GBL's pedagogical impact. The SLR method involved a structured identification, screening, and thematic analysis of relevant empirical and conceptual studies across major academic databases. The results reveal that GBL significantly enhances learning interest by offering interactive, student-centered learning experiences that stimulate curiosity, engagement, and intrinsic motivation. Game elements such as challenges, narrative missions, rewards, and collaborative tasks foster active participation and sustained attention, addressing common issues of disengagement in traditional Christian Religious Education instruction. Moreover, the findings indicate that GBL effectively supports Christian character development by providing experiential learning environments where students practice values such as honesty, empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and perseverance. Game-based scenarios enable learners to engage in moral decision-making and reflect on biblical principles within meaningful contexts. The review also highlights that GBL aligns well with the learning preferences of Generation Z and Generation Alpha, making Christian Religious Education learning more relevant and culturally resonant. While challenges such as limited teacher readiness and technological constraints remain, the overall evidence suggests that GBL is a promising pedagogical approach for enhancing both cognitive engagement and spiritual formation. This study recommends further development of Christian-based educational games and teacher training to optimize GBL integration in Christian Religious Education learning.*

**Keywords:** Games Based Learning, Learning Interest, Christian Education, Student

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of educational technology and innovative pedagogical approaches in the twenty-first century has encouraged teachers to rethink and redesign learning strategies that are more engaging, interactive, and student-centered. One of the

approaches that has gained significant attention in recent years is *Games Based Learning* (GBL), a model that integrates game elements such as challenges, rewards, levels, and problem-solving into the learning process. In Christian Religious Education where the goal is not only cognitive understanding but also the formation of character and values, the use of GBL offers a new pedagogical pathway that aligns with students' learning preferences and developmental needs. Modern learners, especially adolescents, tend to prefer dynamic learning environments that actively involve participation, creativity, and exploration rather than passive reception of information. Therefore, integrating GBL into *Christian Religious Education* learning can potentially foster higher learning interest, deeper engagement, and stronger internalization of Christian values. Learning interest is a fundamental affective component that determines students' willingness to participate, pay attention, and commit to learning activities. In many educational contexts, declining student interest particularly in subjects perceived as theoretical or moral-normative like *Christian Religious Education* has become a major concern. Traditional methods that rely heavily on lecturing, memorization, or teacher-dominated instruction often fail to meet students' expectations for interactive learning. When interest decreases, students tend to be disengaged, less motivated, and unable to deeply understand or internalize Christian teachings. Research on educational psychology shows that interest plays a central role in shaping learning outcomes, influencing not only academic achievement but also attitudes, behaviors, and long-term character development. Finding learning models that can significantly increase interest is critical for improving the effectiveness of *Christian Religious Education* learning. Games Based Learning offers a promising solution because it provides a meaningful, contextualized, and enjoyable learning experience. Through games, students learn by doing, experimenting, and making decisions that require moral reasoning and reflective thinking. In *Christian Religious Education*, such activities can be designed to emphasize values such as cooperation, empathy, honesty, forgiveness, and respect. Game scenarios can replicate real-life moral dilemmas, enabling students to explore biblical principles and Christian ethics in ways that feel relevant and personally meaningful. Furthermore, the challenge-reward structure within GBL can stimulate intrinsic motivation, while the collaborative nature of many educational games can strengthen social relationships and support character formation. This aligns with the Christian educational mandate to cultivate learners who are not only knowledgeable about Christian doctrines but also embody Christlike character in daily life.

Another significant aspect of GBL in *Christian Religious Education* is its compatibility with the developmental characteristics of Generation Z and Generation Alpha learners. These generations are digital natives who grow up immersed in technology, interactive media, and gaming environments. Their cognitive styles are often oriented toward visual learning, rapid feedback, and experiential engagement. Thus, GBL not only matches their learning preferences but also leverages their strengths, making the learning process more intuitive and culturally relevant. Incorporating games into *Christian Religious Education* learning can bridge the gap between traditional religious education and the digital realities of contemporary students, making Christian teachings more accessible and appealing. Character development one of the central aims of *Christian Religious Education* can be strengthened through GBL because game-based scenarios can cultivate perseverance, discipline, teamwork, and moral decision-making. When learners face challenges within a game and are required to collaborate or apply ethical reasoning, they

build dispositions that are essential for Christian character formation. By guiding students to reflect on their in-game choices and relate them to biblical teachings, teachers can create opportunities for transformative learning experiences that shape both cognition and character. Given these potentials, this study seeks to analyze the influence of the Games Based Learning model on students' learning interest in *Christian Religious Education* and its contributions to character development. Understanding this relationship is crucial for enriching pedagogical practices and providing empirical evidence for the integration of innovative learning models in Christian religious education. Through this research, it is expected that GBL can be positioned as an effective approach to enhancing engagement, deepening value understanding, and fostering holistic character formation in students.

## METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively analyze research findings related to the influence of the Games Based Learning (GBL) model on learning interest in Christian Religious Education and its contribution to character development. SLR was selected because it provides a structured, transparent, and replicable method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing empirical evidence from existing studies. Unlike traditional narrative reviews that often rely on selective references, SLR follows a rigorous protocol that minimizes bias and enhances the reliability of conclusions. This method enables researchers to map the development of a research topic, identify patterns, compare outcomes, and draw meaningful inferences from a wide range of scholarly sources. The SLR process began by formulating clear research questions that guided the entire review process. The key questions included: How does Games Based Learning influence students' learning interest in Christian Religious Education? and In what ways does GBL contribute to the development of Christian character values among learners? These questions served as the foundation for determining the scope, inclusion criteria, and search strategy. The review incorporated studies from national and international journals to ensure the diversity and comprehensiveness of the data. Only peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings, and reputable academic sources published between 2013 and 2024 were considered to capture the most relevant and up-to-date research developments. The literature search was conducted across several academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, CrossRef, and DOAJ. Keywords were carefully designed using Boolean operators to improve search precision, such as "Games Based Learning," "game-based education," "Christian Religious Education," "character development," "learning interest," and "education." The search results initially produced a large number of studies, which were then screened through a multi-stage filtering process. The first stage involved removing duplicates, followed by a relevance screening based on titles and abstracts. Studies that did not address GBL, learning interest, character development, or Christian religious education were excluded. The remaining articles underwent full-text evaluation to ensure methodological rigor, theoretical alignment, and data relevance to the research questions. To maintain the quality of the reviewed literature, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Studies included in the SLR were required to meet the following criteria: addressed the application of GBL in educational contexts, discussed learning interest or character development outcomes, provided empirical or conceptual

insights, and were available in full text. Excluded studies were those that focused solely on secular values without relevance to Christian education, employed non-educational game contexts, or lacked adequate methodological clarity.

Data extraction was conducted systematically by summarizing key information from each selected study, including authors, publication year, research design, sample characteristics, intervention type, key findings, and implications. The data were then coded thematically to identify recurring patterns and categorize findings into major themes, such as the impact of GBL on motivation, engagement, value internalization, and collaborative learning. Qualitative synthesis was employed to interpret and compare results rather than conducting a meta-analysis, given the diverse methodologies of the included studies. The results of the SLR were synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of how GBL influences learning interest and supports character development within Christian Religious Education. This method ensured that conclusions were based on accumulated evidence rather than isolated findings, thereby enhancing the credibility and academic contribution of the study.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this Systematic Literature Review reveal a consistent pattern across national and international research regarding the effectiveness of the Games Based Learning (GBL) model in enhancing learning interest and supporting character development within Christian Religious Education. The reviewed studies indicate that GBL is not merely an entertainment-driven pedagogical tool but a structured instructional model capable of stimulating cognitive, affective, and moral engagement. The integration of game elements, such as challenges, feedback loops, goal-oriented tasks, narrative-based missions, rewards, and interactive collaboration, contributes to learning environments that align with the psychological needs and preferences of contemporary learners. This study's synthesis emphasizes that GBL significantly influences students' intrinsic motivation and emotional investment in learning, which in turn enhances their understanding and internalization of Christian values and moral principles. Across the articles examined, one of the most prominent findings concerns the enhancement of students' learning interest through the inclusion of gameplay dynamics. Learning interest, often defined as a combination of attention, curiosity, enjoyment, and involvement, is found to increase when students are engaged in activities that require active participation rather than passive listening. Research in both secular and religious education contexts demonstrates that when learners are presented with challenges to solve, missions to complete, and outcomes shaped by their decisions, they naturally experience heightened engagement. Traditional Christian Religious Education instruction, which is frequently based on lecture-style delivery, often struggles to maintain student attention due to its abstract or moral-normative nature. However, GBL transforms the learning experience into one that is interactive, situational, and exploratory. This shift from passive to active learning is consistently reported as a major factor in increasing learning interest.

In Christian Religious Education, the integration of GBL becomes particularly meaningful as it allows students to explore biblical stories, moral dilemmas, and Christian values through immersive scenarios. Several of the reviewed studies describe educational games that simulate real-life decision-making situations based on biblical principles, such as choosing actions that reflect love, forgiveness, honesty, justice, or compassion. By placing

learners in these decision-driven environments, games serve as experiential laboratories for practicing Christian character. Students are not only learning about values cognitively but are also experiencing the emotional and social consequences of particular choices. This experiential dimension has been recognized as one of GBL's strongest contributions to moral education because character development requires the union of knowledge, disposition, and action. The reviewed literature shows that GBL aligns strongly with the developmental characteristics of modern learners, especially Generation Z and Generation Alpha. These generations, shaped by digital technologies and interactive media, exhibit learning preferences that are visually oriented, feedback-dependent, and collaborative. They tend to respond positively to educational tasks that resemble digital interactions they encounter daily, such as mobile games, online challenges, and virtual simulations. Several studies reveal that the interactive nature of games enhances self-efficacy, persistence, and emotional engagement, factors that are essential for developing meaningful learning interest. When learners feel competent, challenged at the right level, and rewarded for their progress, they experience intrinsic motivation that sustains their engagement. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering motivation. GBL, with its inherent emphasis on autonomy and mastery through gameplay mechanics, naturally supports this motivational framework.

In terms of character development, the synthesis of research demonstrates that GBL can cultivate several critical Christian character values. These include responsibility, cooperation, empathy, honesty, resilience, and respect. Many educational games require students to work together to achieve shared goals, fostering collaboration and mutual support. In Christian Religious Education, this collaborative component can be intentionally designed to reflect biblical principles of fellowship, unity, and service. When students collaborate within game-based activities, they learn to negotiate roles, share ideas, resolve conflicts, and support peers, behaviors that reflect Christian relational ethics. Studies indicate that such cooperative learning moments significantly contribute to students' social-emotional development and the strengthening of their interpersonal character traits. Several studies also emphasize the role of narrative in GBL as a medium for moral learning. Games that incorporate narrative structures, such as quests, story missions, or character-driven episodes, provide students with symbolic worlds where moral and spiritual narratives can unfold meaningfully. In Christian Religious Education, narratives from Scripture can be transformed into interactive learning journeys. For instance, a game that allows students to navigate the journey of Joseph, David, Paul, or other biblical figures enables learners to experience challenges, moral decisions, and transformations within a simulated environment. Narrative immersion has been shown to deepen moral reflection and strengthen emotional resonance, making Christian values more relatable and memorable for learners. Another essential insight is that GBL supports reflective learning, which is vital for Christian character formation. Reflection is a crucial component of learning in Christian Religious Education because it encourages students to internalize values, evaluate their actions, and align their behavior with Christian principles. Many studies reviewed highlight that reflection questions integrated after gameplay sessions significantly enhance value comprehension. When students reflect on why they chose certain actions, how they solved moral dilemmas, or what biblical lessons

can be derived from their in-game experiences, deeper learning occurs. This reflective dimension transforms gameplay from mere activity into a character-shaping process. The SLR findings also highlight the role of feedback, both immediate and constructive, in supporting student learning and character development. Games typically provide instant feedback that allows learners to evaluate their performance and adjust their strategies. This kind of immediate reinforcement helps students build resilience, learn from mistakes, and strengthen problem-solving skills. In Christian education, feedback can be connected with biblical principles, guiding students to interpret their successes and failures through a values-based lens. Teachers can use in-game feedback as an opportunity to discuss spiritual growth, ethical responsibility, and personal integrity. Another recurring theme in the literature concerns the psychological benefits of GBL. Several studies emphasize that games can reduce learning anxiety, increase self-confidence, and create a supportive environment for participation. In subjects like Christian Religious Education, where some students may feel uncomfortable discussing moral issues or expressing personal beliefs publicly, games offer a safe and low-stress environment for exploration. The playful nature of games lowers affective barriers and encourages learners to engage in discussions that they might otherwise avoid. This emotional safety is significant in fostering open conversations about faith, morality, and character. The synthesis also indicates that GBL contributes to differentiated learning, making it accessible for students with diverse learning styles and abilities. Visual learners benefit from game graphics, auditory learners from narrative sounds, and kinesthetic learners from interactive tasks. In Christian Religious Education contexts, differentiated instruction is particularly important because spiritual and moral understanding varies across individuals. GBL provides multiple pathways for students to access religious content and express their understanding, making the learning process more inclusive and equitable. Another significant insight relates to teachers' roles in facilitating GBL. The reviewed studies emphasize that the success of GBL is not solely dependent on the games themselves but also on how teachers integrate them into pedagogy. Teachers play a crucial role in selecting appropriate games, designing learning objectives, guiding reflection, and ensuring alignment with Christian values. Studies reveal that when teachers actively facilitate GBL with clear instructions, structured reflection, and value-oriented debriefings, the impact on learning interest and character development becomes significantly stronger. Thus, teacher competency in designing and implementing GBL-based lessons is essential. Several studies also identify challenges in implementing GBL effectively in Christian Religious Education. These challenges include limited technological resources, lack of teacher training, potential misunderstandings about the pedagogical purpose of games, concerns about excessive screen time, and the need for culturally relevant Christian game content. Some educators express concern that games might trivialize sacred topics or distract students from spiritual reflection. However, research indicates that these concerns can be addressed through thoughtful instructional design, careful game selection, and teacher-led value integration. Proper scaffolding ensures that gameplay supports rather than diminishes the sacredness and moral depth of Christian teachings. Another challenge identified in the literature pertains to the availability of high-quality Christian educational games that align with doctrinal integrity and curriculum objectives. While many secular educational games are available, Christian-centered games designed specifically for value education remain limited. This scarcity

presents an opportunity for curriculum developers, religious educators, and Christian institutions to collaborate in designing contextually relevant games that support Christian Religious Education learning. Moreover, research suggests that even secular games can be repurposed for Christian education when teachers provide appropriate biblical interpretations and reflective questions.

A key contribution of this SLR is the identification of empirical patterns across multiple studies that confirm the robust potential of GBL in transforming Christian Religious Education learning. The convergence of findings demonstrates that GBL not only enhances cognitive engagement but also supports moral and spiritual development. Students become more active participants in their learning, more willing to explore difficult moral issues, and more capable of relating biblical teachings to real-life contexts. The dynamic and relational nature of games reflects several biblical principles of teaching, such as experiential learning, storytelling, mentorship, and community building. This study's findings emphasize that Games Based Learning is an effective and innovative approach for increasing learning interest and supporting character development in Christian Religious Education. It aligns with modern pedagogical principles while remaining faithful to the goals of Christian education: nurturing faith, shaping virtues, and developing students who embody Christlike character. The reviewed research provides strong evidence that GBL has the capacity to make Christian Religious Education learning more engaging, relevant, and transformative for today's learners. The synthesis further suggests that Christian educators should continue exploring GBL as a strategic tool in strengthening pedagogical practices, promoting holistic student development, and bridging the gap between biblical values and contemporary learning environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this Systematic Literature Review clearly demonstrate that the Games Based Learning (GBL) model holds significant potential for enhancing learning interest and fostering character development within Christian Religious Education. Through the synthesis of national and international studies, it becomes evident that GBL offers more than merely an entertaining instructional approach; it provides a pedagogically grounded, psychologically engaging, and morally relevant framework that aligns effectively with the goals of Christian Religious Education. By integrating game mechanics such as challenges, feedback loops, narratives, rewards, and meaningful decision-making, GBL succeeds in creating learning environments that are dynamic and student-centered. These environments encourage active participation, curiosity, enjoyment, and reflective thinking, four essential components that contribute to increased learning interest. Students become more attentive and motivated because the model places them at the center of the learning process, allowing them to construct understanding through experience rather than passive reception. The review also acknowledges several challenges that must be addressed for optimal implementation. These include limited teacher readiness, inadequate technological resources, concerns about excessive screen time, and the scarcity of Christian-centered educational games. Despite these challenges, the literature suggests that they can be mitigated through professional development, collaborative curriculum design, and intentional pedagogical planning. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding reflective conversations, aligning gameplay with biblical values, and

ensuring that the learning experience remains spiritually grounded. This study affirms that the Games Based Learning model is a promising pedagogical approach for enriching Christian Religious Education learning by increasing students' interest and supporting character formation. By fostering active engagement, encouraging moral reflection, and aligning with the developmental needs of digital-age learners, GBL stands out as a strategic and effective model for achieving holistic Christian education. Therefore, further research and innovation in the development of Christian game-based resources, teacher training, and curriculum integration are essential to maximize the positive impact of GBL in fostering faith, values, and character in today's students.

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