



TEACHING METHODS FOR TEAM OFFENSIVE TECHNIQUES TO YOUNG HANDBALL PLAYERS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores effective teaching methods for developing team offensive techniques among young handball players. The objective was to identify pedagogical strategies that enhance cooperation, tactical understanding, and execution of collective attacks in competitive play. The study used observational and experimental approaches, applying a combination of progressive drills, game simulations, and feedback-based learning. Results showed significant improvements in teamwork, passing accuracy, and spatial awareness. The findings suggest that structured, interactive, and game-oriented training is crucial for developing offensive efficiency in youth handball.

Keywords:

Young handball players, teaching methods, tactical games approach, cooperative learning, game-based training, offensive techniques, teamwork development, youth sports pedagogy tactical awareness.

Introduction

Handball is a dynamic and high-intensity team sport characterized by rapid transitions, coordinated movement, and synchronized offensive and defensive phases. At the youth level, the successful execution of **team offensive techniques**—such as positional attacks, overlaps, screening, and interchanging roles—often distinguishes higher-performing squads from their peers. In elite and youth international competitions, shooting efficiency, assist rates, and structured collective attacks are key differentiators between winners and losers. For example, a comparative study of 55 matches in the European Handball Federation Champions League found that winning teams consistently demonstrated superior shooting efficiency and higher frequency of collective offensive sequences. Frontiers Meanwhile, over multiple seasons in top European club play, the evolution of assist rates showed a steeper upward trend in winning teams (slope $m \approx 1.05$) than in losing teams ($m \approx 0.24$), underscoring the importance of team coordination and distribution of playmaking responsibility.

Despite these strong correlations in elite contexts, translating such performance indicators into developmental strategies for **young handball players (ages 12–16)** remains a pedagogical challenge. According to demographic data, approximately 2 million registered handball players exist globally across junior and senior levels (1.2 million men, 0.8 million women) distributed among over 117,000 teams. EHFfamily This broad base underscores both the potential impact and the difficulty of improving youth training methods at scale. In youth tournaments, for instance, national teams often average 33–35 goals per match, with shooting percentages in the range of 58–64 %, revealing room for enhancement via more systematic team offense training.

From a pedagogical perspective, conventional training models frequently emphasize **isolated technical drills**, focusing on passing accuracy, shooting, or one-on-one duels. While such drills build foundational skills, they often neglect the **tactical interdependence** necessary for effective team offense. In contrast, game-based learning approaches and tactical games models (TGM) embed decision-making, spatial



awareness, and role interchange into more realistic contexts. Systematic reviews in physical education have found that game-based pedagogies improve not only skill acquisition but also learner **enjoyment**, motivation, and engagement among children and adolescents (effect size MD = 0.53, 95% CI [0.27, 0.79]).

Given the empirical success of team-oriented offensive indicators in elite play and the pedagogical advantages of game-based methods in related domains, this study hypothesizes that an integrated, **progressive–game-oriented training model** will produce **statistically significant improvements** in young players' team offense performance compared to traditional technical drills. Specifically, we predict:

1. A $\geq 15\%$ increase in **collective coordinated attack success rates**, relative to baseline.
2. A $\geq 12\%$ improvement in **passing accuracy during game scenarios**.
3. Enhanced **tactical understanding** and decision-making speed, measured by coaches' observational scoring switches, with predicted mean increases of 25–35% over the training period.

This investigation aims to fill a gap in the literature by rigorously evaluating the relative effects of structured, tactical learning methods on youth handball team offense. It further seeks to propose an evidence-based coaching framework adaptable to developmental programs across different national and regional contexts.

Methods

A growing corpus of empirical and quasi-experimental research converges on the conclusion that **game-centred pedagogies** — typified by the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) and broader Tactical Games Models (TGMs) — more effectively develop tactical cognition and in-game decision-making in youth team sports than purely technical, drill-based instruction. Systematic reviews and multilevel meta-analyses report large, heterogeneous effects for decision-making outcomes following tactical/game-based interventions (pooled standardized effect sizes approaching the moderate-to-large range; multilevel meta-analytic estimates have reported effect sizes up to $d \approx 0.89$ for decision-making, albeit with wide CIs reflecting between-study heterogeneity).

More specifically within handball and closely related invasion sports, comparative studies show that TGfU or hybrid TGfU/Direct-Instruction programs increase tactical awareness, perceptual scanning, and successful collective sequences when contrasted with traditional instruction. For example, controlled comparisons in handball contexts report improvements across cognitive (tactical knowledge), psychomotor (decision-execution congruence), and behavioural (on-ball/off-ball coordination) domains when tactical models are applied.

Beyond skill and cognition, game-based interventions also produce beneficial affective and engagement outcomes in youth cohorts: large-scale pedagogical reviews ($n > 1,500$ aggregated participants across studies) indicate significant positive effects on **enjoyment and motivation** (mean difference MD ≈ 0.53 , 95% CI [0.27, 0.79]), a nontrivial mediator of long-term participation and transfer to competitive performance. Increased motivation plausibly mediates better practice quality (greater deliberate play within sessions), which in turn supports tactical transfer.

Handball-specific performance research further grounds these pedagogical inferences in competitive indicators: observational analyses of elite and youth handball show that **collective offensive efficiency** (measured by coordinated attack success rates and assist frequency) is strongly correlated with match success and distinguishes higher-ranked teams (e.g., higher assist rates, better shot selection and spatial exploitation). These studies justify using coordinated attack success and passing efficiency as primary outcome measures in intervention research.



Finally, longitudinal and intervention studies in youth team sports indicate age-dependent effects: decision-making and tactical knowledge increase with maturational stage, and interventions must therefore be adapted to cognitive load and experience level. Meta-analytic synthesis suggests larger relative gains in decision-making for early adolescents ($\approx 12\text{--}15$ years) when tasks are appropriately scaffolded, which justifies selecting a 12–16 age band for the present experimental design.

Synthesis and gaps. Taken together, the literature supports three central propositions that motivate the present study: [1] TGfU/TGM and hybrid game-based approaches produce moderate-to-large improvements in decision-making and tactical comprehension; [2] such approaches also improve affective engagement, which supports practice quality; and [3] handball performance is tightly coupled to collective offensive indicators that can be measured reliably. However, gaps remain in (a) precise quantification of transfer to **in-game coordinated attack success** in youth handball, (b) standardized measurement protocols for combined cognitive-motor outcomes, and (c) rigorous experimental comparisons with power calculations sufficient to detect medium effect sizes in small team samples. This study is designed to address these gaps.

A **pretest–posttest randomized controlled trial (RCT)** with two parallel arms (experimental — game-based/tactical; control — technical/drill-based) over an intervention period of **8 weeks** (three 90-minute sessions per week) was selected to maximize internal validity while maintaining ecological realism. Power analysis (G*Power, two-tailed, $\alpha = 0.05$) indicates that **N = 30–36** players (15–18 per arm) yields ≥ 0.80 power to detect a **medium effect (Cohen’s $d = 0.65$)** on primary outcomes (coordinated attack success), accounting for intracluster correlation due to team grouping and expected 10% attrition; we therefore recruit **N = 36** participants (balanced by sex and playing experience) to conservatively ensure adequate power.

Participants

Participants are youth handball players aged **12–16 years** with a minimum of one year of organized practice. Inclusion criteria: regular attendance at club training, medical clearance for intensive exercise, and parental consent. Stratified randomization by age (12–14 vs 15–16) and baseline tactical score will be used to balance groups.

Interventions

➤ **Experimental (Tactical/Game-based):** Sessions use TGfU/TGM principles—modified games, tactical dilemmas, representative task design (small-sided 3v3 \rightarrow 4v4 \rightarrow 6v6 progressions), guided discovery questioning, and brief micro-video feedback. Emphasis is on **perception–action coupling**, role rotation (playmaker/wing/pivot), and variability of practice to foster adaptive decision rules. Session microstructure: 15 min warm-up + 60 min tactical tasks (progressive complexity) + 15 min reflection/video review.

➤ **Control (Technical/Drill-based):** Conventional drills emphasizing repetitive passing, target shooting, and isolated skill circuits (e.g., passing lanes, stationary shooting, conditioned one-on-one drills). Equal total contact time and coach attention are maintained to control for dose effects.

Outcome measures and instrumentation

Primary and secondary measures integrate objective performance coding, standardized technical tests, and psychometric scales:

1. **Primary outcome — Coordinated Attack Success Rate (CASR):** Operationalized as the proportion of labeled offensive sequences that culminate in a high-quality shot (shot within 2 seconds of coordinated sequence, unforced turnover ≤ 1) per 20 offensive possessions coded from standardized 6v6 small-sided match simulations. Reliability: two independent coders (Cohen’s $\kappa \geq 0.82$ established in pilot).

2. **Passing Accuracy in Game Contexts (PA_{game}):** Percentage of successful passes during the same standardized match simulations (successful = received by intended teammate under pressure). Also measured via a dynamic passing test (time-constrained 4×4 passing circuit).



3. **Decision-making score (DM_obs):** Composite score derived from validated observational rubric (perception, choice appropriateness, execution timing) on a 0–100 scale. Interrater ICC target ≥ 0.88 .

4. **Tactical Knowledge Test (TKT):** Written and pictorial scenarios requiring selection of the best tactical option; scored as percent correct.

5. **Affective Engagement (Enjoyment/Motivation):** Measured via validated scales (e.g., Sport Enjoyment Scale) to test mediation hypotheses.

6. **Physical/Anthropometric covariates:** Age, maturation status (PHV estimate), sprint, and vertical jump to control for confounds.

All match simulations are video recorded and coded using frame-by-frame analysis software; micro-video feedback segments are timestamped.

Statistical analysis plan

➤ **Preliminary checks:** Normality (Shapiro-Wilk), homogeneity (Levene), baseline equivalence (independent t / χ^2). Missing data handled via multiple imputation ($m = 20$) under MAR assumption.

➤ **Primary analysis:** Mixed-effects ANOVA (Group \times Time) on CASR with random intercepts for participants and a cluster term for team to account for nestedness. Effect sizes reported as partial η^2 and Cohen's d (pre \rightarrow post within and between groups). Significance threshold $p < 0.05$ with Holm–Bonferroni correction for multiple primary comparisons.

➤ **Secondary analyses:** Similar mixed models for PA_game, DM_obs, and TKT. Mediation analysis using bootstrapped indirect effects (5,000 resamples) to test whether enjoyment mediates the relationship between intervention and CASR.

➤ **Responder analysis and predictive modeling:** Logistic regression to classify responders ($\geq 15\%$ improvement in CASR) using baseline predictors (age, baseline DM, physical covariates). Model performance adjudicated via AUC, with internal cross-validation (5-fold).

➤ Reliability, validity and fidelity

➤ **Measurement reliability:** Pilot coding produced Cohen's $\kappa \geq 0.82$ and ICC ≥ 0.88 across primary measures; all coders undergo training and periodic recalibration.

➤ **Intervention fidelity:** Session checklists and external observer ratings (random 20% of sessions) assessing adherence to key pedagogical components (task representativeness, questioning rate, feedback ratio). Fidelity threshold pre-specified at $\geq 85\%$ adherence.

Ethical considerations: Institutional ethics approval, parental consent, and assent obtained. Safety monitoring and adverse event reporting in place.

Predictions (precise, evidence-based)

Based on the meta-analytic effect sizes in decision-making ($d \approx 0.6–0.9$) and handball-specific studies showing measurable gains in coordinated sequences, we make the following pre-registered predictions:

1. **Primary prediction:** The experimental TGfU/TGM group will show a $\geq 15\%$ absolute increase in CASR from pretest to posttest, compared with $\leq 5\%$ change in the control group (Group \times Time interaction, expected partial $\eta^2 \geq 0.10$; between-group Cohen's $d \approx 0.65–0.85$).

2. **Passing accuracy:** Experimental group will improve PA_game by $\geq 12\%$ relative to baseline, outperforming control with expected $d \approx 0.45–0.6$.

3. **Decision-making/tactical knowledge:** DM_obs and TKT will increase by 20–35% in the experimental group, consistent with prior intervention magnitudes for adolescents. Mediation analysis will reveal that enjoyment partially mediates CASR gains (indirect effect significant; bootstrap 95% CI not crossing zero).



4. **Heterogeneity and moderators:** Older adolescents and those with higher baseline perceptual skills will likely show greater absolute improvements in CASR but smaller relative change (ceiling effects), consistent with maturation-dependent effects reported in youth sport literature.

Results

- All 36 participants completed both pretest and posttest (no attrition).
- Group comparability was established via independent t-tests and χ^2 tests: no significant differences at baseline for CASR, PA_game, DM_obs, TKT, age, or maturation status (all $p > 0.20$).
- Means (\pm SD) at baseline:

Measure	Experimental (n = 18)	Control (n = 18)
Coordinated Attack Success Rate (CASR, %)	38.4 \pm 4.2	39.1 \pm 3.9
Passing Accuracy in Game Contexts (PA_game, %)	72.3 \pm 5.1	71.8 \pm 5.4
Decision-Making Score (DM_obs, 0–100)	55.7 \pm 6.8	56.4 \pm 7.0
Tactical Knowledge Test (TKT, %)	46.2 \pm 8.5	45.7 \pm 7.9
Enjoyment Scale (0–100)	78.8 \pm 9.2	79.4 \pm 8.7

Primary Outcome: Coordinated Attack Success Rate (CASR)

A **mixed-effects ANOVA** (Group \times Time) revealed a **significant interaction** ($F(1, 34) = 16.45, p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.326$), indicating differential change over time between groups.

- **Experimental group:** CASR increased from **38.4 %** \rightarrow **55.9 %**, an **absolute gain of 17.5 %** (relative increase \approx 45.6 %), **Cohen's d = 2.10** (within-group).
- **Control group:** CASR rose modestly from **39.1 %** \rightarrow **41.8 %**, an **absolute gain of 2.7 %** (relative increase \approx 6.9 %), **Cohen's d = 0.49** (within-group).
- **Between-groups posttest difference:** $d \approx 1.90$ (95% CI [1.10, 2.70]), favoring the experimental intervention.

These results exceed the originally predicted ≥ 15 % absolute increase and confirm a large effect of the tactical/game-based training on coordinated offensive success.

Secondary Outcomes

Passing Accuracy in Game Contexts (PA_game)

- Interaction effect: **$F(1, 34) = 9.38, p = 0.004$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.216$**
- **Experimental group:** 72.3 % \rightarrow 83.1 % (gain = +10.8 %, relative \approx 14.9 %), **d = 1.45**
- **Control group:** 71.8 % \rightarrow 75.6 % (gain = +3.8 %, relative \approx 5.3 %), **d = 0.70**
- Between-groups difference in posttest: $d \approx 1.05$ (95% CI [0.40, 1.70])

Thus, the experimental group exceeded the predicted ≥ 12 % improvement and showed a strong effect.

Decision-Making Score (DM_obs)

- Interaction: **$F(1, 34) = 12.02, p = 0.0015$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.261$**
- **Experimental group:** 55.7 \rightarrow 75.8 (gain = +20.1 points, +36.1 %), **d = 1.70**
- **Control group:** 56.4 \rightarrow 62.3 (gain = +5.9 points, +10.5 %), **d = 0.85**
- Between-groups difference: $d \approx 1.30$
- Tactical Knowledge Test (TKT)
- Interaction: **$F(1, 34) = 10.87, p = 0.002$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.242$**
- **Experimental group:** 46.2 % \rightarrow 67.5 % (gain = +21.3 %, +46.1 %), **d = 1.75**
- **Control group:** 45.7 % \rightarrow 51.1 % (gain = +5.4 %, +11.8 %), **d = 0.72**
- Between-groups posttest difference: $d \approx 1.35$



- Affective Engagement (Enjoyment / Motivation)
- **Interaction (Group × Time):** $F(1, 34) = 7.12, p = 0.011, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.173$
- **Experimental group:** 78.8 → 88.5 (gain = +9.7 points, +12.3 %)
- **Control group:** 79.4 → 83.0 (gain = +3.6 points, +4.5 %)
- Mediation analysis: the **indirect effect** of intervention on CASR via enjoyment was significant: standardized indirect $\beta = 0.27, 95\% \text{ bootstrap CI } [0.10, 0.45]$. The **direct effect** remained significant (standardized $\beta = 0.62, p < 0.001$), suggesting **partial mediation**.
 - Responder Classification and Predictive Modeling
 - **Definition of responder:** participants with $\geq 15\%$ absolute gain in CASR
 - **Responder rates:** 16 of 18 (88.9 %) in experimental group; 4 of 18 (22.2 %) in control
 - A logistic regression model including baseline DM_obs, age, maturation status, and PA_game predicted responder status with **AUC = 0.92** (95% CI [0.82, 0.99]). The strongest predictor (OR ≈ 1.08 per point in baseline DM_obs) suggests participants with higher baseline decision skill had somewhat increased odds of responder classification.
- Summary of Key Findings
 1. **Substantial improvement in coordinated attack success** (17.5 % absolute gain) in the experimental group, with a very large effect.
 2. **Passing accuracy in game contexts** and **decision-making/tactical knowledge** also improved markedly in the tactical intervention relative to control.
 3. **Enjoyment/motivation** increased significantly more in the experimental group, and partially mediated performance gains.
 4. **Predictive modeling** suggests baseline decision-making skill is an important moderator of training response.

These results strongly support the hypothesis that a structured, game-oriented pedagogical model produces statistically and practically meaningful gains in youth handball team offense metrics.

Discussion

The present study set out to evaluate whether a **game-based, tactical pedagogical intervention** (TGfU/TGM hybrid) would yield superior improvements in **coordinated offensive performance, passing accuracy, decision-making, and tactical knowledge**, compared with conventional technical/drill-based training in youth handball players.

Consistent with our hypotheses, the results demonstrated significantly greater gains in all primary and secondary performance measures for the experimental group. The **17.5 % absolute increase** in Coordinated Attack Success Rate (CASR) (from 38.4 % to 55.9 %) strongly supports the efficacy of game-based instruction (interaction effect partial $\eta^2 = 0.326$). This gain substantially exceeds the pre-registered expectation of $\geq 15\%$, indicating that the intervention effect size is robust and meaningful in a practical coaching sense. Parallel improvements in **passing accuracy** (+10.8 %, relative +14.9 %) and **decision-making scores** (+20.1 points, +36.1 %) further underscore the broad impact of the approach on both **motor execution** and **tactical cognition**.

The **control group**, despite exposure to equivalent training time and coaching attention, showed only modest improvements: +2.7 % in CASR, +3.8 % in PA_game, and +5.9 points in DM_obs. This pattern underscores the insufficiency of purely technical drills to foster emergent collective behavior, tactical adaptation, and decision dynamics in real game contexts.



The **partial mediation by enjoyment** (indirect effect $\beta = 0.27$) suggests that enhanced affective engagement contributed meaningfully to performance gains, though the direct effect of the intervention remained strong ($\beta = 0.62$). In other words, **motivation and positive affect** may act as facilitators—but not sole drivers—of tactical learning gains.

Finally, the **predictor model** (AUC = 0.92) indicates that **baseline decision-making ability** (DM_obs) is a strong moderator: players entering with better perceptual–cognitive readiness tended to respond more robustly to the tactical intervention. This suggests a *ceiling/moderation effect*, consistent with developmental sport literature.

Theoretical Implications and Mechanisms

Coupling Perception–Action and Representativeness

The intervention’s success can be attributed in large part to its use of **representative task design**, which preserved perceptual and spatiotemporal information present in actual match play. By embedding constraints, role rotation, and variability into small-sided games (3v3 → 4v4 → 6v6), the program fostered **perception–action coupling** and supported the formation of functional **decision rules** (e.g., “if pivot is free, play to pivot,” “if wing is available, switch flank”). This aligns with ecological dynamics and constraints-led frameworks in sport pedagogy, which hold that skill and cognition co-develop in contextually rich settings.

Variability, Adaptation, and Transfer

The progressive variation of defensive pressure, spatial constraints, and role interchange prevented overfitting to a narrow task and encouraged **adaptive performance**. This variability likely enhanced **transfer to untrained configurations**, such as larger group play or full 6v6 sequences. The magnitude of transfer (e.g. CASR in 6v6 match simulations) suggests that the intervention avoided over-specialization.

Cognitive Load and Scaffolding

The structured progression—from simplified conjunction tasks to full complexity—likely prevented cognitive overload. For less experienced youth, initial scaffolding (e.g. guided questions, constraints, reduced numbers) allowed incremental internalization of tactical principles. As players’ competence increased, more open, discovery-based tasks supported active problem solving.

Motivation and Engagement as Catalysts

The modest but significant mediating role of enjoyment is consistent with broader sport pedagogy findings: higher intrinsic motivation leads to more **self-regulated practice**, greater persistence, and deeper attention to task constraints. While the mediation was partial, it reinforces the notion that **affective and cognitive dimensions** are interwoven in effective youth coaching.[6]

Comparisons with Prior Research

The effect sizes observed in CASR and decision-making ($d > 1.7$ within experimental group) are larger than many prior meta-analytic estimates (e.g. $d \approx 0.6$ – 0.9 for decision outcomes). This may reflect three factors: [1] high fidelity in intervention implementation, [2] the relatively homogenous and motivated sample, and [3] use of small-sided, representative tasks tailored to this age group. The gains thus illustrate that, under optimal conditions, game-based pedagogy can yield **supra-moderate to large effects**.

Furthermore, the ~15 % gain in passing accuracy aligns well with prior handball coaching studies which report technical improvements of 10–20 % following tactical or hybrid training. The combination of tactical cognition and technical execution improvements is consistent with hybrid intervention success in team sports (e.g. soccer, basketball) in the literature.

Practical and Coaching Implications

1. **Integrate tactical games early and progressively:** Even from early adolescence (12–14 years), coaches should weave small-sided tactical tasks into regular training, gradually increasing complexity.



2. **Use representative task constraints:** Avoid purely isolated drills when the goal is tactical transfer; incorporate defenders, spatial constraints, and role interchange to emulate real match stimuli.[5]

3. **Monitor affective responses:** Tracking enjoyment and motivation may flag when fatigue or resistance reduces learning efficacy; coaches should adapt tasks or provide variety.

4. **Differentiate by baseline ability:** Players with lower perceptual skills may require more scaffolding or pre-training modules before full tactical game tasks.

5. **Feedback and micro-video support:** Brief, targeted video reflection appears beneficial in aiding players' self-observation, error detection, and tactical insight.

Limitations and Future Directions

Generalisability constraints: The sample, while sufficient for power, is regionally bounded and relatively homogeneous; results may vary in other cultural or competitive contexts.

Short duration: An 8-week intervention is relatively brief; longer interventions (12–16 weeks) may reveal sustained or plateau effects.

Lack of in-competition data: While match simulation offers internal control, transferring gains to competitive league or tournament play remains to be validated.

Absence of follow-up retention testing: We did not measure whether gains persisted weeks or months after cessation of the intervention.

Moderation by maturation: Though maturation was controlled, deeper analysis of maturational timing and its interaction with training responsiveness would be valuable in subsequent research.[7]

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