

The Effectiveness of the Cooperative Learning Model in Improving Reading Comprehension Ability in Fifth-Grade Students

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by initial observations at SD Negeri 153 Kayulaut, Mandailing Natal Regency, indicating low reading comprehension abilities among fifth-grade students in the 2025-2026 academic year. This study aimed to test the effectiveness of the Cooperative Learning model in improving the reading comprehension ability of fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 153 Kayulaut. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design was used in this research, involving 42 fifth-grade students divided into two groups: an experimental group (21 students) who received treatment with the Cooperative Learning model, and a control group (21 students) who continued with conventional learning. Data collection techniques included tests (pre- and post-tests), observation, and documentation. Data were analyzed using normality tests, homogeneity tests, and t-tests to determine the significance of the differences between groups. In Cycle I, the average reading comprehension score for the experimental class was 59.62, with a classical completeness of 42.86%. This figure increased sharply in Cycle II to 69.14 with a completeness of 61.90% and reached 77.19 with a classical completeness of 90.48% in Cycle III. This increase far surpassed the control class, which only showed an average of 53.24 (33.33% completeness) in Cycle I, 61.43 (47.62% completeness) in Cycle II, and actually decreased to 56.76 (14.29% completeness) in Cycle III after a temporary increase. In addition to the improvement in learning outcomes, observations of experimental class student activity also showed consistent improvement, from an average of 58.75% in Cycle I to 72.5% in Cycle II, and 85% in Cycle III. The research results indicate that the application of the Cooperative Learning model significantly improves the reading comprehension ability of fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 153 Kayulaut, Mandailing Natal Regency, Academic Year 2025-2026.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning, Reading Comprehension, Elementary School Students, Learning Effectiveness

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental cognitive skill that underpins academic success across all subject domains and serves as a prerequisite for lifelong learning and personal development. The ability to read with understanding enables students to extract, interpret, and integrate information from written texts, thereby facilitating their engagement with increasingly complex intellectual content throughout their education. In the context of Indonesian primary education, reading comprehension proficiency holds particular significance, as it directly influences students' capacity to participate meaningfully in classroom instruction, complete academic assignments, and develop the critical thinking abilities necessary for informed decision-making in contemporary society (Sohil et al., 2025).

Observations conducted at SD Negeri 153 Kayulaut in Mandailing Natal Regency during the initial assessment phase of the 2025-2026 academic year revealed concerning deficiencies in reading comprehension abilities among fifth-grade students. Empirical data indicate that a substantial proportion of students have difficulty identifying main ideas within texts, extracting relevant details, making inferences based on textual information, and synthesizing concepts across multiple reading passages. These foundational reading challenges directly impede students' academic performance across other subject areas and limit their capacity to engage in independent learning activities. Furthermore, classroom observations revealed that students exhibited low motivation and passive engagement during reading instruction, frequently appearing disinterested or disengaged from the instructional process (Zulkifli Surahmat et al., 2025).

The predominance of conventional teaching methodologies in the observed classrooms, characterized by teacher-centered instruction and limited opportunities for student interaction, emerged as a significant

contributing factor to these deficiencies. Traditional reading instruction typically positions the teacher as the primary knowledge dispenser, while students assume a largely receptive role, merely absorbing information without meaningful engagement, active participation, or collaborative knowledge construction. This pedagogical approach fails to capitalize on the cognitive benefits of peer interaction and collaborative learning, which have been extensively documented in contemporary educational research literature as crucial mechanisms for enhancing both academic achievement and higher-order thinking skills (Zhao, 2024).

The Cooperative Learning model represents a pedagogically sound alternative to conventional instruction that emphasizes structured small-group collaboration toward shared learning objectives. This instructional approach positions students as active agents in their learning process, empowering them to construct understanding through interaction with peers and teachers. The theoretical frameworks underlying Cooperative Learning, including social constructivism and sociocultural perspectives on learning, posit that knowledge is actively constructed through social interaction rather than passively received, and that peer collaboration provides authentic contexts for meaning-making and knowledge consolidation. In a cooperative learning environment, heterogeneous groups of students work interdependently toward common goals while maintaining individual accountability for their learning, thus promoting both academic achievement and essential social-emotional competencies, including communication, interpersonal collaboration, and collective problem-solving (Rande et al., 2025).

Extensive international research examining Cooperative Learning interventions has consistently documented significant positive effects on student achievement across diverse subject areas and grade levels. Slavin's meta-analytic reviews of Cooperative Learning research, conducted across multiple decades of educational investigation, substantiate that well-implemented cooperative learning approaches produce meaningful improvements in student academic outcomes, particularly when combined with individual accountability mechanisms and clearly defined group goals (Agartsupu et al., 2025). Research specifically investigating reading instruction has demonstrated that Cooperative Learning models, including Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC), substantially enhance students' reading comprehension abilities, vocabulary acquisition, and fluency development. For instance, Picarima et al. (2025) documented a remarkable improvement in reading comprehension scores from 55 to 86.83 following CIRC implementation in a fifth-grade setting (Picarima et al., 2025). Similarly, Goran and Suparno (2025) reported progressive increases in comprehension mastery across three implementation cycles, advancing from 63.21% to 77.50%. These empirical findings collectively indicate that Cooperative Learning represents a viable, evidence-supported intervention for addressing reading comprehension deficiencies in primary school populations (Goran & Suparno, 2025).

Given the documented deficiencies in reading comprehension ability at SD Negeri 153 Kayulaut and the extensive empirical evidence supporting Cooperative Learning's effectiveness, this investigation was undertaken to examine whether the systematic implementation of Cooperative Learning would produce meaningful improvements in reading comprehension ability among fifth-grade students in this specific educational context. This study sought to determine whether the theoretical benefits of Cooperative Learning documented in the international literature could be realized within the Indonesian primary education system, considering potential contextual variables, including student background characteristics, classroom resources, teacher preparation, and instructional implementation quality. Understanding the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in this particular setting would contribute valuable evidence to the Indonesian educational research literature regarding evidence-based instructional interventions for reading comprehension development.

The overarching research objective guiding this investigation was to assess the effectiveness of the Cooperative Learning model in enhancing reading comprehension ability among fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 153 Kayulaut during the 2025-2026 academic year. This central research question was further disaggregated into specific sub-questions examining the magnitude of improvement in reading comprehension scores across implementation cycles, the sustainability of improvements across multiple cycles, comparisons between the experimental group receiving Cooperative Learning instruction and the control group continuing conventional teaching, and changes in student engagement and classroom participation patterns as a function of the instructional model employed. By addressing these specific research questions through systematic empirical investigation, this study aimed to generate evidence regarding the practical effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in improving reading comprehension in Indonesian primary education contexts, thereby informing curricular and instructional decisions by educators and administrators in similar settings.

II. METHODS

A. Research Design

This investigation employed a quasi-experimental research design with a non-equivalent control group structure to examine the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning instruction for reading comprehension development. The quasi-experimental design was selected as appropriate for this investigation, given that intact classroom groups were utilized rather than random assignment to conditions, reflecting practical constraints inherent in school-based educational research. Two intact fifth-grade classes at SD Negeri 153 Kayulaut were designated as the experimental group (receiving Cooperative Learning instruction) and control group (continuing conventional instruction), respectively (Arikunto, 2017).

B. Participants

The study population comprised all fifth-grade students enrolled at SD Negeri 153 Kayulaut during the 2025-2026 academic year, from which the accessible sample consisted of 42 students distributed across two intact classroom groups. The experimental group comprised 21 students (11 male and 10 female) in one fifth-grade classroom, while the control group comprised 21 students (10 male and 11 female) in a parallel fifth-grade classroom. Both groups demonstrated comparable baseline characteristics regarding age, gender distribution, and pre-test reading comprehension scores, confirming their appropriateness for comparison. Student selection was determined by classroom assignment rather than randomization, consistent with quasi-experimental design conventions in school-based research, where intact groups are utilized to minimize disruption to regular school operations (Sugiyono, 2019).

C. Instructional Intervention

The experimental group received reading comprehension instruction utilizing the Cooperative Learning model implemented across three instructional cycles. The Cooperative Learning intervention structured students into heterogeneous small groups of 4-5 students, with group composition designed to ensure a balanced representation of students demonstrating varying baseline achievement levels, linguistic abilities, and behavioral characteristics. Group members were assigned complementary roles (discussion facilitator, recorder, reporter, and monitor) to ensure distributed responsibility and equitable participation. Reading comprehension instruction within the Cooperative Learning framework included the following structured components: (1) teacher introduction of reading strategies and comprehension objectives; (2) guided reading of selected passages with periodic pausing for collaborative discussion of main ideas and supporting details; (3) peer explanation activities wherein students articulated comprehension to group members; (4) collaborative completion of comprehension-focused tasks including main idea identification, vocabulary clarification, and inference generation; and (5) whole-group sharing wherein groups reported findings to the broader classroom community. Each instructional cycle encompassed multiple lessons addressing progressive reading texts and comprehension objectives, with deliberate scaffolding of difficulty across the three cycles to promote the continued skill development.

The control group continued standard classroom reading instruction utilizing conventional pedagogical approaches characterized by teacher-directed instruction, individual student reading, and teacher-led discussions. This conventional approach positions the teacher as the primary content expert and information source, with limited opportunities for student-to-student interaction regarding reading content (Creswell, 2021).

D. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Reading comprehension achievement was assessed through pre- and post-test measures administered following each instructional cycle. The assessment instruments utilized were previously validated reading comprehension tests assessing students' abilities to identify main ideas, extract factual details, make inferences, and determine the author's purpose within narrative and expository texts appropriate for fifth-grade reading levels. Each test administration included five reading passages of moderate length (200-300 words) followed by comprehension questions in both multiple-choice and short-answer response formats. Test scoring was conducted using established rubrics to assess the accuracy of comprehension responses, with total possible scores ranging from 0-100 for each cycle.

Student engagement and participation during reading instruction were assessed through structured classroom observations using a standardized observation protocol. The observation protocol enumerated specific behavioral indicators, including active participation in group discussions, on-task engagement during collaborative activities, completion of assigned learning tasks, and appropriate peer interaction during group work. The observers recorded the frequency and quality of these behavioral indicators, converting the

observation data into percentage engagement scores representing the proportion of observation intervals during which the students demonstrated the designated engagement behaviors.

Documentation review supplemented quantitative tests and observation data, utilizing student work samples, classroom records, and instructional materials to provide contextual information regarding the learning environment, instructional implementation quality, and student progress trajectories (Miles, M. B., & Huberman, 2014).

E. Data Analysis

Pre-test and post-test data were analyzed to examine the normality of distribution utilizing the Z-score calculation method, with the following formula applied:

$$Z = \frac{X - \bar{X}}{S}$$

Where X represents the individual observed values, \overline{X} denotes the sample mean, and S indicates the standard deviation. The homogeneity of variance between the experimental and control groups was examined using F-ratio calculations, comparing the magnitude of variance within each group.

$$F = \frac{S_1^2}{S_2^2}$$

Where S_1^2 and S_2^2 represent the variances of the experimental and control groups, respectively. Following confirmation of normality and homogeneity assumptions, independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine whether significant differences existed between the experimental and control group mean achievement scores. The t-test formula employed was as follows:

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{s_1^2}{n_1} + \frac{s_2^2}{n_2}}}$$

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Reading Comprehension Achievement Across Instructional Cycles

The experimental group demonstrated substantial improvements in reading comprehension across the three instructional cycles, with progressively increasing mean scores and achievement mastery percentages. During Cycle I, the experimental group achieved a mean score of 59.62, with 42.86% of the students demonstrating mastery of achievement. This performance improved notably during Cycle II, advancing to a mean of 69.14, with a 61.90% achievement mastery. By Cycle III, the experimental group achieved a mean score of 77.19, with 90.48% achievement mastery, representing a substantial cumulative improvement of 17.57 points across the three-cycle implementation period.

In contrast, the control group continued conventional instruction, demonstrating minimal and inconsistent improvement patterns. The control group's Cycle I mean score of 53.24 (33.33% mastery) increased modestly to 61.43 in Cycle II (47.62% mastery) but paradoxically declined to 56.76 in Cycle III (14.29% mastery), indicating regression in achievement despite continued instruction. This performance deterioration in the final cycle suggests that conventional instructional approaches prove insufficient for sustained reading comprehension development and may even result in achievement decline in the absence of more engaging, interactive instructional strategies.

Table 1. Reading Comprehension Achievement Across Instructional Cycles

Metric	Cycle I	Cycle II	Cycle III
Experimental Group Mean Score	59.62	69.14	77.19
Experimental Group Mastery (%)	42.86%	61.90%	90.48%
Control Group Mean Score	53.24	61.43	56.76
Control Group Mastery (%)	33.33%	47.62%	14.29%
Mean Difference	6.38	7.71	20.43

The divergent achievement trajectories between the experimental and control groups became increasingly pronounced across the instructional cycles. While the experimental group maintained consistent upward achievement momentum, the control group's achievement plateau and subsequent decline in Cycle III created an achievement gap of 20.43 points by the final measurement point, representing a statistically and practically significant difference between instructional conditions.

B. Student Engagement and Participation Patterns

Systematic classroom observation of student engagement and participation during reading instruction revealed substantial differences between the experimental group receiving Cooperative Learning instruction and the control group continuing conventional teaching. The experimental group demonstrated consistent improvements in engagement across cycles, advancing from 58.75% average engagement in Cycle I to 72.5% in Cycle II, and reaching 85% in Cycle III. This progressive increase in engagement paralleled the improvement trajectory observed in achievement scores, suggesting that enhanced student engagement may partially mediate the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning in reading comprehension development.

Observational documentation indicated that the students in the experimental group demonstrated increased enthusiasm for reading-related activities, voluntarily contributed responses and ideas during collaborative discussions, actively sought clarification from peer group members, and persisted through challenging reading passages. Students verbalized their appreciation for the collaborative structure, with numerous reports that they enjoyed working with peers and benefited from peer explanations and support. The group roles assigned within the Cooperative Learning structure appeared to distribute participation responsibilities such that students who traditionally contributed minimally during whole-class instruction actively participated when assigned specific role responsibilities within small groups.

In contrast, student engagement in the control group remained consistently lower and demonstrated less improvement across cycles. Observational notes indicated that control group students displayed passive participation during conventional instruction, with limited voluntary contributions, minimal peer interaction regarding reading content, and incomplete engagement with assigned reading and comprehension tasks. The absence of structured collaborative opportunities and active participation mechanisms appeared to result in lower intrinsic motivation and engagement with reading instruction.

Table 2. Student Engagement and Participation Patterns

Engagement Metric	Cycle I	Cycle II	Cycle III
Experimental Group Engagement (%)	58.75%	72.5%	85.0%
Improvement from Previous Cycle	Baseline	+13.75%	+12.5%

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the experimental and control group achievement scores at each cycle to determine whether the observed differences reached statistical significance. Analysis of Cycle I data yielded a t-statistic indicating a non-significant difference between groups ($p > 0.05$), reflecting that baseline achievement levels were comparable between the experimental and control groups prior to intervention implementation. However, Cycle II analyses yielded a statistically significant difference between groups ($p < 0.05$), with the experimental group demonstrating superior achievement compared to the control

group. Cycle III analyses confirmed continued statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), with the experimental group's superior performance becoming increasingly pronounced.

These statistical findings corroborate the practical significance evident in mean score comparisons, indicating that the Cooperative Learning intervention produced effects sufficiently large to exceed chance variation and represent meaningful educational differences. The progressive increase in effect magnitude across cycles suggests that continued exposure to Cooperative Learning instruction produced cumulative benefits, with the intervention becoming increasingly effective as students developed familiarity with collaborative structures and peers refined their collaborative skills.

E. Interpretation and Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence that the systematic implementation of the Cooperative Learning model produces substantial improvements in reading comprehension ability among elementary school students in Indonesian educational contexts. The magnitude of improvement observed in the experimental group—advancing from 42.86% baseline achievement mastery to 90.48% final mastery—exceeds the effect sizes commonly reported in international Cooperative Learning research, suggesting that the intervention produced particularly pronounced benefits for this student population (Putri et al., 2025).

Several mechanisms appear to underlie the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning for reading comprehension development in this context. First, the structural features of Cooperative Learning, including positive interdependence and assigned group roles, ensured that all students participated actively in reading-related activities rather than allowing passive engagement by lower-achieving or less assertive students. The assignment of specific role responsibilities within group structures obligated even typically quiet or disengaged students to contribute meaningfully to collaborative work, thereby increasing their cognitive engagement with the reading content. Second, peer interaction within Cooperative Learning groups provided authentic contexts for elaborating understanding, clarifying confusions, and receiving corrective feedback regarding comprehension errors. When students explained their understanding to peers or received peer explanations, the necessity of articulating reasoning and defending interpretations promoted deeper cognitive processing compared to passive listening during teacher-centered instruction. Third, the social motivation inherent in peer-based accountability and interdependence enhanced student motivation and on-task persistence through challenging reading passages, as students recognized that their individual performance contributed to group success. Finally, the heterogeneous group composition, intentionally mixing students of varying abilities, created contexts wherein higher-achieving students modeled sophisticated comprehension strategies and explained concepts in peer-appropriate language, while lower-achieving students benefited from increased interaction and explanation opportunities (Moreira Acosta et al., 2025).

The control group's achievement plateau and subsequent decline in Cycle III, despite continued conventional instruction, provides important negative evidence highlighting the limitations of teacher-centered reading instruction for sustained comprehension development. The regression observed in the Cycle III performance of the control group suggests that conventional approaches may rely excessively on teacher-provided explanations and external scaffolding rather than developing independent comprehension strategies and self-regulated learning capacities. When external scaffolding decreases or reading passages increase in difficulty (as typically occurs as instruction progresses), students instructed exclusively through conventional methods may lack the independent comprehension strategies and peer support networks necessary for continued success in reading.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This investigation provides empirical evidence demonstrating that the Cooperative Learning model significantly enhances reading comprehension ability in fifth-grade elementary students. The experimental group receiving Cooperative Learning instruction achieved a final reading comprehension mastery rate of 90.48%, compared to merely 14.29% in the control group continuing conventional instruction—a difference of 76.19 percentage points, representing both statistical and practical significance. The mean achievement scores in the experimental group advanced by 17.57 points across three instructional cycles, while the control group's achievement paradoxically declined by 4.48 points, demonstrating the superior efficacy of Cooperative Learning relative to conventional instructional approaches. Student engagement similarly benefited substantially from Cooperative Learning implementation, advancing from 58.75% to 85% across cycles, suggesting that enhanced motivation and participation mediate achievement improvements. These findings corroborate extensive international research literature documenting Cooperative Learning's effectiveness for reading comprehension development while extending this evidence base to Indonesian educational contexts. The magnitude of the improvements observed suggests that Cooperative Learning represents a highly viable,

evidence-supported instructional intervention for addressing reading comprehension deficiencies in primary schools. Educational administrators and classroom teachers seeking to improve students' reading comprehension abilities should seriously consider the systematic implementation of well-structured Cooperative Learning approaches, ensuring that intervention quality is maintained through adequate teacher preparation, explicit instruction in collaborative skills, and consistent monitoring of implementation fidelity. Future research should examine whether the effects persist beyond immediate intervention implementation and whether Cooperative Learning benefits transfer to the comprehension of texts in other curricular subjects. Additionally, investigations examining the mechanisms underlying Cooperative Learning's effectiveness and identifying which student subpopulations benefit most substantially from cooperative approaches would refine understanding and support increasingly precise instructional decision-making.

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Ethical Compliance

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Data Access Statement

A Data Access Statement is a section in a scientific publication or research report that explains how the data used or generated in the study can be accessed by readers or other researchers. This statement aims to promote transparency, support research reproducibility, and comply with open-access policies, where applicable.

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Conflict of Interest Declaration

The authors declare that they have no affiliations or involvement with any organization or entity with any financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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