



**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WORD SQUARE MEDIA IN INCREASING
THE LEARNING INTEREST OF NINTH GRADE STUDENTS ON THE
TOPIC OF DIGITAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AT MTSN 1 JEMBER**

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Abstract

This study was conducted to address the low learning interest of ninth-grade students in digital economic development material at MTsN 1 Jember, where traditional lecture-based teaching methods limited engagement and participation. The research aimed to enhance students' learning interest by applying the Word Square learning medium, which combines educational games with cognitive challenges to promote active and enjoyable learning. Using a qualitative Classroom Action Research (CAR) design following Kemmis and McTaggart's model, the study was implemented in two cycles involving stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, focusing on indicators such as attention, participation, and willingness to learn. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' learning interest from 49% in the first cycle to 87% in the second indicating that Word Square media effectively fostered enthusiasm, focus, and interaction during lessons. It is concluded that Word Square serves as an effective alternative learning strategy to increase students' learning interest in digital economic topics and is recommended for broader application across other subjects.

Keywords: Word Square, Learning Interest, Digital Economic Development



INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar in human development, serving as the foundation for shaping intelligent, knowledgeable, and morally upright generations capable of effective communication and critical thinking. The higher the quality of education implemented within a nation, the greater its contribution to societal progress and competitiveness (Bella et al, 2024). According to Law No. 20 of 2003, education is a conscious and planned effort to create learning environments and processes that enable students to actively develop their potential in spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects. Similarly, Suriadi et al. (Biassari et al., 2021) describe education as a process that aims to cultivate students' intellectual capacity, personality, spirituality, and moral integrity.

In the contemporary digital era, technological advancement has profoundly transformed various sectors, including the economic domain, which is increasingly oriented toward digital systems. This transformation requires junior high school students (MTs/SMP) to comprehend fundamental economic concepts such as e-commerce, financial technology (fintech), and digital marketing. However, observations at MTsN 1 Jember indicate that ninth-grade students exhibit low interest in learning digital economy topics, tend to be passive, and experience reduced engagement during lessons. Teachers continue to rely predominantly on conventional lecture-based methods with limited integration of innovative media, while students' intensive boarding school activities further diminish their focus and participation in the learning process.

Low learning interest is a major obstacle to students' academic progress. Students who lack enthusiasm tend to struggle in understanding material, avoid asking questions, and demonstrate lower retention of knowledge. According to Uno (2011), learning interest represents an internal drive that motivates individuals to enjoy and engage in learning activities. When this interest declines, students' participation and academic achievement tend to deteriorate. Hence, it is crucial for educators to design learning processes that are both engaging and interactive to foster students' intrinsic motivation and interest in learning.

To achieve this, teachers must employ learning strategies that emphasize active student participation and align with the needs of 21st-century education. Conventional media such as textbooks and worksheets are often less effective in sustaining students' attention and encouraging critical engagement. This limitation underscores the importance of adopting innovative and game-based learning media that encourage exploration, collaboration, and meaningful learning experiences (Syarifuddin et al, 2024).



One such strategy is active learning, which encourages students to engage cognitively and behaviorally throughout the learning process. According to Hamid (2011), active learning encompasses all forms of instruction that allow students to participate directly in constructing their knowledge through interaction with peers and teachers. Uno (2012) further emphasize that active learning fosters a dynamic, interactive, and enjoyable classroom environment, enhancing comprehension and knowledge application.

A promising approach within this framework is the use of Word Square as an educational medium. Word Square combines cognitive challenge and play by requiring students to identify correct answers within a grid of letters—similar to crossword puzzles. As explained by Karyadinata et al. (2012) and Lufri (2020), this activity trains students to be more attentive, analytical, and accurate. Huda (2017) defines Word Square as an educational word-based game designed to engage students in identifying keywords aligned with the learning material, while Arsyad (2019) highlights its ability to enhance focus, memory retention, and enjoyment in learning.

However, previous research has not yet explored the use of Word Square within the context of digital economic learning at the MTs level. Most studies have focused on improving students' motivation, achievement, or activity rather than directly examining their learning interest in economic content adapted to the digital era. For instance, Rahayu (2020) analyzed the use of Word Square to enhance motivation and achievement in social studies, while Puspitasari (2021) focused on student activity and performance in a similar context. Sari & Hidayat (2022) examined interactive digital media to improve learning interest but did not employ the Word Square model. Meanwhile, Yuliana (2019) studied Word Search rather than Word Square, focusing on concentration and memory, and Hartono (2023) confirmed that educational games can improve interest but without addressing their integration into digital economy topics.

These findings reveal a research gap in the existing literature. There has been limited research specifically integrating the Word Square medium with digital economy topics in the MTs context. In addition, previous studies have primarily focused on learning outcomes, motivation, or student activity rather than directly examining students' learning interest. Furthermore, the digital economy, as a newly introduced theme in the social studies curriculum, remains underexplored through game-based educational approaches.

The novelty of this study lies in applying Word Square specifically to increase students' learning interest rather than merely improving achievement



within the theme of digital economic development. This research offers a new pedagogical model that combines educational games with digital economic literacy, aligning with 21st-century learning demands and the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the Word Square learning medium in enhancing ninth-grade students' interest in learning digital economic development at MTsN 1 Jember. Academically, the research contributes to the growing body of literature on innovative instructional media in digital economic education, while practically, it provides teachers with a creative, engaging, and relevant strategy to foster student interest and participation. Furthermore, this study supports national education policies emphasizing technology integration and student activity, thereby offering meaningful academic, social, and pedagogical implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Word Square Learning Media

The Word Square learning media is an educational game integrating fun and critical thinking. As explained by Mujimin in Maryaningsih & Hidayati (2018), it evolves from the lecture method with an emphasis on student activeness. Students respond to questions by finding corresponding words in a grid containing distractor letters to enhance accuracy (Fauzi, & Maufur, 2020). Saptono in Maryaningsih & Hidayati (2018) adds that this activity fosters precision and critical thinking through letter-based problem-solving. Although it improves students' accuracy and comprehension, improper application may limit creativity.

Learning Interest (Summary)

Learning interest refers to a psychological drive that keeps learners engaged and motivated. Uno (2011) identifies its indicators as enjoyment, curiosity, attention, and participation. According to Slameto (2010), interest develops from pleasure and leads to enthusiasm and responsibility in learning. Sardiman (2018) and Hurlock in (Haryati, 2015) link it to mental readiness and motivation. Dewi (2018) highlights that learning interest arises from emotional, cognitive, and social factors. Hence, it represents an integration of affective and cognitive elements that sustain learners' active involvement in the learning process.



Digital Economic Development Material (Summary)

Digital Economic Development examines how technological progress transforms economic activities. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2022) outlines its goal as helping students grasp economic digitalization and societal adaptation to technological changes. This transformation involves digitized production, distribution, and consumption systems. At the MTs level, the topic introduces students to current trends such as e-commerce, digital payments, and innovation. Consequently, it prepares learners to understand and participate in the modern, technology-driven economy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design aimed at improving students' learning interest through the use of Word Square media in the topic of digital economic development for ninth-grade students at MTsN 1 Jember. The CAR model follows Kemmis and McTaggart (1998), consisting of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation to identify changes in students' learning interest. Referring to Haryati (2015) dan Slameto (2010), the indicators include attention, interest, active participation, and willingness to learn. The data were analyzed qualitatively to evaluate the effectiveness of Word Square media in fostering students' learning interest and supporting innovative, interactive learning in the digital era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This Classroom Action Research was conducted at MTsN 1 Jember in the Social Studies subject on the topic of digital economic development, aiming to enhance students' learning interest through the use of Word Square media. The research was carried out in two cycles, each consisting of the stages of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection, following the Kemmis and McTaggart model. By integrating the Word Square media into the learning process of digital economic development, it is expected that students not only engage in educational gameplay but also gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter being studied.

The primary instrument used in this study was an observation sheet assessing students' learning interest, developed based on the indicators proposed by (Uno, 2011), namely: (1) feeling of enjoyment, (2) interest in the subject, (3) attention to the material, and (4) students' involvement in learning activities.



Observation Results of Cycle I and Cycle II

Observations were conducted over two learning cycles. The results of the observation on the four indicators of students’ learning interest are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1.
The results of the observation on the four indicators of students’ learning interest

Indicators of Learning Interest (Uno, 2011)	Cycle I (%)	Cycle II (%)	Increase (%)
Feeling of enjoyment	57	90	+33
Interest in the subject	50	87	+37
Attention to the material	47	83	+36
Overall involvement	43	87	+44
Overall average	49 (Moderate)	87 (High)	+38

Based on the results above, students’ learning interest increased from 49% (moderate category) in Cycle I to 87% (high category) in Cycle II. The 38% increase indicates a significant influence of the application of the Word Square media on enhancing students’ learning interest.

Interpretation of the Results

The increase in students’ learning interest is attributed to the characteristics of the Word Square media, which combines elements of play and learning. This media successfully fosters feelings of enjoyment, curiosity, and cooperation among students in groups. According to Uno (2011), learning interest emerges when students show feelings of enjoyment, attention, interest, and active involvement in the learning process. All four of these aspects are accommodated in learning activities using the Word Square media.

In addition, Word Square creates a competitive yet enjoyable learning atmosphere, motivating students to better understand economic digital concepts such as e-commerce, fintech, business digitalization, and startups.

Discussion Based on Theory and Previous Studies

The results of this study support Uno (2011) theory, which states that interest is influenced not only by students’ internal factors but also by learning strategies that foster enjoyment and engagement. The Word Square media makes



learning more active, contextual, and collaborative. These findings are consistent with Usmayani (2020) study, which showed that educational games enhance students' enthusiasm and motivation to learn. Similarly, Fitriani (2022) found that educational games are effective in increasing junior high school students' learning interest. Meanwhile, Arsyad (2019) explained that visual and interactive media strengthen students' attention and retention toward the material.

Thus, the Word Square media plays an important role in creating an interactive and enjoyable learning environment while enhancing students' attention and participation in digital economics learning at madrasah. Based on the classroom action research conducted in two cycles, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Word Square media effectively increased the learning interest of ninth-grade students at MTsN 1 Jember in the topic of digital economic development. Overall, students' average learning interest increased from 49% (moderate category) in Cycle I to 87% (high category) in Cycle II, with a 38% improvement. This demonstrates that the use of Word Square media can create a fun learning atmosphere, foster attention and curiosity, and increase students' active participation in understanding digital economic concepts.

CONCLUSION

The results of this classroom action research at MTsN 1 Jember show that the use of Word Square media effectively increased students' learning interest in digital economic development material. Students' learning interest rose from 49% (moderate) in Cycle I to 87% (high) in Cycle II, indicating a 38% improvement. The interactive and enjoyable nature of the Word Square media successfully enhanced students' enjoyment, attention, and participation in learning. It is recommended that teachers use Word Square as an alternative learning strategy to make lessons more engaging, while future studies may apply this media to other subjects and grade levels to assess its wider benefits.

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