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### APPLICATION OF THE INDEX CARD MATCH MODEL TO IMPROVE THE LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THE MORAL BELIEFS OF GRADE VII JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TQ MUADZ BIN JABBAL

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#### ABSTRACT

*This classroom action research addressed the low learning outcomes and passive participation of Grade VII students in Akidah Akhlak at SMP TQ Muadz Bin Jabbal, which were initially hindered by conventional, teacher-centred methods. The Index Card Match (ICM) model was implemented in the social constructivist learning theory to create interactive and collaborative learning. The study aimed to improve the process and learning outcomes, specifically targeting increased mastery and active involvement in each cycle. Employing the Kemmis & McTaggart PTK model across two cycles, the research involved the subject teacher and all students in the class. Data were collected through observation, tests, interviews, and documentation, then analysed using descriptive quantitative and qualitative approaches. Findings revealed a progressive improvement from pre-cycle to the second cycle, with significant growth in mastery levels, engagement, and collaborative skills. Students became more confident in expressing ideas, while the teacher became a facilitator. These results affirm that ICM can enhance understanding and moral values simultaneously. This research contributes to classroom practice improvement, teacher professional development, and strengthens the evidence base for cooperative, game-based learning models.*

**Keywords:** *Index Card Match, cooperative learning, Akidah Akhlak, classroom action research.*

#### INTRODUCTION

The learning process at TQ Muadz Bin Jabbal Junior High School still faces serious challenges, especially in Moral Beliefs. Students only memorise concepts without understanding their meaning and relevance in daily life. The dominant lecture method limits interaction, makes students passive, and decreases



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learning motivation (Sugrah, 2020). In fact, according to constructivist learning theory, students will find it easier to understand and internalise the material if they are actively involved in the learning process, interact with peers, and experience the application of the concepts learned for themselves (Efgivia et al., 2021). In Islamic education, especially the Moral Faith, this process is essential because learning is not just about transferring knowledge, but about forming a faithful, pious, and noble personality. Therefore, a learning model is needed to facilitate active student involvement while contextualising moral values (Zajda, 2021).

The Index Card Match (ICM) learning model is one of the relevant strategic alternatives. This model is based on an educational game that requires students to match cards containing questions and answers interactively (Mukhsin, 2025). Its application allows students to move, discuss, and work together in a fun learning atmosphere, in line with active learning principles that simultaneously emphasise cognitive, affective, and psychomotor involvement (Tikasari & Setiyawati, 2024). Thus, ICM not only supports the achievement of academic goals but also brings to life the values of togetherness, mutual respect, and responsibility, which are at the core of moral education (Safika et al., 2025).

Some previous studies have shown the effectiveness of this model. Research by Andong Maha (2021) proves that the learning outcomes of the Moral Faith of Asmaul Husna material have increased from 62.5% completeness in the first cycle to 93.75% in the second cycle through the implementation of ICM in class V of MI Al-Mansuriyah (Maha, 2023). Similar results were found by Choerul Anwar and Salma Avinia (2020), who reported a significant correlation between ICM strategy and Aqidah Akhlak learning achievement, with a value of  $r$  0.597 in MTs students (Anwar & Salma Avinia, 2020). Kartika Ariyanti and Zaifaturrida (2020) also noted the positive influence of ICM on the understanding of grade IX students of MTs Al-Habib Sei Lapan, with an effectiveness rate of 66.7% and an average score of 81.5 (Kartika Ariyanti, 2022). Furthermore, Bima and Widodo (2017) found an increase in the average score from 56.35 to 82.3 in MI NU Sukomalo Lamongan after implementing ICM (Bima & Widodo, 2017). Research by Apriyanti (2021) in the context of mathematics learning shows that ICM can increase activeness and learning outcomes through collaborative information-matching activities (Apriyanti et al., 2021).

Although the results of previous studies consistently showed the effectiveness of ICM, most studies were conducted at the MI/MTs level or subjects other than Moral Faith at the junior high school level. There have not been many studies that have tested the application of ICM in the context of



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learning Akidah Akhlak in tahfiz-based junior high schools, such as TQ Muadz Bin Jabbal Junior High School, which has more diverse student characteristics in learning styles and levels of understanding. In addition, previous research tends to use a correlational quantitative approach, so aspects of the learning improvement process through the classroom action cycle have not been explored in depth. This opens up a space for classroom action research (PTK) to repeatedly test ICM's effectiveness in a more specific context.

The urgency of this research is even higher considering the need to overcome the low involvement of students in learning Akidah Akhlak. With the background of students who are used to memorising the Qur'an, but have not maximally associated moral values with daily life, the application of ICM is expected to connect conceptual learning with real experience. This research can also enrich the literature of PTK on Islamic religious subjects, especially in tahfiz-based schools, which still lack empirical studies.

This research's novelty lies in adapting the ICM model in learning Akidah Akhlak in tahfiz-based junior high schools through the PTK cycle. The innovations include integrating religious materials with matching activities based on small group discussions, emphasising strengthening moral values in each feedback session, and using visual media relevant to Islamic themes. In addition, evaluation was carried out not only on the cognitive aspect through a written test, but also on the affective and psychomotor aspects using observation sheets of student behaviour during learning.

In general, this study aims to improve the learning outcomes of Akidah Akhlak students in grade VII of SMP TQ Muadz Bin Jabbal by applying the ICM active learning model based on the PTK cycle. The improvement focus includes understanding concepts, developing critical thinking skills, and appreciating Islamic moral values in daily life. Combining active learning principles and an Islamic contextual approach, this research is expected to be a practical and applicable learning model in similar schools.

In particular, this study will answer the following questions: (1) How can applying the ICM model increase students' active participation in learning Akidah Akhlak? (2) To what extent can this model improve cognitive, affective, and psychomotor student learning outcomes? (3) What are the changes in students' learning behaviour after participating in ICM learning in each action cycle? The results of the answers to this question will provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of ICM as an active learning strategy in the context of Islamic religious education in tahfiz-based junior high schools.



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### RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a Classroom Action Research (PTK) design with a spiral model from Kemmis and McTaggart, which emphasises learning improvement through a repetitive cycle that includes planning, implementation, observation, and reflection collaboratively between researchers and teachers. PTK was chosen because its characteristics allow teachers as educational practitioners to directly identify, analyse, and solve learning problems faced in the classroom, so that the solutions produced are contextual and applicable. This approach aligns with the view that learning is a dynamic process that requires continuous adjustment based on honest feedback from classroom situations (Muhammad Azis et al., 2023). The research was conducted at SMP TQ Muadz Bin Jabbal in grade VII students of the Akidah Akhlak subject, with 25 research subjects who were selected because they showed low learning outcomes in the previous evaluation, and were less active in class discussions. The selection of this location is based on the absolute need to improve the understanding of concepts and the appreciation of students' moral values through more interactive learning methods.

The research procedure was carried out in two cycles, including four main stages. In the planning stage, the researcher and the teacher prepared a learning plan based on the Index Card Match model, prepared learning tools, media, and assessment instruments such as observation sheets and learning outcome tests. The implementation stage is carried out as planned, where teachers apply the learning model in an interactive classroom atmosphere. During the implementation, the observation stage was carried out to record student involvement, interaction between students, and the achievement of learning outcomes. These observational data are then analysed at the reflection stage to evaluate the success of the action and determine improvements in the next cycle. The cycle is repeated until the improvement target is achieved, both in increasing learning outcome scores and changes in student learning behaviour. Data collection techniques include participatory observation to monitor student engagement, written tests to measure cognitive achievement, documentation of learning activities, and interviews to explore student perceptions. The selection of this technique aims to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data so that the picture of learning improvement can be more accurate (Hajaroh et al., 2025; Palobo et al., 2021).

The research instrument includes the researcher as the main instrument that manages the entire PTK process, assisted by supporting instruments such as teacher and student activity observation sheets, attitude assessment rubrics, and



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learning outcome test questions. Quantitative data were analysed using percentage techniques to calculate learning completeness and score improvement between cycles, while qualitative data were analysed through reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing to describe changes in student behaviour and participation. The validity of the data is ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques, validation of instruments by experts, and discussions with peers to reduce researcher bias (Ulfa et al., 2023). This analytical approach ensures that the study's results not only measure academic achievement but also pay attention to the development of the student's affective and psychomotor aspects, so that the picture of learning success becomes more complete (Saádi, 2025).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The initial condition before the action (pre-cycle) showed that students' learning outcomes in the Akidah Akhlak subject were relatively low. Based on the initial test, the average grade of the class only reached 65, with a learning completion percentage of 40%, below the Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) set, which is 75. Student learning activities are also relatively passive; Most tend to listen without actively engaging in discussions, and only a few dare to ask or answer the teacher's questions. This condition is the basis for implementing a learning model that can simultaneously increase active participation and student learning outcomes (Gustiawan et al., 2023; Hou & Xue, 2023).

In the first cycle, implementing the Index Card Match model began to have a positive impact. Students seem more enthusiastic about learning because of their involvement in matching question and answer card activities. The average student score increased to 73, with a learning completeness of 68%. Although it has not fully reached the target, this increase reflects a positive change in student motivation and engagement. Some obstacles arise because some students are still confused about understanding the game instructions, and the learning time has not been optimally managed for all groups (Li et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2021).

Improvements in cycle II include more precise explanations of instructions, stricter time management, and intensive guidance for groups experiencing difficulties. The impact is significant: the average grade score reaches 83 with a learning completeness of 92%, exceeding the set KKM. Student activities are increasingly conducive; Almost all students are actively involved in group discussions and when presenting answers in front of the class. These findings corroborate the evidence that ICM can consistently improve students'



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cognitive achievement and participation (Schnitzler et al., 2021; Wang & Liu, 2019).

The main findings in the first cycle highlight an increase in motivation to learn through a healthy competitive atmosphere. Students become more confident in expressing opinions, although some still rely on their peers to answer. An 8-point increase in learning outcomes from pre-cycle showed that this method effectively triggered early student engagement. However, the completeness of learning that is not optimal indicates the need to modify strategies in the next cycle. This aligns with the principle of continuous improvement in PTK, which emphasises continuous improvement (Nisa et al., 2024; Yayuk Primawati et al., 2024).

Cycle II resulted in stronger findings, in which almost all students improved their understanding of the material. Changes in learning behaviour were also monitored, such as the courage to ask questions, the willingness to help friends, and the ability to conclude material independently. Improving instruction and division of roles in groups has been proven to increase the efficiency of learning activities, so that all students can actively participate (Agonafir, 2023; Ji-Young, 2021).

Overall, the increase in average scores from 65 (pre-cycle) to 83 (cycle II) and the jump in learning completeness from 40% to 92% reflected the actions' success. This improvement is not only in the cognitive aspect, but also in the affective and psychomotor aspects of the student. They are more enthusiastic, cooperative, and show mutual respect in group work (Alannasir, 2020; Kuo et al., 2024).

During the action process in cycle I, teacher-student interaction increased compared to pre-cycle. Teachers play more of a facilitator's role, giving brief directions and letting students explore answers through group collaboration. However, some students are passive if direct questions do not trigger them. In cycle II, teachers ask random questions and give verbal and symbolic appreciation, which has been proven to increase students' active responses (IRMA GHASANI, 2023; Zhang, 2024).

Regarding the effectiveness of learning strategies, cycle II showed improvements in time management, group management, and class control. Learning activities become more structured, and each session takes place according to the time allocation without sacrificing the quality of the discussion. Teachers also use whiteboards and visual media to help students quickly relate questions and answers (Harley, 2024; van Diggele et al., 2020).



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Comparisons between cycles show a clear upward trend. In the pre-cycle, only 10 students reached the KKM, increasing to 17 students in the first cycle, and finally 23 students in the second cycle. Factors that support success are increased motivation through interactive methods, teacher support in giving direction, and a conducive learning environment. Obstacles arising from time constraints and early adaptation of students to new methods can be overcome through technical improvements and more detailed explanations (Crescenzi et al., 2021; Martina et al., 2020). To provide a clearer picture, here is a table of the development of student learning outcomes in each cycle.

**Table 1. Development of Student Learning Outcomes Each Cycle**

stage	Average Score	Completion Percentage	Number of Students Completed
Pre-cycle	65	40%	10
Cycle I	73	68%	17
Cycle II	83	92%	23

The table shows a consistent upward trend from pre-cycle to cycle II. The increase in the average score of 18 points and the increase in completeness by 52% prove the effectiveness of the Index Card Match model in improving the learning outcomes of Akidah Akhlak in grade VII of SMP TQ Muadz Bin Jabbal. This increase is driven by active student engagement, a more enjoyable learning atmosphere, and adaptive learning strategies to student needs (El-Sabagh, 2021; Rincon-Flores et al., 2024).

The results of this study directly answer the research gap identified in the introduction, namely, the low learning outcomes of Akidah Akhlak students in grade VII of SMP TQ Muadz Bin Jabbal due to less interactive learning methods. In the pre-cycle, the average score only reached 65 with 40% learning completeness, indicating the need for a strategy to increase student involvement actively. Applying the Index Card Match (ICM) model, the first cycle raised the average score to 73 and learning completeness to 68%. This increase shows that ICM is starting to positively impact academic achievement and student participation, even though it has not reached the expected targets (Guhn et al., 2020; Won & Seong, 2024).

Improvements in actions in cycle II, which included more effective timing, more structured explanations of instructions, and intensive assistance for less active groups, provided a significant boost in learning outcomes. The average



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score increased to 83 with 92% learning completeness, exceeding the KKM set by the school. This achievement proves that ICM-based learning strategy modification can overcome the obstacles identified in the previous cycle, so that research gaps related to methods that can improve learning outcomes and participation simultaneously can be successfully filled (Bimas Saputra & Andika, 2023; Nadkarni et al., 2023).

In addition, this study also answers the gap in the context of applying the ICM model in tahfiz-based schools, which has not been widely researched before. The learning environment at TQ Muadz Bin Jabbal Junior High School, which combines general and religious curricula, presents its challenges, as students tend to be more trained in rote learning than interactive discussions. Applying ICM can break this iceberg, make the classroom more dynamic, and provide empirical evidence that this method is effective even in specific educational contexts such as tahfiz-based schools (Md Sharipp, 2023; Heroes & Heroes, 2025).

This study's findings align with Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, which emphasises the importance of social interaction and collaboration in building knowledge. ICM provides opportunities for students to learn cooperatively, discuss, and complement each other through matching questions and answer cards. This mechanism facilitates natural scaffolding where more knowledgeable students help other students, resulting in effective knowledge transfer (Wibowo et al., 2025; Xue, 2023).

In terms of cooperative learning, the results of this study corroborate the findings of Mulyadi et al. (2021), who stated that the game-based model can increase motivation and learning outcomes through a healthy competitive atmosphere. The increase in learning completeness from 40% to 92% proves the effectiveness of this method in encouraging student engagement. However, this study expands on their findings by emphasising the importance of adapting strategies in each PTK cycle to optimise outcomes (Afifah & Atmazaki, 2024; Fonseca et al., 2023).

This research also has similarities with the study by Putri & Rohman (2021), which reported the success of ICM in improving the understanding of PAI concepts at the junior high school level. However, the unique contribution of this research lies in its implementation in tahfiz-based schools, which require a classroom management approach and instruction tailored to the learning patterns of students who tend to focus on memorisation. This shows that ICM has high flexibility to be adapted in various educational contexts (Malhotra et al., 2022; VanTassel-Baska, 2021)



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The success of the action in this study is inseparable from the characteristics of students and the school environment. TQ Muadz Bin Jabbal Junior High School students generally have high discipline and good memorisation skills, but tend to be passive in learning discussions. The ICM model, with its interactive nature and demanding the participation of all students, harnesses their strengths in remembering while practising communication and cooperation skills. This adaptation makes students who are usually silent more courageous to give answers in front of their peers (SUPARYANTO, 2023; Swanson et al., 2020).

The physical condition of the classroom and school facilities also supports success. A spacious classroom allows student mobility when searching for a pair of cards, while the support of principals and other teachers creates a favourable climate for learning innovation. This factor is consistent with the view of Gea and Harefa (2025) that a conducive learning environment catalyses the successful implementation of active learning strategies (Gea & Harefa, 2025).

In addition to internal and external factors, a school culture prioritises moral values and strengthens learning outcomes. Activities in ICM encourage mastery of materials and build the value of cooperation, mutual respect, and time discipline, which are integral parts of learning Akidah Akhlak. The synergy between learning methods and school vision is the reason why the results of the study show a significant improvement in students' cognitive and affective aspects (Rosyidah et al., 2021).

Several challenges arise during the PTK process, such as time constraints that make several sessions have to be condensed, difficulties for some students in understanding the instructions at the beginning of implementation, and differences in learning speed that affect the smooth flow of group discussions. However, this obstacle can be overcome by adjusting instruction, using visual media, and actively mentoring teachers. Theoretically, these results reinforce the idea that a game-based cooperative learning model can improve learning outcomes across contexts. Practically, teachers can adopt ICM as an alternative method in other classrooms, especially for subjects that demand an understanding of concepts and values (Dewi & Lestari, 2024; Umacina et al., 2025).

This research makes an important contribution to developing learning practices in the classroom, especially in religious subjects. Implementing ICM effectively improves learning outcomes, enables student participation, and fosters social skills such as cooperation and communication. From the perspective of method innovation, this study shows how educational games can be integrated



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into the formal curriculum while maintaining the depth of the material (Aseery, 2024; Plummer et al., 2020).

Institutionally, the results of this research can be a reference for schools to develop teacher training programs using active learning methods. The implementation of ICM can be included in the workshop agenda of PAI teachers and other subjects to improve the quality of learning.

On a broader scale, these findings can potentially influence education policy, especially in encouraging the use of interactive methods in schools with a tendency toward one-way learning. This research shows that with the proper adaptation, game-based methods can be integrated in various types of schools, including those focusing on religious curriculum.

### CONCLUSION

This research has provided a clear answer to the focus of the action formulated from the beginning. Through two cycles of PTK, the Index Card Match model has successfully transformed the learning process of Akidah Akhlak from passive to interactive and participatory. Teachers are no longer just the presenters of the material, but act as facilitators who direct discussions and motivate students to be actively involved. Students also showed significant changes, from passively receiving information to actively asking, answering, and working together to find solutions. This transformation confirms that the right learning strategy not only changes academic achievement but also forms a favourable learning climate in the classroom.

Theoretically, the results of this study reinforce the view of social constructivism, which emphasises the importance of interaction and collaboration in building knowledge. These findings also expand the empirical evidence on the effectiveness of play-based cooperative learning, particularly in the context of religious education in tahfiz-based schools. Practically, this research makes a real contribution to PAI teachers' teaching methods, offering alternative learning strategies that combine understanding concepts and strengthening moral values. This model can be part of a learning innovation policy for schools that encourages active student engagement and social skills development.

In the future, these findings are relevant to be adapted to various subjects and education levels, especially those with similar challenges related to student participation and concept understanding. Its application to other subjects can enrich students' learning experience, while strengthening a collaborative learning culture in schools. Further research is suggested to test the modification of the



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Index Card Match model with the addition of digital media or integration with other learning strategies, as well as to expand the observed variables, such as students' critical thinking skills or creativity. Teachers and education policymakers can leverage these findings to strengthen active learning approaches, making them part of teacher training and ongoing school innovation programs.

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