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CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTING FACTORS IN IMPLEMENTING THE STAD STRATEGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT SMP PESANTREN AS SALAM PONTIANAK

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges and supporting factors influencing the implementation of the Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) strategy in English language teaching at SMP Pesantren As Salam Pontianak. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the research involved one English teacher and eighth-grade students as respondents. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation. The findings reveal that limited technological facilities and restricted instructional time pose significant challenges to implementing STAD effectively. However, teacher competence, classroom resources, and the availability of supplementary learning materials serve as crucial supporting factors. These findings provide insights for educators seeking to integrate cooperative learning in EFL contexts and highlight considerations necessary for optimizing STAD in similar educational settings.

Keywords: EFL, teaching strategy, cooperative learning, STAD, English teaching

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INTRODUCTION

English continues to function as a global lingua franca, enabling individuals to participate in academic, professional, and social communication across cultures. Mastery of English requires competence in the four fundamental skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—which together support comprehensive language proficiency. Alongside the increasing integration of technology into education, teachers are encouraged to adopt innovative pedagogical strategies that facilitate interactive and student-centered learning.

Teaching strategies play a vital role in shaping learners' engagement and learning outcomes. Bakhruddin (2021) emphasizes that teaching strategies represent essential pedagogical tools that guide teachers in planning, organizing, and delivering instruction. Similarly, Stone and Morris (as cited in Isaac, 2010) contend that instructional strategy is a structured plan that outlines objectives, learning activities, and implementation procedures designed to achieve intended learning outcomes. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), the selection of an appropriate strategy becomes critical, especially in environments where exposure to English is limited.

Preliminary observations at SMP Pesantren As Salam Pontianak indicated that teachers frequently apply the Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) strategy in English instruction. STAD is among the most widely used cooperative learning models, developed by Slavin (2014) to promote student collaboration and academic achievement through structured group work. In STAD, students work in small, heterogeneous teams to master academic content, support each other's learning, and produce group outcomes. Maulana (2017) states that STAD not only promotes active participation but also enables students to express ideas freely while engaging with peers in collaborative learning.

Despite its advantages, the implementation of STAD may encounter challenges related to institutional constraints, teacher preparedness, and student readiness, especially within boarding school environments where academic schedules are tightly structured and resources may vary.

In response to these concerns, the present research focuses on identifying both the challenges and the supporting factors involved in implementing STAD to teach English in this context. The study aims to address the following questions:

1. What challenges do teachers face in implementing the STAD strategy in English language teaching at SMP Pesantren As Salam Pontianak?
2. What factors support the successful implementation of the STAD strategy in this school?

LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language Teaching and Learning

English Language Teaching (ELT) aims to develop learners' communicative competence through the integration of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In EFL contexts, where learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, effective instructional strategies are essential to maximize language input and promote active use of the target language. Teachers are therefore required not only to master language content but also to apply pedagogical approaches that encourage meaningful interaction and learner engagement.

Bakhruddin et al. (2021) assert that teaching strategies are fundamental components of the teaching–learning process, as they guide teachers in organizing learning activities, managing classrooms, and facilitating student participation. Well-planned strategies help teachers align learning objectives with instructional activities and assessments, thereby improving learning outcomes. In addition, student-centered approaches are increasingly emphasized in ELT, particularly those that encourage collaboration, communication, and critical thinking.

Cooperative learning has gained prominence in ELT because it allows students to actively engage with peers, practice language skills in authentic contexts, and develop social as well as academic competencies. Through interaction in small groups, students are more likely to negotiate meaning, share ideas, and reduce anxiety when using a foreign language. As a result, cooperative learning models are considered effective alternatives to traditional teacher-centered instruction in EFL classrooms.

Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) Strategy

Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) is one of the most widely applied cooperative learning strategies developed by Slavin. According to Slavin (2014), STAD involves students working in small, heterogeneous teams where members are responsible not only for their own learning but also for helping their teammates achieve academic success. The strategy typically consists of five components: class presentation, team study, quizzes or individual tests, individual improvement scores, and team recognition.

The effectiveness of STAD has been widely documented across educational levels and subjects. Hirmanudin (2015) found that the application of STAD significantly improved students' learning outcomes, as it encouraged cooperation, responsibility, and mutual support among learners. In English language teaching, STAD provides opportunities for students to

practice language skills collaboratively, enabling them to exchange ideas, discuss language forms, and build confidence in using English.

Hayatunisa (2014) demonstrated that the STAD technique positively influenced students' writing skills, particularly in teaching narrative texts. The study revealed that students became more motivated and actively involved in the learning process when working in teams. Similarly, Yusuf, Natsir, and Hanum (2015) reported that STAD fostered positive classroom interaction, enhanced student motivation, and supported learners with varying proficiency levels through peer assistance.

Overall, STAD aligns well with communicative language teaching principles, as it emphasizes interaction, learner autonomy, and shared responsibility for learning. These characteristics make STAD a promising strategy for EFL contexts, including secondary and boarding school environments.

Challenges in Applying STAD Strategies in the Classroom

Despite its advantages, the implementation of STAD is not without challenges. Slavin (2014) notes that successful cooperative learning requires careful planning, classroom management skills, and teacher commitment. Without proper guidance and monitoring, group work may become ineffective, with some students dominating discussions while others remain passive.

Teacher-related factors also influence the effectiveness of STAD. Yusuf et al. (2015) highlight that teachers may experience difficulties in managing time, organizing groups, and designing suitable materials that align with cooperative learning principles. Limited training or unfamiliarity with cooperative strategies can hinder proper implementation, leading teachers to revert to traditional instructional methods.

Student-related challenges may include low motivation, unequal participation, and limited language proficiency. In EFL classrooms, students with weaker English skills may rely excessively on more proficient peers, reducing individual accountability. Hayatunisa (2014) emphasizes that teachers must carefully structure activities and assessments to ensure that all students contribute meaningfully to group tasks.

Institutional constraints, such as large class sizes, rigid schedules, and limited learning resources, may further complicate the application of STAD, particularly in boarding school settings. Bakhruddin et al. (2021) argue that contextual factors play a significant role in determining the success of teaching strategies, suggesting that teachers must adapt cooperative learning models to suit their specific teaching environments.

While STAD offers significant pedagogical benefits for English language teaching, its effectiveness depends on adequate teacher preparation, student readiness, and institutional support. Understanding these challenges is essential for optimizing the implementation of STAD in EFL classrooms such as SMP Pesantren As Salam Pontianak.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the real-life experiences of teachers and students regarding the implementation of the STAD strategy in English teaching. Qualitative research, as described by Creswell (2014), enables researchers to examine participants' perspectives within natural settings and to interpret meanings underlying their experiences.

Research Participants and Setting

The research involved one English teacher and several purposively selected eighth-grade students from SMP Pesantren As Salam Pontianak. The teacher was chosen due to regular use of the STAD strategy in instructional practice, while the students were selected based on their direct involvement in STAD-based learning activities. The school, operating under a boarding school system, offers limited weekly instructional time for English, and this contextual factor shaped the experiences documented in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was carried out over several weeks through interviews and documentation. The process began with preliminary engagement, during which the researcher visited the school, obtained formal permission, and established rapport with the teacher and students. This phase included informal conversations and brief observations to understand the classroom environment and confirm that STAD was routinely applied in English lessons.

Following this initial phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The teacher participated in an in-depth interview lasting approximately forty-five minutes. Questions focused on the teacher's experiences in applying the STAD model, perceived benefits and difficulties, instructional decision-making, classroom management during group activities, and the availability of institutional support. Complementary interviews were carried out with selected students to gain additional insights into their experiences, including their perceptions of group work, interaction with classmates, and challenges encountered during STAD-based lessons. With the consent of all participants, each interview was recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Documentation served as an additional source of data. The researcher collected lesson plans, teaching materials, classroom photographs, and excerpts from student worksheets. Field notes, taken during classroom visits, captured contextual details such as the organization of learning activities, group dynamics, and the instructional use of available facilities. These various sources were later compared to ensure data triangulation and enhance validity.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts, documentation, and field notes were first organized and coded to identify emerging themes. Patterns related to challenges—such as facility limitations and time constraints—and supporting factors—such as teacher pedagogical competence—were grouped into thematic categories. These categories were continually refined as the researcher compared new data with existing codes. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by revisiting raw data to ensure that interpretations were grounded in participants' actual experiences.

Trustworthiness

To establish credibility, the study employed methodological triangulation by combining interview data with documentation and observation-based field notes, as recommended by Creswell (2012) and Sugiyono (2019). Cross-checking information from multiple sources ensured that the findings accurately reflected the realities of STAD implementation in the research setting.

FINDINGS

This section presents the research findings based on interviews and classroom observations. Two main themes emerged: (1) challenges in implementing STAD and (2) supporting factors influencing STAD implementation.

Challenges in Implementing STAD

Limited Infrastructure

Teachers reported that insufficient facilities, particularly technological tools, hinder the implementation of the STAD strategy. The school lacks adequate multimedia devices, requiring teachers to bring their own laptops, speakers, and English storybooks to support group learning activities. The limited availability of learning media makes it difficult to fully optimize STAD-based activities that require collaborative and interactive materials.

Limited Instructional Time

Another major challenge relates to time constraints. SMP Pesantren As Salam is a boarding school where a significant portion of learning time is dedicated to Arabic subjects. As a result, English receives considerably fewer instructional hours compared to other schools. STAD, which requires multiple stages—including presentation, team study, quizzes, and group recognition—demands more classroom time than is available. This forces teachers to use class time efficiently and often assign discussions or tasks as homework.

Supporting Factors in Implementing STAD

Teacher Competence

Interviews revealed that English teachers at the school meet the required qualification standards and possess sufficient competence to apply the STAD model effectively. Teachers demonstrate strong classroom management skills, are capable of organizing groups efficiently, and maintain high student engagement. Students expressed that their teacher delivers English lessons in a clear, structured, and encouraging manner, contributing to a positive learning environment. STAD also helps students develop teamwork, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and vocabulary mastery.

School Facilities

Although limited in some respects, the school provides several essential facilities to support English instruction, such as an infocus projector, an English LKS, tape recorders, and dictionaries owned by students. A computer laboratory is also available for certain activities. These facilities help teachers apply STAD more effectively, especially when presenting materials or administering group tasks.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the English teacher at SMP Pesantren As Salam Pontianak views the Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) strategy as a valuable approach for fostering collaborative learning and increasing students' engagement in English lessons. This perspective aligns with Slavin's (2014) argument that STAD, as one of the foundational cooperative learning models, provides a clear, systematic framework that encourages interaction, shared responsibility, and active participation among students. In the context of this study, STAD allowed learners to exchange ideas, support one another in completing tasks, and participate more confidently in a group-based learning environment.

The results also reaffirm earlier research by Hirmanudin (2015), who emphasized that active student participation is essential for cooperative learning to be effective. Similar to his findings, the present study revealed that when students engage fully in teamwork and feel

responsible for their group's success, learning becomes more dynamic and meaningful. However, the study also uncovered challenges that reflect patterns commonly identified in research on cooperative learning within resource-limited settings. Restricted access to facilities—such as multimedia tools—and limited instructional time were noted as primary barriers. These constraints hindered the teacher's ability to implement all stages of the STAD model consistently and limited opportunities for extended group activities.

Despite these limitations, the study highlights the adaptability of teachers in tailoring STAD procedures to suit their classroom realities. This is consistent with the findings of Yusuf, Natsir, and Hanum (2015), who reported that although teachers often modify certain steps of STAD due to contextual and logistical constraints, the core principles—team cooperation, individual accountability, and positive interdependence—remain central to the process. Such flexibility was evident in the present study, where the teacher demonstrated the ability to sustain group dynamics and maintain student motivation even when some procedural stages required simplification.

Furthermore, previous research by Hayatunisa (2014) demonstrated that STAD can improve students' performance in specific language skills, such as writing. The findings from the current study resonate with this view, showing that STAD can be beneficial not only for skill-specific learning outcomes but also for overall classroom engagement and communicative confidence among learners.

An important contribution of this study lies in identifying supporting factors that strengthen STAD implementation. Teacher competence emerged as a critical component, as the teacher's pedagogical skills, creativity, and classroom management strategies allowed the lessons to remain effective despite infrastructural limitations. The teacher's ability to foster positive group interactions and provide meaningful guidance contributed greatly to sustaining students' enthusiasm and participation. In addition, while facilities were limited, the availability of essential tools such as projectors, whiteboards, and learning media still played a substantial role in facilitating interactive learning tasks and group discussions. These resources supported the implementation of STAD by enhancing visual learning, enabling group presentations, and assisting students in comprehending lesson materials more effectively.

The study illustrates that STAD holds considerable potential for enriching English language instruction in EFL classrooms, particularly when supported by teacher expertise and appropriate learning resources. Although challenges such as limited instructional time and constrained facilities may influence the extent to which the strategy can be fully executed,

these obstacles do not diminish the overall effectiveness of STAD in promoting collaborative learning. The findings suggest that with adaptive teaching practices and strategic use of available resources, STAD remains a viable and impactful cooperative learning strategy, even in contexts with significant limitations. Future research may explore ways to optimize STAD implementation through improved resource allocation, teacher training, and integration of digital tools to further enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore how the Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) cooperative learning strategy is applied in English instruction at SMP Pesantren As Salam Pontianak. Through interviews with the English teacher and supporting documentation from classroom practices, the research illuminated both the challenges encountered in implementing STAD and the factors that facilitate its successful use within the school context.

The findings reveal that the teacher faces several constraints that affect the optimal execution of STAD. The most notable challenges concern limited technological infrastructure and restricted instructional time. As a boarding school that prioritizes Arabic language studies, SMP Pesantren As Salam Pontianak allocates relatively few hours for English instruction. This time limitation reduces opportunities for extended group work, discussions, and peer interactions that are fundamental to the STAD model. Additionally, insufficient technological tools, such as multimedia devices and stable internet access, pose obstacles—especially when the strategy requires teachers to introduce content through visual presentations or digital resources. Despite these limitations, the teacher demonstrates considerable dedication by utilizing personal teaching equipment and managing classroom time efficiently. Strategic task delegation and clear structuring of group activities allow the teacher to maintain the essence of STAD even within a constrained learning environment.

In contrast, the study also highlights several supporting factors that enhance STAD implementation. Teacher competence emerges as a central determinant of success. The teacher's strong pedagogical understanding, effective classroom management skills, and familiarity with cooperative learning principles enable smooth facilitation of team-based activities. Moreover, the presence of basic but functional school facilities—such as projectors, English LKS books, dictionaries, and computer laboratory access—contributes to a more meaningful learning experience. These resources provide students with reference materials and visual support that strengthen comprehension during STAD cycles, including team study sessions and individual assessments.

Overall, the findings indicate that STAD remains an effective and adaptable cooperative learning strategy for teaching English in contexts with limited resources. Its success in such settings depends largely on teacher expertise, creativity, and the strategic use of available tools. When guided by a competent teacher who can navigate infrastructural constraints and maximize student participation, STAD encourages active engagement, enhances peer collaboration, and creates a supportive learning environment. This study suggests that with adequate institutional support and continued professional development for teachers, cooperative learning strategies like STAD can significantly enrich EFL instruction even in schools with constrained facilities.

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