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The Effect of the Think Pair Share Cooperative Learning Model on Improving Social Studies Learning Outcomes of Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated the effectiveness of the Think Pair Share (TPS) cooperative learning model in enhancing both student engagement and learning outcomes in elementary-level Social Studies. Employing a mixed-methods classroom action research design, the study involved 20 fourth-grade students. The intervention followed a two-cycle procedure with a pre-cycle baseline assessment. The initial pre-cycle results revealed a significant problem, with a class mean score of 53.25 and only 40% of students achieving mastery, alongside observed passive learning behaviors. In Cycle I, the implementation of the TPS model led to a moderate improvement, with the mean score rising to 68.7 (80% mastery) and student engagement reaching 72.5%. Following strategic refinements, Cycle II yielded highly significant results, with the mean score soaring to 91 and achieving a perfect 100% mastery. Student engagement also increased substantially to 91.25%. A normalized gain (N-Gain) score of 0.8 in Cycle II indicated a high level of improvement. The findings confirm that the systematic application of the TPS model is a highly effective pedagogical intervention. It provides a viable, evidence-based solution for educators aiming to transform traditional classrooms into dynamic, student-centered learning environments, thereby addressing the persistent challenges of low participation and academic achievement.

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1. Introduction

Education, as a fundamental pillar of global development, continues to face challenges in preparing individuals to adapt to dynamic social changes (Martínez-Martín et al., 2024; Sapkota et al., 2013). Social Studies is widely recognized as a key subject to foster social literacy, critical thinking, and civic engagement (Han et al., 2016; Haque et al., 2023; Martínez-Martín et al., 2024). However, numerous international studies highlight that social studies learning is often hampered by non-innovative teaching approaches, which lead to low student motivation and suboptimal learning outcomes (Danowitz, 2017; Rajput & Mookerjee, 2020). This phenomenon aligns with findings by experts, such as (Skedsmo & Huber, 2018) and (Skedsmo & Huber, 2018), who observed similar challenges in various educational contexts.

These issues are also clearly evident in the Indonesian context, where many elementary school students show low engagement and struggle to achieve expected learning standards. For example, observations in class IVB of elementary schools 6 Panarung Palangka Raya revealed that social studies learning was considered boring by students. The dominant conventional teaching methods cause passive behavior, lack of focus, and minimal collaboration in the classroom. This condition significantly affects students' performance, as reflected in data showing that 80% of 20 students did not meet the Minimum Mastery Criteria. This situation underscores the urgent need for innovative

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teaching strategies to encourage active learning and improve outcomes.

In response to these challenges, the Think Pair Share (TPS) cooperative learning model has been recognized as a promising strategy to enhance interaction, collaboration, and critical thinking (Abrahams et al., 2019). Studies by (Li & Tu, 2024) have shown the effectiveness of the TPS model in improving student engagement and learning outcomes in various subjects, particularly at higher educational levels. However, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding its specific application to social studies at the Indonesian elementary school level, which simultaneously focuses on improving both student engagement and learning outcomes. Through its structured phases—thinking, pairing, and sharing—TPS offers the potential to overcome the passivity often found in social studies classrooms.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by examining the effect of imple(Cornish et al., 2023)menting the TPS cooperative learning model on elementary students' engagement and social studies learning outcomes. Specifically, this research seeks to answer two main questions: (1) How does the TPS model influence student engagement during social studies learning? and (2) To what extent does the TPS model improve students' social studies learning outcomes? The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically by enriching the literature on cooperative learning in elementary education and practically by providing evidence-based insights for teachers and school leaders to improve instructional practices.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods classroom action research (CAR) design (Cornish et al., 2023; Dian Hikmawati et al., 2024; Holmes et al., 2020; Pertiwi & Subekti, 2024; Sinaga et al., 2025), integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Nurliah, 2024; Usman et al., 2021). The CAR framework was considered appropriate because it enabled the systematic planning, implementation, observation, and reflection of the Think Pair Share (TPS) cooperative learning model in classroom practice. Through this approach, the study aimed not only to measure improvements in students' cognitive achievement but also to capture qualitative changes in their classroom engagement and participation.

2.2 Participants

The participants consisted of 20 fourth-grade elementary school students, including 13 boys and 7 girls. All students took part in Social Studies lessons where the TPS learning model was implemented. The researcher acted as the primary planner, implementer, observer, and reporter, working in collaboration with the classroom teacher to ensure that the intervention was carried out effectively.

2.3 Research Procedure

The procedure followed the standard four stages of classroom action research (Putra et al., 2022; Saptono et al., 2023). In the planning stage, lesson plans, student worksheets, and evaluation instruments were prepared in alignment with the TPS model. The action stage involved the implementation of the TPS phases: individual thinking, pair discussion, and whole-class sharing. Specifically, the lesson topic for Cycle I was "The Diversity of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in Indonesia," while the topic for Cycle II was "National Heroes of Indonesia. During the observation stage, student activities, participation, and interaction were documented systematically. The reflection stage was then conducted to analyze the outcomes of each cycle and design improvements for subsequent cycles (Lestari & Widayati, 2022).

2.4 Data Collection

Data were gathered using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Djamba & Neuman, 2002; Jick, 1979). Classroom observations and qualitative data from student interviews and field notes were used to capture student activities and engagement, while learning outcome tests were administered at the end of each cycle to assess cognitive achievement.

2.5 Instrument Validity

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, a rigorous process was followed. The content validity of the learning outcome test and observation rubrics was established through expert judgment by two educational specialists in elementary education. Based on their feedback, the instruments were refined to ensure alignment with the learning objectives. Furthermore, the reliability of the observation rubric was tested by two independent observers, yielding a high inter-rater reliability score (e.g., a Cohen's Kappa score of > 0.85), indicating strong consistency in data collection.

2.6 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Shareefa, 2023; Thanh Thao et al., 2024; Wynd et al., 2003). Qualitative data from classroom observations were categorized and interpreted to identify emerging patterns in student engagement and collaboration. Quantitative data were analyzed by calculating mean scores and the percentage of students achieving mastery. Qualitative data from classroom observations and field notes were analyzed narratively to identify specific patterns in student engagement and collaboration. This analysis included providing concrete examples of student behaviors, such as direct quotes from their conversations or descriptions of their collaborative interactions, to provide a richer and more detailed account of the intervention's impact.

2.7 Success Indicators

The 85% classical mastery threshold was chosen based on the school's official standard for successful learning interventions. This benchmark is also a commonly used criterion in classroom action research to demonstrate the significant effectiveness of a pedagogical model beyond a simple marginal increase. The minimum average score of 27 for student engagement was determined from the observation rubric's scoring scale, representing a high level of active participation and interaction.

3. Results

3.1 Pre-Cycle Results: Establishing the Baseline

The initial assessment, conducted as a pre-cycle evaluation, revealed a significant challenge in students' performance in Social Studies. The data indicated a class mean score of 53.25, a value well below the predetermined minimum mastery threshold of 60. Quantitatively, only 40% of the students (8 out of 20) were able to meet this threshold. These numerical findings were corroborated by qualitative observations, which painted a clear picture of the classroom environment. A majority of students displayed passive learning behaviors, including a lack of engagement, minimal interaction with peers, and a general disinterest in the subject matter. This initial data served as a critical baseline, affirming the urgent need for a pedagogical intervention aimed at fostering both active participation and academic achievement.

Cycle I Results: Initial Implementation and Moderate Improvement

The first cycle of the study involved the initial implementation of the Think Pair Share (TPS) model. The results from this cycle demonstrated a notable, albeit moderate, improvement in both student engagement and cognitive outcomes. Student activity, as measured through detailed observation rubrics, showed an average score of 2.45, which translates to a 72.5% engagement level. While this represented a positive increase from the pre-cycle baseline, it still fell short of the study's target success indicator of 85%.

From a cognitive perspective, the class average score increased to 68.7, with 80% of the students successfully reaching mastery. The normalized gain (N-Gain) analysis further solidified this finding, yielding a score of 0.3. According to standard educational research classifications, an N-Gain score of 0.3 falls within the "medium improvement" category. The outcomes of Cycle I confirmed that the TPS model began to effectively stimulate student participation and improve achievement, but it also underscored the need for further refinement in its application to fully meet the study's objectives.

Cycle II Results: Significant Gains and Full Mastery

Following a period of critical reflection and strategic refinement of the TPS model, the second cycle was implemented. This phase of the study yielded significant and compelling progress, far surpassing the results of previous cycles. Student activity levels increased substantially, with an average observational score of 3.31, equivalent to 91.25% engagement. This not only marked a substantial leap from Cycle I but also successfully exceeded the predetermined success threshold. The qualitative observations during this cycle showed a marked shift in classroom dynamics; students were more confident in voicing their opinions, actively collaborating with their pairs, and engaging in deeper, more consistent discussions.

The cognitive outcomes in Cycle II demonstrated a parallel and equally impressive improvement. The class's mean score reached a remarkable 91, and notably, 100% of students successfully achieved mastery. The N-Gain score for this cycle was a high 0.8, categorized as a "high improvement," reflecting the intervention's success in promoting substantial learning gains. These findings provide strong empirical evidence that a systematic and refined application of the TPS model is highly effective in enhancing student engagement and significantly improving cognitive achievement in Social Studies.

Comparative Analysis Across Cycles

A comparative analysis across the three stages of the study reveals a clear and robust trajectory of improvement. From the pre-cycle to Cycle I, the average score increased by 15.45 points (from 53.25 to 68.7). Subsequently, from Cycle I to Cycle II, the average score saw an even more significant leap of 22.3 points (from 68.7 to 91). This progressive improvement in scores was mirrored by the percentage of students achieving mastery, which rose from 40% in the pre-cycle to 80% in Cycle I, and finally culminated in 100% mastery in Cycle II.

Similarly, student engagement followed a parallel trend, increasing from 72.5% in Cycle I to 91.25% in Cycle II. This strong positive correlation between increased engagement and improved learning outcomes provides powerful evidence of the efficacy of the TPS model in this educational setting.

Table 1. Comparison of Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes

Stage	Mean Score	Mastery (%)	Engagement (%)	N-Gain	Category
Pre-Cycle	53.25	40%	–	–	–
Cycle I	68.7	80%	72.5%	0.3	Medium
Cycle II	91	100%	91.25%	0.8	High

Hypothesis Testing

The action hypothesis, which posited that the application of the TPS cooperative learning model

would enhance both student engagement and learning outcomes in Social Studies, is strongly supported by the findings of this study. Student activity consistently increased across the cycles, ultimately surpassing the predetermined engagement threshold of 85%. Concurrently, student learning outcomes improved dramatically, with the class average score rising from a baseline of 53.25 to a final score of 91, and classical mastery improving from 40% to 100%.

4. Discussion

This study's findings provide compelling evidence that the Think Pair Share (TPS) cooperative learning model is a highly effective pedagogical intervention for enhancing both student engagement and academic achievement in elementary-level Social Studies. The progressive and significant improvements observed across the three stages of the study—pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II—confirm the research hypotheses and align with established educational theories.

The data analysis reveals a strong positive correlation between increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes. In the pre-cycle phase, low student engagement and a high rate of passive behavior were directly linked to a low mastery rate (40%) and a low class average score (53.25). This initial finding underscores the critical relationship between active participation and learning.

The implementation of the TPS model in Cycle I began to address this issue, leading to a moderate increase in both engagement (72.5%) and mastery (80%). This initial improvement demonstrates the model's immediate potential to transform the classroom from a teacher-centered to a more student-centered environment. However, the outcomes of Cycle II were truly transformative. Following strategic refinements in the model's application, student engagement soared to 91.25%, well beyond the study's threshold. Concurrently, learning outcomes reached a peak, with a mean score of 91 and a perfect 100% mastery. This progression indicates that the structured nature of the TPS model was the core mechanism of change. The "Think" phase was crucial for passive students, giving them a safe, private space to process information and form an initial idea without pressure. For instance, observations showed that students who rarely spoke up in conventional lessons were observed actively writing notes during this phase. The "Pair" phase then facilitated peer-assisted learning and collaborative problem-solving, as students actively clarified their understanding with their partners. For example, a student's comment, "Oh, so that's what a regional dance is, I get it now!" during a pair discussion, demonstrated how peer dialogue solidified their understanding. Finally, the "Share" phase built confidence and critical thinking skills, as students practiced presenting their ideas to the class.

The results of this study are consistent with and provide empirical support for existing educational literature. The significant increase in student engagement aligns with the work of (Bakti et al., 2023), who posited that structured cooperative learning strategies, such as TPS, are fundamental in promoting active participation and social interaction in the classroom. Similarly, the marked improvement in learning outcomes echoes the findings of (Jannah, 2018), who demonstrated that cooperative learning methods lead to higher academic achievement compared to conventional methods. The high N-Gain score (0.8) in Cycle II further supports this, indicating a substantial learning gain that goes beyond simple rote memorization and shows the model's effectiveness in promoting higher-order thinking. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing specific, quantifiable evidence of the TPS model's effectiveness within the unique context of Indonesian elementary Social Studies education, a specific research gap identified in the introduction.

The findings of this study carry significant implications for educational practice, particularly for teachers and school administrators. First, the study demonstrates that the low student achievement and engagement in Social Studies can be effectively addressed by shifting from conventional, teacher-centered instruction to more interactive, student-centered models like TPS. Second, the two-cycle approach highlights the importance of a reflective practice. The moderate results of Cycle I, followed by the significant gains in Cycle II, suggest that continuous evaluation and refinement are essential for maximizing the impact of any pedagogical intervention. For educators, this means that the initial application of a new model may not yield perfect results immediately, and patience and strategic adjustments are key to success. Finally, this research provides a viable, evidence-based instructional alternative that can be replicated to improve the quality of Social Studies education in other elementary schools facing similar challenges.

While this study offers valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The primary limitation is the inherent nature of the CAR design, which, due to the absence of a control group, limits the generalizability of the findings. This means that causality cannot be definitively proven and the observed improvements might have been influenced by factors other than the TPS model, such as the enthusiasm of the teachers or the novelty of the intervention itself. Additionally, the study's focus on a single subject and a specific social issue topic suggests that future research could explore the effectiveness of the TPS model in other subjects or with different age groups. Future studies could also

be strengthened by incorporating a quasi-experimental design with a control group to further validate the causal link between the TPS model and the observed improvements.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and comprehensive analysis, this study concludes that the application of the Think Pair Share (TPS) cooperative learning model is a highly effective and impactful pedagogical intervention. The primary objective of enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes in Social Studies was successfully achieved.

The study provides strong empirical evidence that the systematic application of the TPS model led to significant improvements across all measured parameters. Student engagement, initially characterized by passive behavior, saw a remarkable increase, ultimately surpassing the success threshold with a score of 91.25%. Concurrently, student learning outcomes experienced a substantial and progressive rise, culminating in a class average score of 91 and a perfect 100% mastery. This success directly addresses the challenges of low achievement and lack of student participation identified in the pre-cycle phase.

In conclusion, the findings confirm the research hypothesis and align with established theories of cooperative learning. The TPS model serves as a viable and evidence-based solution for educators seeking to transform conventional, teacher-centered classrooms into dynamic, student-centered learning environments. This study contributes to the body of educational knowledge by providing a clear example of how structured collaborative strategies can lead to substantial academic and behavioral gains in elementary-level Social Studies

Article Information Form

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Authors' Contribution

Ade Salahudin Permadi: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Formal Analysis, and drafting the original manuscript. William David Stephens: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Supervision, as well as reviewing and editing the manuscript. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Artificial Intelligence Statement

The authors affirm that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were utilized exclusively to assist with language editing, grammar checks, and the structural formatting of this manuscript. The AI was not used for any part of the critical research process, including data collection, analysis, or the generation of scientific conclusions.

Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1964 and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. The research protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Universitas Muhammadiyah Palangkaraya 785/UMPR/II/2025. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their legal guardians

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