



Tantangan Pembelajaran Kooperatif bagi Pembelajar Muda di Tingkat Sekolah Menengah Pertama

The Challenges of Cooperative Learning for Young Learners at the Junior High School Level

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the challenges experienced by junior high school students in engaging with Cooperative Learning (CL) during English lessons. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a participatory design, the researchers directly implemented CL in the classroom and observed student interactions. Data were collected from 20 seventh-grade students through open-ended questionnaires, group interviews, and classroom observations. The findings reveal that students generally have a positive perception of group learning, particularly in terms of motivation, comfort, and peer collaboration. However, several obstacles were identified, including unequal task distribution, difficulties in communication, inactive group members, and limited understanding of the material during group discussions. These challenges suggest that although CL offers emotional and social benefits, its implementation requires structured guidance and support to ensure equal participation and effective learning. The study implies that fostering active engagement and balanced collaboration among students is essential for maximizing the benefits of Cooperative Learning in junior high school contexts.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, Group Interaction, Junior High School

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki tantangan yang dialami oleh siswa sekolah menengah pertama dalam mengikuti Pembelajaran Kooperatif (PK) selama pelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan desain partisipatif, para peneliti secara langsung menerapkan PK di kelas dan mengamati interaksi siswa. Data dikumpulkan dari 20 siswa kelas tujuh melalui kuesioner terbuka, wawancara kelompok, dan observasi kelas. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa siswa secara umum memiliki persepsi positif terhadap pembelajaran kelompok, khususnya dalam hal motivasi, kenyamanan, dan kolaborasi antarteman. Namun, beberapa kendala diidentifikasi, termasuk pembagian tugas yang tidak merata, kesulitan dalam komunikasi, anggota kelompok yang tidak aktif, dan pemahaman materi yang terbatas selama diskusi kelompok. Tantangan-tantangan ini menunjukkan bahwa meskipun PK menawarkan manfaat emosional dan sosial, implementasinya memerlukan bimbingan dan dukungan terstruktur untuk memastikan partisipasi yang setara dan pembelajaran yang efektif. Penelitian ini menyiratkan bahwa mendorong keterlibatan aktif dan kolaborasi yang seimbang di antara siswa sangat penting untuk memaksimalkan manfaat Pembelajaran Kooperatif dalam konteks sekolah menengah pertama.

Kata Kunci : Pembelajaran Kooperatif, Interaksi Kelompok, Sekolah Menengah Pertama



INTRODUCTION

Recent studies highlight several challenges in implementing Cooperative Learning (CL) for young learners, particularly at the junior high school level. Teachers often face difficulties integrating CL into the existing curriculum, managing time constraints, and evaluating students effectively (Buchs et al., 2017). Other significant barriers include insufficient stakeholder readiness, lack of adequate facilities, and rigid traditional educational structures (Keramati et al., 2024). Teacher educators also report various obstacles, such as issues related to teachers, learners, curriculum design, and administrative policies (Chakyarkandiyil & Prakasha, 2023). Although concrete CL methods like Jigsaw are considered more feasible to implement compared to conceptual approaches, both types remain important in language instruction (Ghaith, 2018). Additional implementation challenges involve aligning CL with the curriculum, managing class time, and navigating school policies (Ghaith, 2018). To overcome these issues, scholars suggest enhancing curriculum design, promoting positive stakeholder attitudes, and offering in-service training for teachers (Keramati et al., 2024).

Understanding these challenges in implementing Cooperative Learning (CL) requires a closer look at the learners themselves, particularly the unique developmental characteristics of junior high school students. At this stage, young learners exhibit several distinct traits that influence how they engage in classroom activities. For example, students in early adolescence often display a mix of growth and fixed mindsets, showing both a belief in their ability to improve and a tendency to struggle with setbacks (Saefudin et al., 2023). Birth order may also affect learner behavior; youngest children in families are sometimes less independent and less motivated to achieve, although they generally adapt well to school environments (Zola et al., 2017). Furthermore, junior high school students typically enjoy fun, play-based learning and respond positively to hands-on, interactive activities (Almalti, 2018). In the context of the new normal era, educators need to recognize and accommodate the diverse learning preferences and developmental needs of these students (Aslamiah, 2022). These characteristics highlight the importance of adjusting instructional strategies to suit the cognitive, emotional, and social nature of young adolescents.

Research on cooperative learning for young learners at the junior high school level reveals several gaps and areas for further investigation. While cooperative learning has been shown to enhance students' learning motivation, particularly at this level (Damayanti et al., 2023), more structured and age-appropriate approaches are needed to produce consistent positive outcomes, especially in terms of prosocial behavior (García-González et al., 2023). Other studies highlight how variables such as gender, grade, and academic achievement influence the effectiveness of cooperative learning, especially in rural school settings (Zhang et al., 2017). Despite its documented benefits, cooperative learning remains underutilized in many classrooms, indicating a gap between its potential and its practical application (Jolliffe, 2015). Addressing this issue requires sustained implementation strategies and the development of collaborative teacher cultures. Future research is needed to explore age-specific cooperative learning models, examine its long-term



impact across various subjects, and identify effective strategies to enhance its adoption in diverse educational contexts.

Given these challenges and research gaps, it is important to investigate the specific obstacles teachers face when implementing cooperative learning strategies for young learners at the junior high school level. This study aims to explore the practical, pedagogical, and contextual difficulties encountered in the application of cooperative learning in this context. By doing so, it seeks to contribute insights that can inform more effective instructional strategies and support systems.

Accordingly, this research is guided by the following question: *What are the challenges of implementing cooperative learning for young learners at the junior high school level?*

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative design with a participatory approach, where the researcher also acted as a teacher during the learning process. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain direct insight into the learning dynamics and challenges that arise when implementing Cooperative Learning (CL) in real classroom conditions. Unlike a typical observational study, this design provides the advantage of direct involvement, allowing the researcher to respond, adjust and reflect directly. This approach also encourages reflective teaching practices and builds meaningful engagement between teachers and students (John W.Creswell, 2018).

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study consisted of 20 grade VII students at the Darul Iman Islamic Boarding School. The students were selected through a purposive sampling technique based on their involvement in classroom activities that implemented CL. The classroom was used as the learning site as well as the research location, so that the data obtained truly reflected natural learning interactions. The school uses the national curriculum, and English is one of the core subjects, making it relevant for the implementation of cooperative strategies. The physical and social environment of the classroom also provided opportunities to analyze group dynamics and diverse behavior patterns.

Data Collection Method

Data was collected using three main techniques: open-ended questionnaires, group interviews, and classroom observations. An open-ended questionnaire was given to students to allow them to express their feelings, difficulties, and preferences while working in groups. Group interviews, involving 5-6 students per session, were conducted to explore their thoughts more deeply as well as encourage peer-to-peer discussions. In addition, the researcher conducted direct classroom observations during English lessons using CL, taking detailed notes on group participation, behavior, and interaction.



Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method as described by Dawadi (2020), which involves six systematic steps: understanding the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and compiling a report. This method allows researchers to identify recurring patterns and organize qualitative data into meaningful categories. Themes such as “lack of motivation”, “peer pressure”, or “communication difficulties” were identified based on student responses and observation notes. The flexibility of thematic analysis makes it suitable for analyzing combined verbal and written data from multiple sources.

Ethical Considerations

Since the participants were minors, informed consent was obtained from the school and parents before data collection. Students were made aware that their participation was voluntary, and their answers would be kept confidential and used for academic purposes only. The researcher's dual role as teacher and data collector was explained transparently to the students to reduce power imbalances and maintain trust. In addition, all activities were designed to be safe,

fun, and in line with their learning objectives so as not to compromise students' academic integrity or emotional comfort.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Student Data Questionnaire

Hint: Put a checkmark (✓) in the column that corresponds to your opinion for each of the following statements.

Scale used:

1= Disagree

2 = Neutral

3 = Setuju

4 =Strongly Agree

Tabel 1.1 Hail Student Data Questionnaire

No	Question	Disagree	Neutral	Setuju	Strongly agree
1.	I feel good when studying in a group	0	5	8	7
2.	Group study helped me understand the English material	0	7	10	3
3.	All members of my group actively participated	0	3	10	7
4.	I feel confident in expressing my opinion in a group.	0	10	1	9
5.	Tasks in groups are divided equally.	0	9	9	2



6.	I had a hard time working with my classmates.	6	6	5	3
7.	Members of my group help each other while doing assignments.	1	4	6	9
8.	The teacher guided us during the group work.	0	8	10	2
9.	Group study makes me more motivated to learn English	0	3	6	11
10.	I prefer to study in a group rather than alone.	1	8	9	2

Average Student Questionnaire Result Score

The following is the average score of each statement based on the results of the questionnaire that has been filled out by the students. The score is calculated using the following scale weights:

Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5.

Tabel 1.2

No.	Average Score
1.0	4.1
2.0	3.8
3.0	4.2
4.0	3.95
5.0	3.65
6.0	3.25
7.0	4.15
8.0	3.7
9.0	4.4
10.0	3.6

In general, the results of the questionnaire showed that most students had a positive attitude towards group learning. They find it helpful in understanding the material, enjoying the learning process, and actively participating. However, there is still a need to strengthen in terms of teacher guidance and equal participation in groups. Based on the average table, statement number 9 has the highest score (4.40), indicating that the student strongly agrees with the statement. Meanwhile, the lowest score was in statement number 6 (3.25), which indicates the doubts or disapproval of some students.

Student Interview Results

Below are the answers of 20 students when interviewed. why are there only 6 answers per question? Because the interviews were conducted in 6 groups of 20 students.

1. Tell us about your experience learning English in a group!

Student answer: It's very exciting because it can cooperate and help

2. What do you think is the fun of studying in a group?

Student Answer: Can Mingle with Friends, Can Interact, Because You Can Socialize



3. What challenges or difficulties did you face during group work?

Answer: Discussing something because you don't understand because there is a commotion, so you don't understand the material that the teacher conveys

4. How do you resolve issues when there are inactive members?

Answer: Reprimanding the person, not putting in grades, Being talked about well, teaching and inviting them to be active again

5. Do you feel that studying in a group helps you understand the material?

Answer: Yes, it is very understandable, and it makes it easier to learn.

6. Do you prefer individual or group study? Why?

Answer: I like groups and also like because groups can be with friends, if individuals study is very boring and not as exciting as group study.

7. Does the division of tasks in groups feel fair? Explain.

Answer: there are those who are fair and those who are not, because there are those who are favorite, usually fair and unfair, fair because they have good discussions.

8. If you could change one thing from group work in the classroom, what would you want to change?

Answer: Wrong material, Not in a group with people we hate, Change learning, Change Members, Don't shout and joke.

Discussion

Comfort of Learning in a Group, Based on questionnaire data, as many as 60% of students feel happy to study in a group, while 44% of students stated that they prefer to study in a group rather than studying alone. This data shows that most students feel comfortable and have a positive tendency towards group learning methods. These results are in line with the findings of the interviews, where 85% of students stated that group learning provides a pleasant experience, and 80% of students enjoy the social interaction aspect of group learning. This suggests that emotional comfort and social interaction are important factors in the effectiveness of group work.

52% of students feel that group learning helps them understand English material, and 68% of students state that this method makes them more motivated to learn. This is reinforced by the results of interviews, which show that 100% of students feel that group learning helps them understand the material, although 50% of students admit that they still have difficulty understanding the material during group work. This means that group learning in general can increase understanding and motivation, but still requires mentoring strategies so that all students can follow the process well.



Participation and Confidence, 68% of students consider all members of their group to actively participate, and 40% of students feel very confident when expressing their opinions, while only 4% are not confident. This shows that the group work method encourages activeness and builds student confidence. This is important in the context of English learning which requires active verbal interaction as part of language skills development.

Fairness in the Division of Tasks. As many as 44% of students feel that tasks in groups are divided fairly, while 36% are neutral. In the interview, students also mentioned that the division of tasks sometimes feels uneven, especially if there are less active members. Although most feel fair, this shows the need for monitoring and direction to make the distribution of tasks more proportionate and avoid dominance or inequality of participation.

Obstacles to Cooperation, As many as 24% of students experienced difficulties in working together, while 52% stated that they did not experience difficulties. This shows that most students have good cooperative skills, but there are still some students who need coaching in aspects of communication, responsibility, and tolerance in groups. The main challenges found through interviews are difficulty understanding the material and the presence of less active members, which can affect the dynamics of group work.

Helping Each Other in Groups. As many as 60% of students feel that their group members help each other when doing assignments. This indicates that solidarity and cooperation in the group are quite high. This mutually helpful attitude is one of the main supporting factors in the success of the group learning method.

The Role of Teachers in Group Guidance. As many as 48% of students feel that teachers guide them during group work, while 32% are neutral. This means that the role of teachers in group facilitation and monitoring has begun to be felt, but it is not evenly distributed. Increasing the role of teachers in directing, motivating, and ensuring that each group runs effectively is still needed to optimize learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Cooperative Learning (CL) at the junior high school level faces various challenges stemming from pedagogical, structural, and student characteristics. Although CL theoretically aligns with cultural values such as mutual cooperation and deliberation, its implementation is still hampered by limited teacher training, facilities, and teacher-oriented teaching habits. Data from questionnaires and interviews showed that students generally had a positive view of CL, especially regarding increased learning motivation, social interaction, and comfort when studying together.

However, challenges such as uneven division of tasks, passive members, and difficulties in understanding the material still arise and require special attention.

To optimize CL implementation, comprehensive support from various parties is needed. Teachers need to get ongoing practical training, responsive classroom management, and structural support



from the school. In addition, the role of the teacher as a facilitator who actively guides the group process is a crucial factor in ensuring the success of CL. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of adaptive learning strategies to the developmental needs of early adolescents, as well as the need for further research on the CL model that is more structured and per the educational context in Indonesia.

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