
Research Article

Exploring the Impact of Group Work on Students' Learning Outcomes: A Study of Eighth-Grade of Junior High School Students

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Abstract

Enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes at the junior high school level, particularly in Grade VIII, remains a persistent challenge for educators. One widely adopted strategy to address this issue is group work, which is believed to foster collaboration, active participation, and a deeper understanding of learning materials. This study aims to explore students' experiences with group-based learning in English language instruction. Employing a qualitative approach and a case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five Grade VIII students at SMPN 1 Kedawung, Indonesia. The findings reveal that most students responded positively to the group work method, as it allowed them to support one another in understanding the content and completing tasks. Group interactions also contributed to increased motivation and engagement in learning. However, several challenges emerged within group dynamics, including unequal participation, lack of commitment, and disciplinary issues. A notable difference was observed between male and female students, with female students tending to be more active and cooperative. Key success factors for effective group work included positive social relationships, effective leadership, and open communication. Conversely, the use of mobile phones was identified as a significant barrier to maintaining learning focus. These findings underscore the importance of effective group management to maximize the benefits of collaborative learning in enhancing students' educational experiences and outcomes.

Keywords

teaching strategy; group work; learning; learning outcomes; students



Introduction

Education is a lifelong process and plays an important role in helping students develop their potential optimally. Children, as individuals who are still developing, require guidance, direction, and support in order to grow into well-rounded individuals. Schools, as formal educational institutions, not only function to enhance intellectual intelligence but also to shape students' personalities, attitudes, and social skills. This aligns with the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Chapter II Article 3, which states that national education aims to develop students' potential so that they become individuals who are faithful, devoted, of noble character, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and responsible democratic citizens. In this context, quality education is education that can create learning conditions that not only enhance intelligence but also develop critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, social skills, and independence in broader society. This is in line with Kayatun (as cited in Nugraheni et al., 2022). Therefore, effective learning strategies are key to achieving these goals, one of which is the implementation of group work, which is believed to improve learning outcomes while also fostering students' social skills.

Group work is one of the methods used in the teaching and learning process, where students in a class are divided into several small groups to achieve specific learning objectives (Papasi, 2020). This method places students as part of a group that interacts and collaborates in completing tasks, with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of learning. Learning outcomes, on the other hand, are influenced by various factors, both internal and external. One important factor that affects learning outcomes is the use of appropriate teaching methods (Patonah, 2019). Several previous studies have demonstrated the positive impact of group work on students' learning outcomes. For example, a study conducted at Sekolah Dasar Negeri 8 Pajar Bulan showed that the implementation of the group work method had a 35.9% influence on students' learning outcomes, with a significance value of 0.002, indicating that the effect was statistically significant (Delvi, Imam, & Esah, 2023). In addition, other studies have also found that factors such as the utilization of learning resources, the school environment, and school culture also influence student learning outcomes, along with other variables such as learning motivation and teacher competence (Yandi, Putri, & Putri, 2023). Therefore, group work, as a learning method that involves social interaction and collaboration, is believed to play an important role in improving students' learning outcomes.

Although several studies have shown that the group work method can have a positive impact on learning outcomes, particularly at the elementary school level, there is still limited research examining the effect of group work on learning outcomes at the junior high school level, especially among eighth-grade students. The characteristics of students during this transitional stage of cognitive and social development in junior high school require appropriate learning approaches to achieve educational goals optimally. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of group work and determine whether group work has an effect on the learning outcomes of eighth-grade junior high school students. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of effective learning strategies at the junior secondary education level.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kedawung regarding learning through the group work method. The case study was chosen because this method allows researchers to explore phenomena comprehensively in a real-life context, particularly to understand the dynamics of interaction and individual experiences in learning groups, which are difficult to obtain through other methods.

The research population consisted of all 338 eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kedawung. Participants



were selected using purposive sampling based on the criterion of students who actively participated in group learning activities. The research sample consisted of five students who were selected to provide rich and relevant data for the research focus.

Data were collected using individual semi-structured interviews designed to explore students' perceptions, experiences of group work, the impact of the method on motivation and learning outcomes, and factors that supported or hindered the implementation of group work. The interviews were recorded, and the transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques through the stages of coding, grouping themes, and interpreting data.

This research has obtained official permission from SMPN 1 Kedawung through a letter of approval submitted by researchers from the university. The entire data collection process was carried out in accordance with research ethics, including providing information to students about the purpose of the research and ensuring the confidentiality of their data.

To maintain data validity, researchers triangulated sources by comparing information from several respondents and cross-checked with members to ensure the accuracy of the information. The results of the analysis were then linked to relevant literature and previous studies to strengthen and clarify the findings.

Results and Discussion

Students' Perceptions of Group Work

The results of interviews with 8th-grade students at SMPN 1 Kedawung showed that they had a positive perception of learning through group work methods. Most of them felt that this activity made it easier to complete assignments and understand the material. Some students said:

"Kerja kelompok dapat memudahkan saya dalam mengerjakan tugas, karena bisa saling membantu"

"Group work makes it easier for me to complete assignments because we can help each other."

This positive perception indicates that group work creates a learning environment that supports active student engagement. In this context, group work not only enhances social interaction but also helps students feel more confident in expressing their opinions and asking questions. These findings are in line with Papasi, J. (2020), which shows that the learning process using the group work method can increase student motivation to learn, which in turn has a positive impact on their learning outcomes.

In addition, group work encourages students to actively participate, exchange opinions, and build cooperation that can improve their communication skills and deepen their understanding (Tambunan et al., 2022, cited in Mooy et al., 2024). Discussions in groups allow students to explain their ideas and understanding to one another (Rahmat, 2023, cited in Karina et al., 2024). Furthermore, collaborative learning involves not only academic activities but also social interactions among students, which supports the development of cooperation and social skills (Sabrina, 2024).

Although the majority of students gave positive responses, there was one student who expressed a dislike for the group work method. The student stated that,

"Membosankan jika mendapatkan teman yang kurang berkontribusi dalam mengerjakan kelompok"

"It's boring when you get group members who don't contribute much to the work."

This view highlights the challenges in implementing group work, particularly related to the distribution of roles and responsibilities among members. This is consistent with Slavin (as cited in Mahsudi, 2016), who states that cooperative learning is only effective if it possesses three key characteristics: group rewards, individual accountability, and equal opportunities for success.

This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of social loafing, which is the tendency of individuals to reduce their effort when working in a group compared to when working individually (Vaughan & Hogg, 2014, cited in Wahyuni, 2022). This condition emphasizes the need for individual evaluation mechanisms in group work so that each member remains motivated and responsible for the collective results.

These findings indicate that learning through group work ~~methods~~ can enhance active engagement, understanding of material, social skills, and student motivation. The success of this method depends on managing member roles, individual evaluation, and teacher strategies in encouraging active participation to avoid social loafing. Therefore, teachers need to design balanced group activities, establish clear role divisions, and implement individual and group assessments so that learning objectives are optimally achieved.

Experiences in Group Work

The interview results show that students' experiences in group work are greatly influenced by the dynamics between group members. Most students stated that the comfort and effectiveness of group work greatly depend on the commitment and contribution of each member. When students are in a group whose members are less contributing or undisciplined, the group work experience tends to be less enjoyable and unproductive. These findings are in line with research conducted by Yulinda, Sopiatus Nahwiyah, and Helbi Akbar (2020), who, through preliminary observations of students in classes VIII.B and VIII.E, found various symptoms that hindered the effectiveness of group work. These symptoms include: students tend to play more when given group assignments, and only one or two people are actively working, low participation and discipline in group work, and the emergence of negative habits such as not taking group assignments seriously. The consistency between previous findings and the results of this study shows that the implementation of group work in schools still faces serious challenges, especially in terms of role distribution, internal motivation, and student discipline in the collaborative learning process.

In addition to comfort and member contribution, the findings from the interviews also revealed differences in participation patterns between male and female students in group work. Some students observed that male students tended to be more passive and needed extra encouragement to participate actively, in line with the findings of Raffles and Husna (2024), which showed that men tended to have higher levels of social loafing, i.e., a tendency to contribute less in group work. In contrast, female students were easier to work with and showed greater initiative in collaboration. This also reflects the results of a study by Andriani et al. (2015), which states that women have a better collaborative attitude than men, and supports the findings of Reig-Aleixandre et al. (2023), who found that women have a higher sense of social responsibility in the context of cooperation. One student explained,

“Rata-rata laki-laki itu harus dimarahi terlebih dahulu, tidak bisa ada kemauan sendiri. Jadi harus kitanya yang menasehatin, tetapi yang perempuan bisa diajak kerja sama.”

“Most of the boys need to be scolded first; they don't have the initiative on their own. So, we have to be the ones to remind them, but the girls are easier to work with.”

This is in line with the findings of quantitative research by Rizki Amelia (2017), which shows that although male students are more active in making comments, asking questions, and using new vocabulary during class discussions, female students excel in answering questions, responding to others' opinions, and clarifying information. This phenomenon can be explained by the theory of Latane et al. (1979), which states that women are more motivated by the need to maintain group harmony, so their participation in collaborative activities becomes more consistent and positive.

This difference indicates that the success of group work depends not only on verbal activity, but also on the ability to respond and cooperate effectively. Thus, the imbalance in participation and different communication patterns between male and female students are among the factors that influence the dynamics and effectiveness of group work.

The Impact of Group Work on Learning Outcomes

Most students in this study felt that group work could enhance their learning motivation due to a more enjoyable atmosphere and the support among group members, which encouraged active participation and a sense of shared responsibility. Some students stated that,

“Kerja kelompok dapat memudahkan saya dalam mengerjakan tugas, karena bisa saling membantu.”

"Group work makes it easier for me to complete assignments because we can help each other."

“Belajar dengan teman lebih seru, jadi lebih termotivasi karena bisa berdiskusi.”

"Learning with friends is more fun, so I feel more motivated because we can have discussions."

These findings are consistent with the results of a study by Hapsari et al. (2019), which showed that the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model significantly increases motivation to learn mathematics. Similar support was also found in a study by Sari et al (2024), which concluded that the implementation of PJBL positively impacts learning motivation through collaboration and active student engagement in groups. However, based on the findings of this study, not all students shared the same experience; negative experiences, such as a lack of participation from group members, can reduce the effectiveness of group work. One student stated,

“Saya lebih suka belajar sendiri, karena kerja kelompok tergantung teman-teman, kadang ada yang tidak mau kerja sama jadi cuma ingin hasilnya saja”

"I prefer studying alone because group work depends on your teammates—sometimes there are those who don't want to cooperate and just want the results."

This highlights that the quality of collaboration and active participation are key factors in the success of group-based learning. Research by Jamie Costley (2021) provides evidence that collaborative group work can deepen students' cognitive engagement, which aligns with the findings of this study regarding the benefits of social interaction in learning. In that research, active collaboration encouraged deeper mental engagement, which had a positive impact on problem-solving and concept mastery. This is consistent with the interview results in this study, where students felt that discussing and exchanging ideas with group members opened up new perspectives and helped them understand the material more thoroughly. Students also expressed that group work allowed them to explain things to each other and provide feedback that stimulated critical thinking—unlike individual learning experiences, which tended to be more confusing. Thus, social interaction in group work has been shown not only to enhance

motivation but also to promote more meaningful cognitive activity for students.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of Group Work

Interview results with eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kedawung revealed several factors that support the smooth implementation of group work. Most students believed that the ability to engage in discussions, the willingness of members to cooperate, and easily understood material are key to the effectiveness of group work. One student stated,

“Bisa berdiskusi bersama dan mencari jawaban bersama.”

"We can discuss together and find the answers together."

This is in line with Febrianti et al. (2025) in the Journal of Educational Harmony, which states that the small group learning model—one that involves discussion, collaboration, and information sharing—can enhance student interaction, encourage active learning, and develop creative thinking skills. This model emphasizes the importance of group discussion and collaboration among members to effectively achieve learning objectives.

In addition, another student added that the role of a group leader who can bring members together, along with a friendly and supportive atmosphere, also contributes to the smooth progress of group learning, as expressed by one student,

“Ketua kelompok harus bisa merangkul anggotanya, dan materi harus dalam lingkup yang luas.”

"The group leader must be able to bring the members together, and the material should cover a broad scope."

This aligns with Nurhidayah I et al. (2025), who highlight the role of group leaders as catalysts for the effectiveness and harmony of group dynamics. The study states that group leaders who are adaptive, empathetic, and reflective play a crucial role in fostering healthy and productive interactions within the group. Effective leadership is strongly influenced by interpersonal competence and the coaching strategies employed, which ultimately support a supportive and transformational group atmosphere.

However, challenges often arise in the implementation of group work. Some students stated that members' lack of contribution or unwillingness to participate seriously can hinder the group's progress. One student stated,

“Jika ada anggota yang tidak niat, teman yang lain jadi malas semua.”

"If there's a member who isn't serious, the others also start to lose motivation."

In addition, differences in personality among group members and difficulty in understanding the material also pose challenges in group work. One student stated,

“Kadang ada teman yang susah diatur dan tidak mau bekerjasama, jadi sulit untuk mengerjakan tugas bersama.”

"Sometimes there are friends who are difficult to manage and unwilling to cooperate, so it becomes hard to complete the task together."



This is in line with Fazhari, B. A., & Yuniawatika, Y. (2025), who found that low collaboration and lack of active participation from group members become obstacles that cause others to feel demotivated and unwilling to take responsibility, thereby hindering the effectiveness of group work.

Conclusion

This study aims to analyze the application of group work and determine its effect on the learning outcomes of eighth-grade students at SMPN 1 Kedawung. Based on the results of interviews, it was found that most students had a positive perception of learning through the group work method. They felt that this activity helped them understand the material, made it easier to complete assignments, and increased their motivation to learn. This shows that group work can be an effective approach in increasing student engagement and fostering social responsibility in the learning process.

However, the results of the study also show challenges in the implementation of group work. Some students expressed negative experiences, such as an imbalance in contributions among members and the emergence of social loafing behavior, especially in groups with low levels of discipline. In addition, differences in participation patterns were found between male and female students, with female students tending to be more active and have a higher sense of responsibility than male students.

The limitations of this study lie in the relatively small number of participants and the limited research context to one school, so the results cannot be generalized widely. Nevertheless, this study makes a scientific contribution by strengthening empirical evidence on the importance of social dynamics in collaborative learning and providing insight into the factors that influence the effectiveness of group work at the junior high school level. These findings enrich the literature on collaboration-based learning strategies and are relevant for the development of more participatory pedagogical practices.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that teachers pay more attention to the mechanism of group formation and role distribution so that each student has a balanced responsibility. Individual evaluation in group work also needs to be implemented to minimize social loafing and increase accountability. In addition, training in collaborative and leadership skills for students can help create more productive group dynamics.

For further research, it is recommended that studies with larger samples be conducted and that a mixed methods approach be used to measure the effect of group work not only from the students' perceptions, but also through quantitative analysis of learning outcomes. Further research could also explore gender factors, communication styles, and the influence of school culture on the effectiveness of group work in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of collaborative learning.

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