



Implementing the STAD Cooperative Learning Model to Improve Motivation and Social Studies Learning Outcomes among Sixth-Grade Elementary Students

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Abstract

This classroom action research aimed to improve sixth-grade students' motivation and learning outcomes in social studies on the topic of "struggles to defend Indonesian independence" through the implementation of the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) cooperative learning model. The study employed the Kemmis and McTaggart spiral model of classroom action research consisting of planning, acting and observing, and reflecting, conducted in two cycles. The participants were 28 sixth-grade students (14 boys and 14 girls) in a public elementary school in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, who were organized into heterogeneous STAD teams. Data were collected through a learning achievement test, observation sheets of students' learning activities, and a learning motivation questionnaire. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively by calculating mean scores, mastery percentages, and normalized gain (N-gain), while qualitative data from observations and field notes were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results revealed a substantial improvement in students' learning outcomes, with the mean score increasing from 73.64 in Cycle I to 84.29 in Cycle II, and the percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion rising from 32.14% to 92.86%. The N-gain value reached 0.40 (40.40%), which falls into the medium category. Students' motivation also increased from 70.2% to 84.48%, and learning activity rose from 62.5% to 82.7%. The implementation of STAD successfully created a more active, collaborative, and enjoyable classroom climate, fostered individual responsibility and teamwork, and strengthened students' intrinsic motivation. These findings indicate that STAD is an effective instructional model for enhancing cognitive outcomes, social skills, and learning motivation in social studies within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: *STAD; Cooperative Learning; Learning Motivation; Social Studies Learning Outcomes; Merdeka Curriculum; Elementary School*

Introduction

Social studies at the elementary level plays a crucial role in shaping a generation that understands social life, history, and national values, and is able to interact positively in a pluralistic society. However,

in practice, social studies learning is still frequently dominated by lecture-based methods, which position students as passive recipients of information. As a result, students often feel less motivated, rarely ask questions or express their opinions, and tend to perceive social studies as a monotonous and uninteresting subject.

This condition was also observed in the sixth-grade social studies class where this research was conducted. Preliminary observations showed that many students were reluctant to participate actively in class, seldom volunteered answers, and displayed low enthusiasm during group discussions. Consequently, their learning outcomes were below the minimum mastery criterion, and classical mastery had not yet been optimally achieved. Teacher-centered learning gave students limited opportunities to collaborate, think critically, and construct knowledge meaningfully.

One alternative model that can address these issues is the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) type of cooperative learning. According to Slavin, STAD is a cooperative learning model that emphasizes collaboration in small, heterogeneous groups to achieve shared goals. Students work in teams, help each other understand the material, and receive recognition based on the group's performance, particularly on the improvement of individual scores. Through this mechanism, STAD is expected to enhance students' motivation, engagement, and learning achievement.

Within the context of the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered, collaborative, and meaningful learning oriented toward the Profile of Pancasila Students, the application of STAD becomes highly relevant. Group work trains students to cooperate, take responsibility, respect differences, and participate actively in the learning process. Such learning does not only affect cognitive aspects (learning outcomes) but also contributes to affective and social development, including empathy, tolerance, and a sense of belonging in the classroom community.

Based on this background, the present study was conducted to improve sixth-grade students' motivation and social studies learning outcomes through the implementation of the STAD cooperative learning model. The research is expected to provide practical insights for teachers and educational practitioners in selecting and developing instructional strategies that are more effective and aligned with curriculum demands and the characteristics of elementary school students. At the same time, the study highlights the role of cooperative learning in supporting multicultural and collaborative values in a diverse classroom setting.

Research Method

Research Design

This study employed a classroom action research (CAR) design using the Kemmis and McTaggart spiral model, which consists of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The action was carried out in two cycles. Each cycle encompassed a complete sequence of social studies lessons using the STAD model, and the implementation in Cycle II was refined based on reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of Cycle I.

Participants and Research Setting

The participants were 28 sixth-grade students (14 boys and 14 girls) at a public elementary school in Yogyakarta during the 2025/2026 academic year. The class consisted of students with diverse academic abilities. The participants were selected purposively because preliminary studies indicated that this class experienced low motivation and suboptimal learning outcomes in social studies.

The research took place in a regular classroom equipped with basic facilities such as a whiteboard, LCD projector, and social studies textbooks, supplemented by other relevant learning resources (e.g.,

visual media and worksheets). The topic taught was the struggle to defend Indonesian independence, which is closely related to national history and social values.

Procedures of the Action

In general, the procedures in each cycle followed four main stages:

1. **Planning**

The researcher collaborated with the classroom teacher to prepare lesson plans (RPP) that incorporated the STAD model, design social studies learning materials, develop student worksheets, and construct research instruments (achievement test, motivation questionnaire, activity observation sheet, and documentation guidelines). Indicators of success were also determined, including expected improvements in learning outcomes, motivation, and classroom activity.

2. **Acting**

The teacher implemented STAD-based social studies lessons. The stages of STAD included:

- (a) presentation of the material by the teacher using explanations, visual media, and stories related to historical events;
- (b) formation of heterogeneous teams (STAD groups) based on students' academic ability and gender;
- (c) group work on tasks and worksheets in which students discussed and solved problems collaboratively;
- (d) individual quizzes to assess each student's understanding; and
- (e) group rewards based on the improvement of individual scores contributing to the team's overall performance.

3. **Observing**

During the learning process, the researcher and/or observer monitored students' activities using observation sheets, focusing on indicators such as participation in discussions, cooperation within groups, responsibility for tasks, asking and answering questions, and communication during presentations. Field notes and documentation (e.g., photos and attendance records) were also collected to support the data.

4. **Reflecting**

After each cycle, the researcher and teacher conducted a reflection session to evaluate the implementation of the STAD model and students' responses. The reflection focused on aspects such as time management, clarity of instructions, composition of groups, students' participation patterns, and the effectiveness of reward strategies. The results of this reflection were then used as a basis for improving the next cycle.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study consisted of:

1. **Learning achievement test**, in the form of multiple-choice and/or short-answer items, developed based on the indicators of the relevant social studies basic competencies. The tests were administered at the end of each cycle to measure students' cognitive achievement.
2. **Learning motivation questionnaire**, using a Likert scale, designed to capture students' motivation toward social studies learning with the STAD model. The questionnaire covered aspects such as persistence, autonomy, interest, need for achievement, and satisfaction.
3. **Observation sheet of learning activities**, used to assess students' engagement during the learning process, including participation in discussions, cooperation in groups, ability to express opinions, responsibility for completing tasks, and willingness to ask questions.

4. **Documentation**, including photos of learning activities, attendance records, and other documents relevant to the implementation of the research.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Learning achievement data were obtained from test scores in each cycle and analyzed descriptively by calculating the mean score, the percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion (KKM), and the increase in learning outcomes between cycles. Normalized gain (N-gain) was also calculated to categorize the magnitude of improvement.

Motivation and activity data were obtained from the questionnaire and observation sheets, then analyzed descriptively by calculating percentages and categorizing them as low, moderate, or high.

Qualitative data from observations and field notes were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The qualitative findings were used to support and enrich the interpretation of quantitative data, particularly in describing changes in students' behavior, interaction patterns, and classroom dynamics after the implementation of STAD.

The indicators of success in this research were:

- (1) an increase in the average social studies achievement score and the classical mastery percentage in each cycle;
- (2) an increase in students' motivation to at least the moderate–high category; and
- (3) an increase in students' learning activity to the active category.

Results and Discussion

This section presents a structured description of empirical findings obtained from the two cycles of classroom action research designed to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of the STAD cooperative learning model in improving the quality of social studies learning in elementary school. The analysis adopts a descriptive quantitative approach to map changes in learning outcomes, motivation, and learning activity, accompanied by conceptual interpretations of how the core characteristics of STAD—heterogeneous collaboration, individual accountability, and group rewards—contribute to increased student engagement and academic performance.

To provide a concise and comprehensive picture, the findings are summarized in several combined tables.

Social Studies Learning Outcomes

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Social Studies Learning Outcomes

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Average Score</i>	<i>Mastery (%)</i>	<i>Improvement</i>	<i>Category</i>
<i>Cycle I</i>	73.64	32.14%	–	Moderate
<i>Cycle II</i>	84.29	92.86%	+8.57	High
<i>Average N-Gain</i>	–	–	40.40%	Moderate

The mean score increased from 73.64 in Cycle I to 84.29 in Cycle II. The percentage of students achieving mastery rose sharply from 32.14% to 92.86%. The normalized gain (N-gain) of 0.40 (40.40%) falls into the medium category (Hake, 1999), indicating a meaningful improvement in learning outcomes.

These findings support Slavin's (2014) theory that heterogeneous group work and individual accountability in cooperative learning significantly enhance mastery of content. Similarly, Johnson and Johnson (2009) argue that social interdependence and structured interaction in cooperative settings

facilitate conceptual understanding and personal responsibility. In this study, students with higher prior achievement were able to assist peers with lower achievement within their teams, creating opportunities for peer tutoring and shared problem-solving. The combination of individual quizzes and group rewards motivated each student to contribute maximally to the team's success, which in turn improved overall academic performance.

Learning Motivation

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Students' Learning Motivation

<i>.Aspect</i>	<i>Cycle I (%)</i>	<i>Cycle II (%)</i>	<i>Improvement (%)</i>	<i>Category</i>
<i>Perseverance</i>	68.5	84.3	+15.8	High
<i>Independence</i>	70.2	82.0	+11.8	High
<i>Learning Interest</i>	69.4	84.5	+15.1	High
<i>Need for Achievement</i>	72.1	85.4	+13.3	High
<i>Learning Satisfaction</i>	71.0	86.2	+15.2	High
<i>Average Motivation</i>	70.2	84.48	+14.28	High

Students' learning motivation increased from 70.2% (moderate) in Cycle I to 84.48% (high) in Cycle II. The largest gains occurred in interest and satisfaction, indicating that STAD made social studies learning more attractive and rewarding for students.

These findings align with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that intrinsic motivation grows when learners perceive support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the STAD context, group work and interdependence foster relatedness, while individual quizzes and group rewards support students' sense of competence and responsibility. Students reported feeling more valued, having important roles in their teams, and enjoying the learning process, which strengthened both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Learning Activity

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of Learning Activity (Observation)

<i>Activity Aspect</i>	<i>Cycle I (%)</i>	<i>Cycle II (%)</i>	<i>Improvement (%)</i>	<i>Category</i>
<i>Participation in Discussion</i>	61.0	78.5	+17.5	Active
<i>Group Collaboration</i>	65.4	83.6	+18.2	Active
<i>Ability to Express Opinions</i>	60.7	82.1	+21.4	Active
<i>Individual Responsibility</i>	63.0	84.0	+21.0	Active
<i>Questioning Skills</i>	63.3	84.5	+21.2	Active
<i>Average Activity</i>	62.5	82.7	+20.2	Active

The mean level of learning activity increased from 62.5% (fairly active) to 82.7% (active). Students became more involved in discussions, more willing to ask and answer questions, and more responsible for their group tasks. These changes are consistent with Johnson and Johnson's (2009) assertion that cooperative learning enhances social interaction and emotional engagement.

In the first cycle, some students were still passive and tended to rely on more active peers. However, after reflection and adjustment—such as redistributing roles, clarifying expectations, and improving time management—student participation in Cycle II became more evenly distributed across groups. The classroom atmosphere became livelier, with students reading materials, discussing issues, taking notes, and presenting group work.

Overall Interpretation of the Findings

Overall, the implementation of the STAD cooperative learning model was effective in:

1. Increasing social studies learning outcomes (N-gain = 0.40, medium category);
2. Enhancing students' learning motivation from moderate to high; and
3. Raising learning activity from fairly active to active.

These results are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Ngatman et al., 2024; Fikri, 2025; Wulandari et al., 2022) which reported that STAD improves cognitive, affective, and social engagement in elementary school contexts. Conceptually, STAD aligns with the principles of deep learning in the Merdeka Curriculum, as it promotes collaboration, reflection, and learner autonomy.

Furthermore, the findings of this study expand the understanding of deep learning in social studies by demonstrating that integrating STAD with reflective group activities can foster higher-order thinking skills and social empathy. Students not only improved their test scores but also developed communication skills, responsibility, and a sense of belonging to their groups. These outcomes resonate with international research on cooperative learning and its positive impact on academic performance, motivation, emotional experiences, and social interaction.

In the multicultural and socially diverse context of Indonesian classrooms, STAD also contributes to building a collaborative and inclusive learning culture. Students learn to listen to different perspectives, respect peers from various backgrounds, and work together toward shared academic goals. Thus, STAD has significant implications not only for learning effectiveness but also for strengthening social cohesion and democratic values in the classroom.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the classroom action research conducted in two cycles, it can be concluded that the implementation of the STAD cooperative learning model effectively improves sixth-grade students' motivation and learning outcomes in social studies. The mean achievement score increased from 73.64 in Cycle I to 84.29 in Cycle II, while the percentage of students achieving mastery rose from 32.14% to 92.86%. The N-gain value of 0.40 (40.40%) indicates a medium level of learning improvement.

In addition, students' learning motivation increased from 70.2% to 84.48%, and learning activity rose from 62.5% to 82.7%. The STAD model created a more active, collaborative, and enjoyable learning environment, fostering individual responsibility, teamwork, and intrinsic motivation.

Therefore, STAD can be recommended as an effective instructional alternative for social studies in elementary schools, particularly within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes meaningful, reflective, and student-centered learning. Teachers are encouraged to apply STAD adaptively, considering group dynamics, providing continuous formative feedback, and integrating digital media where possible to support collaborative learning.

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