

Transforming Tauhid Understanding through Innovative Team Games Tournament Implementation in Junior High School

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ABSTRACT

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The teaching of Tauhid in Islamic education often relies on lecture-based approaches that emphasize memorization of doctrinal concepts, which may limit students' conceptual engagement and meaningful understanding. This study investigates how an innovative implementation of the Team Games Tournament (TGT) model can transform students' understanding of Tauhid into a more participatory and reflective learning experience. The research employed a Classroom Action Research design conducted in a junior high school Islamic education class involving 39 seventh-grade students. Data were collected through participatory classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation of learning assessments, and were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis model consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. The findings indicate that the integration of collaborative academic games, structured team tournaments, and reflective discussion created a dynamic learning environment that increased students' participation and strengthened their conceptual comprehension of Tauhid. The learning process shifted from passive reception toward collaborative meaning-making, enabling students to interpret theological concepts through peer interaction and guided reflection. These results demonstrate that cooperative game-based learning can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for bridging abstract religious concepts with students' cognitive and social learning processes. The study contributes a transformative instructional model for Islamic education that supports more interactive, reflective, and student-centered approaches to teaching foundational theological concepts.

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INTRODUCTION

The accelerating transformation of contemporary society in the digital age has intensified concerns regarding the moral and spiritual foundations that guide human behavior. Within Islamic educational philosophy, Tauhid the doctrine of divine unity occupies a central role as the epistemological and ethical core of Muslim life. Tauhid not only represents a theological affirmation of God's oneness but also functions as a moral framework that shapes human responsibility, social conduct, and spiritual consciousness. In an era characterized by rapid information flows, digital hyperconnectivity, and the diffusion of cultural values, adolescents increasingly encounter competing narratives about identity, ethics, and meaning (Tsaliki, 2022; Yilmaz, 2026). Several studies have indicated that while access to religious information has expanded significantly through digital platforms, the depth of religious understanding among young Muslims often remains superficial and fragmented (Khamis, 2024; Yilmaz, 2025). This paradox highlights a critical educational challenge: knowledge about religion does not automatically translate into internalized moral awareness. Consequently, strengthening Tauhid education within formal schooling becomes an urgent priority for nurturing ethically grounded individuals capable of navigating complex social realities.

Despite its fundamental importance, the teaching of Tauhid within many Islamic education settings frequently encounters pedagogical limitations that restrict the depth of students' understanding. Instructional practices often emphasize doctrinal transmission, focusing on definitions, classifications, and memorization of theological concepts rather than encouraging reflective engagement with the meaning of divine unity in everyday life. Scholars have argued that such approaches risk producing what is described as "cognitive religiosity," where students possess theoretical knowledge but fail to internalize the ethical implications of belief (Fernhaber & Hawash, 2025; Sabir et al., 2025). This condition becomes particularly problematic during adolescence, a developmental stage marked by identity exploration and moral questioning. When theological concepts are presented as static information rather than lived principles, students may perceive religious learning as intellectually rigid and disconnected from their lived experiences. As a result, Islamic education faces a pressing challenge: how to maintain doctrinal authenticity while simultaneously cultivating meaningful understanding that shapes students' values, attitudes, and moral reasoning.

The pedagogical implications of this challenge become particularly visible at the level of classroom practice in junior high schools. Observational studies across various Islamic education contexts suggest that instructional methods remain largely teacher-centered, especially in subjects dealing with theological

foundations such as Tauhid (Abas et al., 2025). While lectures can efficiently convey doctrinal information, they often fail to stimulate sustained engagement among adolescents who naturally respond to interactive and participatory learning environments. Students frequently experience boredom, reduced motivation, and limited emotional connection to the subject matter when learning activities rely predominantly on passive listening. Such conditions contribute to low classroom participation and minimal dialogue about the deeper meaning of faith. Educational theorists have long emphasized that meaningful learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through interaction, reflection, and collaboration (Bryce & Blown, 2024). These insights suggest that improving Tauhid education requires not merely revising curricular content but fundamentally rethinking the pedagogical strategies through which theological concepts are introduced and explored.

Within the broader field of educational research, cooperative learning models have demonstrated considerable effectiveness in enhancing student engagement and academic performance. Among these approaches, the Team Games Tournament (TGT) model has received particular attention due to its integration of collaborative learning, structured academic games, and group-based recognition systems (Fenezia & Armiami, 2025). The TGT framework encourages students to work cooperatively within teams while simultaneously participating in academic competitions designed to reinforce conceptual understanding. Numerous studies have reported that TGT can improve motivation, increase classroom participation, and strengthen peer interaction in various subjects, including mathematics, science, and language learning (Anggoro & Khasanah, 2024; Pada & Amir, 2022). In the context of Islamic education, several scholars have also explored the potential of TGT to improve learning outcomes in topics such as Islamic jurisprudence and Qur'anic studies (Zakkiyah et al., 2025). These findings suggest that cooperative competition can create an engaging learning atmosphere that motivates students to actively participate in the learning process.

Nevertheless, a closer examination of existing research reveals a notable limitation in the current body of literature. Most studies examining the implementation of TGT in Islamic education focus primarily on subjects that involve procedural or narrative learning, such as fiqh or Islamic history. The application of TGT to theological topics particularly those involving abstract metaphysical concepts like Tauhid remains relatively limited (Hakim et al., 2025; Pohan & Khairuddin, 2025). This gap is significant because the learning challenges associated with doctrinal theology differ substantially from those of other subjects. Tauhid requires students not only to comprehend conceptual definitions but also to reflect upon the philosophical implications of divine unity

in shaping ethical behavior. Consequently, pedagogical strategies that work effectively for procedural knowledge may not automatically produce similar outcomes when applied to abstract theological concepts. Addressing this gap requires innovative instructional designs capable of translating abstract religious principles into meaningful learning experiences for students.

Furthermore, previous research on cooperative learning in Islamic education has tended to prioritize measurable academic outcomes, particularly improvements in test scores or short-term cognitive achievement. While such indicators are important, they often overlook the deeper dimension of learning that involves conceptual transformation and internalization of meaning. Understanding Tauhid requires more than recalling doctrinal statements; it involves a reflective process through which students reinterpret their relationship with God, themselves, and the world around them [Rahman, 2022]. Pedagogical research therefore needs to move beyond surface indicators of academic success and examine how instructional innovations contribute to deeper forms of understanding. Against this backdrop, the present study advances the argument that an innovative adaptation of the Team Games Tournament model can serve as a pedagogical bridge between the abstract nature of Tauhid and the psychological learning characteristics of junior high school students. The study draws upon empirical classroom data generated through a classroom-based action research project originally conducted as part of a student research initiative. By analyzing and refining these classroom interventions within a rigorous academic framework, the article seeks to demonstrate how cooperative learning strategies can transform students' understanding of Tauhid from passive memorization into meaningful conceptual engagement.

METHOD

This study employed an empirical field research approach using a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design to investigate the transformation of students' understanding of Tauhid through the implementation of an innovative Team Games Tournament (TGT) learning strategy. Classroom Action Research was selected because it allows researchers to intervene directly within the learning environment while simultaneously generating reflective knowledge about pedagogical practice. Unlike conventional experimental designs that emphasize controlled variables, CAR prioritizes problem-solving within authentic educational settings and encourages iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection as part of a cyclical process of pedagogical improvement. Such an approach is particularly suitable for Islamic education contexts where instructional challenges often emerge from complex classroom dynamics and require adaptive teaching strategies rather than static

interventions. The conceptual foundation of this design follows the action research framework proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which emphasizes reflective practice and collaborative inquiry in educational (Kemmis et al., 2013). The research was conducted at SMP Nurul Abror Al-Robbaniyin, Banyuwangi, Indonesia, involving a seventh-grade class consisting of 39 students. The site was selected purposively based on two academic considerations. First, preliminary classroom observations indicated persistent difficulties among students in grasping abstract Tauhid concepts due to the dominance of lecture-based instruction. Second, the institution provided a conducive environment for pedagogical experimentation through the integration of Islamic values within formal education. The research was implemented across three iterative action cycles, each consisting of instructional planning, implementation of the TGT-based learning activities, systematic observation of classroom interactions, and reflective evaluation to refine subsequent instructional strategies.

Data collection was conducted using multiple qualitative and quantitative techniques in order to capture both the process and outcomes of the pedagogical intervention. Participatory classroom observations were carried out throughout each action cycle to document student engagement, interaction patterns, and learning dynamics during the TGT implementation. These observations were complemented by semi-structured interviews with students and the collaborating teacher to gain deeper insights into learners' perceptions of the instructional approach and their evolving understanding of Tauhid concepts. In addition, documentary evidence in the form of learning assessments, classroom records, and students' performance scores from the tournament activities was collected to track changes in conceptual comprehension across cycles. The analysis of the collected data followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which involves three interconnected analytical stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). During the data condensation stage, observational notes, interview transcripts, and assessment records were systematically organized and coded through thematic coding to identify emerging patterns related to conceptual understanding and learning engagement. The data were subsequently presented through structured displays that facilitated cross-cycle comparison of learning progress. Finally, conclusions were drawn through iterative verification processes to ensure analytical consistency and theoretical coherence. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed methodological triangulation by comparing data obtained from different collection techniques, as well as source triangulation involving students, teacher observations, and documentary records. This triangulation process strengthened the credibility and objectivity of the analysis by ensuring that interpretations were supported by

multiple converging sources of evidence.

RESULT

Transformation of Tauhid Understanding through the Innovative Implementation of Team Games Tournament

The transformation of students' understanding of Tauhid in this study is operationally defined as a shift in the quality of students' conceptual comprehension of Islamic monotheism from a predominantly memorization-based understanding toward a more reflective, contextual, and participatory comprehension facilitated through innovative components of the Team Games Tournament (TGT) model. In this research, the innovative implementation of TGT extended beyond conventional cooperative learning structures by integrating additional pedagogical elements such as conceptual puzzle-based academic games, cumulative scoring across learning cycles, and short reflective discussions following tournament sessions. These elements were intentionally designed to encourage students not only to recall definitions of Tauhid but also to explore its conceptual implications within everyday life contexts. Consequently, the transformation of Tauhid understanding in this study was measured through two primary indicators: (1) the progressive improvement in students' conceptual comprehension scores across the action research cycles and (2) observable changes in student participation patterns during classroom learning activities.

Interview data with the Islamic Education teacher indicated a noticeable shift in students' engagement and conceptual orientation toward Tauhid after the implementation of the innovative TGT strategy. One teacher involved in the instructional intervention stated:

“Previously, when Tauhid was taught mainly through lectures, students tended to listen, take notes, and memorize the definitions. However, when the TGT method was introduced, students began discussing concepts with each other and tried to understand the meaning behind them because they wanted their team to win the competition. Some students even started relating the concept of Tauhid to their daily behavior.”

This statement suggests that the integration of academic games and team-based competition stimulated students' intrinsic motivation to understand the material more deeply. From the researcher's perspective, the teacher's observation indicates that the structured competitive dynamics embedded in the TGT model functioned as a pedagogical stimulus that encouraged students to collectively construct conceptual understanding. The interaction among group members during tournament activities also demonstrated that discussions about Tauhid were no longer dominated by teacher explanations but evolved into

collaborative meaning-making processes among students.

Similar insights emerged from interviews with participating students. One student explained:

“Before this activity, learning Tauhid mostly meant memorizing the definitions. But when the group games were introduced, we asked each other questions and explained the answers so that our team could win. That made me understand why Tauhid is important, not just what its definition is.”

This statement illustrates how collaborative academic games created a learning environment that encouraged active knowledge construction. The student’s experience indicates that explaining concepts to peers became an important mechanism for reinforcing understanding. The researcher interprets this response as evidence that peer interaction within the tournament-based structure facilitated deeper conceptual engagement with the topic of Tauhid. Rather than passively receiving information, students participated in dialogical exchanges that allowed them to reinterpret the meaning of the concept through social interaction.

Classroom observation data further revealed noticeable changes in learning dynamics during the implementation of the TGT model. During the initial stage of Cycle I, several students still displayed passive learning behavior and tended to wait for instructions from the teacher before contributing to group discussions. However, as the implementation progressed through subsequent cycles, the classroom atmosphere gradually became more interactive. Students appeared increasingly engaged in group discussions, frequently asking and answering questions related to Tauhid concepts, and demonstrating enthusiasm during tournament sessions. During the academic game activities, nearly all members of each team participated in the process of solving conceptual questions and formulating group responses. The researcher also observed that several students who previously rarely participated began contributing actively to group discussions and tournament answers. These behavioral patterns suggest that the structured competition embedded within the TGT model contributed to creating a more participatory learning environment compared to conventional lecture-based instruction.

In summary, the combined findings from interviews and classroom observations demonstrate a clear shift in the learning dynamics of Tauhid instruction. Students who initially exhibited passive learning patterns gradually became more engaged when learning activities incorporated academic games and team tournaments. This increase in classroom participation was accompanied by a measurable improvement in students’ conceptual comprehension scores across the action research cycles. The empirical data therefore indicate that the innovative implementation of TGT contributed to both

behavioral and cognitive transformations in students' engagement with Tauhid learning.

The transformation of students' conceptual understanding was also reflected in the progressive improvement of comprehension scores across the action research cycles. The quantitative comparison of students' learning outcomes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Students' Tauhid Understanding Scores Across Learning Cycles

Learning Cycle	Average Score	KKM	Status
Cycle I	340	500	Not Achieved
Cycle II	920	1000	Nearly Achieved
Cycle III	1620	1500	Achieved

As shown in Table 1, students' conceptual comprehension scores increased consistently across the three learning cycles. The average score improved substantially from 340 in Cycle I to 1620 in Cycle III, indicating a significant shift in students' mastery of Tauhid concepts.

Furthermore, the overall pattern emerging from the data suggests a consistent relationship between the level of collaborative interaction within student teams and the depth of conceptual understanding achieved. Groups that demonstrated higher levels of discussion intensity during academic game sessions tended to achieve higher comprehension scores in the learning evaluations. This pattern indicates that collaborative interaction played an important role in enabling students to clarify abstract theological concepts. Consequently, the learning transformation observed in this study can be described as a pedagogical shift from passive individual learning toward an active and collaborative learning environment that integrates structured competition and cooperative problem-solving.

The pattern emerging from the classroom intervention suggests a structured learning transformation process in which conceptual understanding of Tauhid develops through several interconnected pedagogical stages. This transformation process is illustrated in Figure 1.

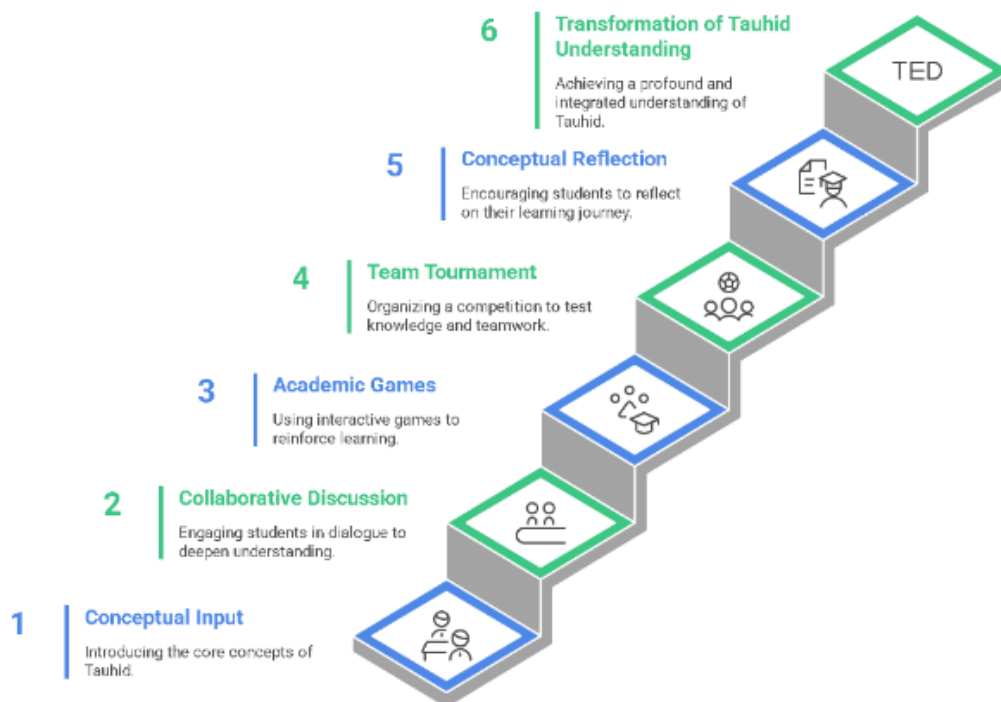


Figure 1: Model of Tauhid Understanding Transformation through Innovative TGT

Figure 1 illustrates how the innovative implementation of the TGT model facilitates a gradual shift from passive conceptual reception to active collaborative construction of Tauhid understanding. The integration of academic games and tournament-based learning creates opportunities for students to reinterpret theological concepts through interaction and reflection.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illuminate how the implementation of an innovative Team Games Tournament (TGT) strategy facilitated a shift in students' engagement with Tauhid from passive conceptual reception toward a more experiential and reflective understanding. Tauhid, as the epistemological core of Islamic theology, is often presented in formal education through doctrinal exposition that emphasizes definitional knowledge rather than lived comprehension. The results observed in this study suggest that when learning environments are structured around collaborative competition and dialogical interaction, abstract theological principles can become cognitively and emotionally accessible to adolescent learners. From a developmental perspective, early adolescents tend to respond more positively to interactive learning environments that combine social interaction, challenge, and immediate feedback (Antonacopoulou et al., 2023). The tournament-based learning structure appears to have activated these psychological tendencies, allowing

students to engage with Tauhid concepts through discussion, negotiation of meaning, and peer explanation. This pedagogical dynamic resonates with the broader literature on religious education, which argues that theological understanding deepens when learners are provided opportunities to interpret doctrine through participatory experiences rather than solely through authoritative transmission (Chia, 2025; Yalvaç Arıcı, 2025). Consequently, the transformation observed in this study indicates that cooperative competition can serve as a mediating pedagogical mechanism through which doctrinal knowledge becomes internalized as meaningful understanding.

These findings corroborate earlier research on cooperative learning, particularly the foundational work of Slavin, who emphasized that structured team competition enhances student motivation and academic engagement when combined with collaborative responsibility (Zitha et al., 2023). Numerous studies in general education contexts have demonstrated that the TGT model improves classroom interaction, learning motivation, and conceptual comprehension across various subjects (Lapabande et al., 2026; Mukuka & Tatira, 2024). Within Islamic education research, similar patterns have been identified in studies applying TGT to subjects such as fiqh or Islamic history, where cooperative games increased student participation and academic outcomes (Lapabande et al., 2026; Suwanto, 2025). The present study extends these insights into the domain of Islamic theology by demonstrating that the model is equally capable of facilitating engagement with doctrinal material traditionally considered abstract or difficult for younger learners. At the same time, the findings highlight a subtle divergence from earlier research that often treats TGT primarily as a motivational strategy. In this study, the learning dynamics observed during the tournament sessions suggest that the model functioned not merely as a tool for increasing participation but also as a mechanism for enabling students to collectively construct theological meaning. This distinction underscores the pedagogical potential of TGT beyond its conventional application as a classroom management strategy.

The distinctive contribution of this research lies in the innovative modifications introduced into the conventional TGT framework. While classical implementations of TGT typically focus on quiz-based competitions and group score accumulation, the model applied in this study incorporated additional elements designed to support conceptual reflection. These elements included puzzle-based academic challenges, cumulative tournament scoring across learning cycles, and reflective classroom discussions following the competitive phases. Such modifications appear to have played a crucial role in enabling students to move beyond procedural engagement toward deeper conceptual processing. Educational theorists have long argued that game-based learning

environments are most effective when competitive activity is accompanied by opportunities for reflection and conceptual consolidation (Hu, 2024; Rye et al., 2025). By embedding reflective dialogue within the tournament structure, the instructional design in this study created a pedagogical bridge between playful competition and theological contemplation. This hybrid model therefore offers an important methodological innovation for religious education, suggesting that even metaphysical concepts such as Tauhid can be explored through structured learning games when supported by guided reflection and collaborative reasoning.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings contribute to ongoing discussions about the relationship between social constructivist learning theory and Islamic pedagogy. Social constructivism posits that knowledge emerges through interaction, dialogue, and collaborative meaning-making within a social context (Dermentzi, 2024; Rye et al., 2025). Although this perspective has been widely applied in contemporary educational research, its implications for theological learning within Islamic education have received comparatively limited attention. The results of this study suggest that the collaborative interactions embedded in the TGT model enabled students to negotiate the meaning of Tauhid collectively, thereby transforming doctrinal learning into a socially mediated process. In this sense, the study demonstrates that theological understanding can be facilitated through the same socio-cognitive mechanisms that support conceptual learning in other academic domains. Importantly, this does not diminish the doctrinal integrity of Tauhid but rather illustrates how pedagogical strategies rooted in social constructivism can support the internalization of religious concepts. The findings therefore contribute to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to harmonize contemporary educational theory with the epistemological foundations of Islamic education (Rahman, 2025; Sahin, 2018).

The broader implications of this study extend to both curriculum design and teacher professional development within Islamic education. If Tauhid is to function as a foundational element in shaping students' moral and spiritual identity, its teaching cannot remain confined to expository instruction. The results presented here suggest that pedagogical innovation is essential for translating theological concepts into meaningful learning experiences for contemporary students. Integrating cooperative game-based strategies into the teaching of Islamic studies may therefore represent a promising direction for curriculum reform, particularly at the junior secondary level where student motivation and identity formation are especially dynamic. At the same time, the successful implementation of such approaches requires teachers to develop competencies beyond traditional lecturing, including the ability to facilitate

collaborative learning environments and reflective classroom dialogue. Professional development programs for Islamic education teachers should thus incorporate training in interactive pedagogical strategies that align with both modern educational research and the ethical objectives of Islamic teaching (Mahara, 2025; Syukri & Rosyad, 2025). By bridging the gap between doctrinal instruction and experiential learning, such innovations have the potential to reshape how Tauhid and indeed Islamic education more broadly is taught in contemporary classrooms.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the innovative implementation of the Team Games Tournament (TGT) model can effectively transform students' understanding of Tauhid from a purely abstract doctrinal concept into a meaningful and engaging learning experience. By integrating collaborative competition, academic games, and reflective dialogue, the instructional approach created a learning environment in which students actively constructed theological understanding through interaction and shared reasoning. The primary scientific strength of this research lies in its demonstration that cooperative game-based pedagogy can bridge the persistent gap between doctrinal transmission and experiential comprehension in Islamic education. In doing so, the study contributes a transformative pedagogical model that repositions Tauhid learning beyond rote memorization toward participatory meaning-making, thereby aligning classical Islamic educational objectives with contemporary learner-centered instructional practices.

Despite these contributions, the scope of this research remains bounded by its implementation within a single institutional setting and a limited number of instructional cycles. Such contextual specificity inevitably constrains the generalizability of the findings to broader educational environments. Future research should therefore explore the application of this pedagogical framework across diverse school contexts, age groups, and curricular structures in order to examine its adaptability and long-term impact. Further investigations may also consider integrating digital learning platforms or gamified educational technologies to expand the interactive dimensions of the TGT framework in religious education. Through such developments, the model proposed in this study holds potential to inspire more dynamic and contextually responsive approaches to teaching foundational Islamic concepts in contemporary classrooms.

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