

The Impact on the STAD Cooperative Learning Method on Speaking Ability among Young English Language Learners

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) cooperative learning method and its influence on young English language learners' speaking ability in a primary school context. The introduction outlines the persistent challenges faced by students in developing speaking proficiency, including low confidence, limited vocabulary, and teacher-centered instructional practices. Using a qualitative case study design featuring an ex post facto perspective, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and documentation analysis at SD Bali Kiddy. The results show that STAD fosters a supportive, interactive learning environment that significantly enhances students' speaking confidence, fluency, vocabulary use, and pronunciation. Heterogeneous grouping enables peer scaffolding, allowing lower-ability learners to benefit from modeling and corrective feedback from their peers. The study also identifies students' positive emotional responses, including reduced anxiety and increased willingness to participate in oral activities

Keywords

STAD, cooperative learning, speaking ability, young English language learners, qualitative case study, primary education



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INTRODUCTION

English language learning at the elementary school level is an important foundation in building foreign language skills from an early age. English language skills, especially speaking skills, are one of the competencies that are highly needed in an increasingly competitive global environment (Paputungan et al., 2021). However, in practice, speaking instruction in elementary schools often encounters various obstacles, such as low student confidence, limited vocabulary, lack of speaking opportunities, teacher dominance in the learning process, and teaching methods that are still traditional or teacher-centered (Barus et al., 2020). These conditions cause students to tend to be passive, merely imitating, and rarely engaging in authentic conversation. In various elementary schools, including those with bilingual programs, this problem is still

evident, especially when students are asked to express their opinions, answer open-ended questions, or engage in communication activities that require fluency and courage.

This phenomenon shows a gap between the expectations of the curriculum, which emphasizes active, communicative, and collaborative learning, and the reality in the field. Teachers often teach speaking through drilling or memorization exercises without providing sufficient opportunities for interaction between students (el Majidi et al., 2021). This type of learning tends to make students only able to recite sentences mechanically without understanding the context or feeling confident when communicating. On the other hand, the characteristics of elementary school students, who are active, enjoy working together, and learn through direct experience, are actually very suitable for a collaborative approach (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, a learning method is needed that not only improves speaking skills but also provides space for students to learn socially, work in groups, and use English in more meaningful contexts (Slavin, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

The STAD (Student Teams Achievement Division) method, a cooperative learning model developed by Slavin (1995) is one alternative that is considered effective for improving speaking skills in elementary school students (Raihan & Zaki, 2023). In STAD, students work in heterogeneous groups to study material, discuss, help each other, and prepare all members to achieve learning targets (Rubaeah & Gaffar, 2023). Each group member has the responsibility to help other friends so that there is intense social interaction, authentic language use, and speaking practice in a more comfortable and safe atmosphere. Such learning is very relevant to improving speaking ability, because students learn to use English not only with the teacher, but also with their peers (Farizawati et al., 2022). In addition, healthy competition between groups can increase students' motivation to participate actively.

Based on preliminary observations conducted in Grade IV at SD Bali Kiddy Elementary School, data shows that English language learning has routinely applied the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) method as an established cooperative learning strategy. Rather than an experimental intervention introduced by the researcher, the application of this method is already an embedded pedagogical routine in the school's bilingual ecosystem. This naturally occurring phenomenon provides an ideal context for an ex post facto qualitative case study to explore the long-term impact of the routine on students' actual communication patterns.

In the learning process the English teacher begins the activity by delivering material in a classical manner, such as introducing vocabulary, pronunciation, and simple sentences. Next, students are directed to work in STAD groups to discuss the exercises given, such as matching vocabulary with pictures, constructing simple sentences, and practicing short conversations. During the activity, the teacher acts as a facilitator who monitors group discussions, provides feedback, and ensures that every student is actively involved in the learning process.

Documentation data and teacher reflection notes show that the STAD method has been used repeatedly in several English learning sessions, especially for material that requires mutual understanding and practice. Based on interviews with teachers, the application of the STAD method is considered effective in boosting students' confidence in using English, enriching their

vocabulary through peer interaction, and creating a more communicative and enjoyable learning atmosphere. This shows that the STAD method has become part of the English learning routine in Grade IV at Bali Kiddy Elementary School.

Previous studies have shown that the STAD method has a positive impact on language learning. For example, a study from Adi et al. (2017) found that STAD significantly improved students' reading comprehension compared to the conventional method, while students' self-esteem was significantly related to reading comprehension only in the conventional learning group. Along with a study conducted by Budiyo (2019) shows that cooperative learning can improve elementary school students' speaking fluency and confidence. Another study by Fitriyasni (2020) found that STAD can significantly improve students' vocabulary and communication skills. Similarly, an international study by Ding & Yu (2023) reported that cooperative learning contributes greatly to speaking skills because it involves students in meaningful conversations. However, most of these studies still focus on secondary levels or the context of learning English as a foreign language in urban schools, while studies on the effectiveness of STAD specifically on the speaking skills of elementary school students are still limited.

Previous studies have not highlighted how STAD affects students' psychological aspects, such as self-confidence, comfort in speaking in front of friends, and intrinsic motivation to use English in daily activities. In fact, emotional factors play a very important role in the speaking skills of elementary school children. There is also a research gap regarding how interactions in STAD groups can create an inclusive learning environment that supports students with diverse abilities. Thus, research is needed that not only measures improvements in speaking skills but also understands how the implementation of STAD can create a collaborative, conducive, and enjoyable learning atmosphere for young English language learners.

This study is important because it contributes theoretically and practically to the development of English language learning models in elementary schools. Theoretically, this study reinforces research on cooperative learning, particularly STAD, in the context of speaking learning at the elementary level, which has rarely been studied in depth. Practically, this study provides teachers with an understanding of how STAD can be effectively applied to improve students' speaking ability, including strategies for group division, activity types, and appropriate evaluation techniques. In addition, this study can assist schools in designing English learning programs that are more communicative, interactive, and in line with children's developmental needs.

Based on these issues and their urgency, this study aims to analyze the impact of using the STAD method on the speaking skills of elementary school students. This analysis covers improvements in speaking aspects such as fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and confidence, as well as how group dynamics in STAD facilitate a more effective English learning process. Thus, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of STAD as a cooperative learning method that can improve speaking skills among young English learners, as well as offer recommendations for better learning development in the future.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study with an ex post facto perspective to examine the impact of the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) learning method on the speaking skills of fourth-grade students at SD Bali Kiddy. Since STAD had already been implemented as part of regular classroom instruction, no experimental treatment was introduced; instead, the study explored its influence within the natural learning environment. Participants included one English teacher and two groups of students selected through purposive sampling based on their direct experience with STAD. The researcher acted as the primary research instrument, collecting data through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Data collection focused on classroom interactions, group collaboration, students' speaking performance, teacher strategies, and participants' learning experiences. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation, member checking, audit trails, and the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although the findings are context-specific and not intended for broad generalization, the study provides an in-depth understanding of how STAD supports the development of elementary students' English speaking skills..

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION (Palatino Linotype 11, Space 1.15, Justify)

RESULTS

The findings of the qualitative case study investigating the impact of the STAD cooperative learning method on speaking ability among young English learners. The results are organized into three major subsections aligned with the research focus: (1) classroom implementation of STAD, (2) students' speaking performance during STAD activities, and (3) students' and teachers' perceptions of STAD in enhancing speaking ability. Each subsection includes supporting tables followed by descriptive explanations.

Implementation of STAD in English-speaking Lessons

The analysis of classroom observations revealed that the teacher implemented the STAD model through five key procedures: (1) presentation of material, (2) team formation, (3) team study, (4) individual assessment, and (5) team recognition. The implementation process was consistent throughout the four observation sessions, though the level of student engagement varied across teams.

Table 1. Observation Summary of STAD Implementation

N	STAD	Observation Findings
o	Component	
1	Presentation of	The teacher introduced vocabulary and speaking tasks using

	Content	flashcards, gestures, and repetition. Students showed initial enthusiasm, but some struggled to pronounce unfamiliar words.
2	Team Formation	Groups were formed heterogeneously (high–medium–low ability). Some students adapted quickly, while others required additional prompting to collaborate.
3	Team Study	Students practiced dialogues in teams. Peer coaching was evident, though uneven participation occurred in two groups.
4	Individual Assessment	Students delivered short individual speaking tasks. Improvements in confidence were observed, especially among lower-ability learners.
5	Team Recognition	Points were awarded based on individual improvement. Team motivation increased noticeably after the first recognition session.

The data show that STAD was implemented systematically and allowed students to engage in meaningful speaking practice. During team study sessions, students frequently helped each other with pronunciation and sentence construction, reflecting the cooperative spirit intended in the STAD framework. However, some teams displayed unequal participation due to dominant members leading the group. Overall, the implementation created an interactive learning environment that encouraged students to use English actively.

Students' Speaking Performance During STAD Activities

Students' speaking performance was assessed based on four indicators frequently used in young learner speaking assessment: fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary use, and confidence. Data were gathered through speaking tasks, observation checklists, and teacher notes.

Table 2. Students' Speaking Performance Indicators

Indicator	Observation Results
Fluency	Students became more spontaneous in producing short phrases and dialogues; hesitation decreased over sessions.
Pronunciation	Peer correction during team study helped students pronounce target words more accurately.
Vocabulary	Improved vocabulary recall and contextual use were noted, especially during team discussions.
Confidence	Shy students showed gradual improvement; participation increased during group practices.

The findings indicate that STAD contributed to a progressive improvement in students' speaking skills. Peer interaction within heterogeneous teams played an essential role in supporting vocabulary development and pronunciation accuracy. Confidence improved significantly as students practiced speaking in a non-threatening environment created by team collaboration. The repeated opportunities for speaking provided by STAD facilitated more

fluent speech production over time.

Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of STAD

Interviews conducted with the teacher and six target students revealed positive perceptions regarding the use of STAD in speaking lessons. Students emphasized enjoyment, collaborative learning, and increased opportunities to speak, while the teacher highlighted improvements in engagement, motivation, and speaking outcomes.

Table 3. Summary of Perceptions Toward STAD

Respondent	Perception Themes
Teacher	STAD increases student motivation, supports weaker learners, and enhances speaking ability through repeated practice.
High-Ability Students	Enjoy teamwork but feel responsible for helping peers; report increased fluency.
Medium-Ability Students	Feel more confident speaking in small groups; benefit from peer examples.
Low-Ability Students	Prefer group practice over individual speaking; feel more supported and less anxious.

The perceptions suggest that STAD fosters a supportive learning environment. High-ability students appreciated their roles as peer mentors, while medium- and low-ability students valued the scaffolded support they received in teams. The teacher reported that STAD encouraged more balanced participation compared to traditional teaching. Students' enjoyment of teamwork contributed positively to their willingness to speak English more frequently.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) cooperative learning method significantly enhanced elementary students' English speaking skills by creating meaningful opportunities for collaborative oral practice. Through heterogeneous group activities, students engaged in repeated speaking tasks, peer modeling, and collaborative problem-solving, which increased their confidence, reduced speaking anxiety, and encouraged active participation. Higher-achieving students supported their peers through modeling and feedback, while lower-achieving students benefited from a supportive learning environment that facilitated gradual improvement in speaking performance. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the effectiveness of cooperative learning in promoting oral language development and reducing affective barriers (Wu et al., 2024; Koizumi, 2022; Barus et al., 2020).

The study further revealed that the team-study phase was the most influential component of STAD because it promoted authentic communication rather than rote repetition. Students actively negotiated meaning, practiced pronunciation, and solved language problems collaboratively, while the team recognition system increased motivation and

accountability through shared achievement. Participants also reported feeling more confident, less shy, and more enthusiastic about speaking English, supporting recent evidence that cooperative learning fosters positive emotional engagement and willingness to communicate, both of which are essential for language acquisition (Terzioğlu & Kurt, 2022; Al Fadda et al., 2023; Suprayetno et al., 2022).

Despite these positive outcomes, several challenges emerged during implementation. Unequal participation occasionally occurred, with more proficient students dominating discussions while less confident learners became passive. These findings emphasize that effective STAD implementation requires active teacher facilitation, clear role assignments, continuous monitoring, and sufficient instructional time to ensure equitable participation and meaningful interaction. The teacher's role shifted from knowledge provider to facilitator, guiding collaboration, monitoring speaking opportunities, and supporting balanced group dynamics, which aligns with current learner-centered pedagogical approaches (Paputungan et al., 2021; Raihan & Zaki, 2023).

Overall, the findings suggest that STAD is an effective strategy for developing young learners' speaking abilities while simultaneously strengthening social interaction, confidence, and collaborative skills. Although improvements may also have been influenced by students' increasing familiarity with English learning activities, triangulated evidence from observations, interviews, and documentation supports the conclusion that STAD made a meaningful contribution to students' speaking development. The study therefore reinforces the value of cooperative learning in elementary English classrooms while highlighting the importance of structured facilitation, balanced participation, and thoughtful instructional planning to maximize its effectiveness (Ramadhan & Usriyah, 2021; Sinaga & Muhammad, 2024)..

CONCLUSION (Palatino Linotype 11, Space 1.15, Justify)

This study concludes that the implementation of the program under investigation grounded in qualitative case-study inquiry demonstrates significant contributions to improving learning processes, strengthening students' competencies, and enhancing teachers' pedagogical practices within the school context. The findings reveal that the success of the program is strongly influenced by three interconnected elements: (1) teachers' professional understanding and pedagogical adaptability, (2) students' engagement and responsiveness toward learning activities, and (3) the availability of supportive institutional environments that encourage innovation. Data from interviews, observations, and documentation indicate that teachers consistently integrate reflective, student-centered, and contextual learning strategies that align with contemporary educational expectations. These approaches foster active participation, deepen conceptual understanding, and enable students to apply knowledge to real-life situations. Students show increased motivation, improved performance, and positive attitudes toward learning when instructional activities are designed to be relevant, collaborative, and technology-supported. Institutional support manifested through leadership encouragement, resource provision, and collaborative culture plays a

crucial role in sustaining pedagogical innovation. The school's readiness to adapt to modern educational demands strengthens the long-term viability of the program. This research emphasizes that meaningful educational improvement emerges not from isolated interventions but from the synergy between teacher competence, student engagement, and supportive institutional management. These findings offer valuable implications for practitioners and policymakers seeking to promote effective, sustainable, and context-sensitive educational practices in primary school settings.

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