

## *The Effectiveness of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) Cooperative Learning Model in Improving Students' Understanding of Social Studies Concepts*

Nurlailatul Badriyah<sup>1\*</sup>, Tetep<sup>2</sup>, Lili Dianah<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Institut Pendidikan Indonesia Garut

<sup>1\*</sup>nurlailatulbadriyah29@gmail.com,

<sup>2</sup>tetep@institutpendidikan.ac.id,

<sup>3</sup>lilidianah@institutpendidikan.ac.id,

### **Abstract**

*This study aims to examine the implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model in enhancing students' understanding of Social Studies concepts among seventh-grade students at SMPN 3 Tarogong Kidul. The study is motivated by the low level of students' conceptual understanding, which is influenced by teacher-centered instruction and limited student participation in the learning process. This research employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. The participants included a Social Studies teacher and seventh-grade students selected purposively. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the implementation of the TGT model improves students' engagement, learning motivation, and social interaction. In addition, students' conceptual understanding increased, as indicated by their improved ability to explain, connect, and apply concepts effectively. Supporting factors include high student enthusiasm and effective group collaboration, while inhibiting factors involve low self-confidence and limited instructional time. Therefore, the TGT model can be considered an effective, interactive, and meaningful alternative strategy for Social Studies learning.*

**Keywords:** TGT, cooperative learning, conceptual understanding, social studies,

### **1. Introduction**

Education is a fundamental need for every individual to optimally develop their potential, including knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Within the context of formal education, Social Studies (IPS) learning plays a strategic role in shaping students into individuals capable of critically and contextually understanding various social phenomena. IPS learning is not solely oriented toward mastering material but also emphasizes the importance of conceptual understanding as a foundation for thinking, analyzing, and making decisions in everyday life (Sapriya, 2017; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2017).

Conceptual understanding is a key component in the learning process because it enables students not only to remember information but also to explain it again, connect concepts, and apply it in various situations. However, the current state of social studies learning in the field shows that students' conceptual understanding is still relatively low. This is due to the learning process still being dominated by conventional methods, such as lectures, which tend to make students passive and less engaged in learning activities (Sari et al., 2020). As a result, students memorize material without understanding its meaning, making the concepts learned less meaningful and easily forgotten.

The problem of poor conceptual understanding is also inseparable from the academic background of students who have just entered junior high school (SMP). Seventh-grade students generally come from elementary schools (SD) that still implement thematic learning. At this stage, social studies material is not presented in a structured and in-depth manner as a separate discipline. This condition causes students to experience difficulties in adjusting to social studies learning in junior high school, which is more complex and requires abstract and analytical

thinking skills (Nurdyansyah & Fahyuni, 2016). The transition process from thematic learning to subject-based learning often creates gaps in understanding, so students are unable to optimally master social studies concepts.

In addition to these factors, the teacher's role in managing learning is also a key determinant of students' success in understanding concepts. Teachers are expected to create an active, innovative, and enjoyable learning environment so that students can optimally engage in the learning process. However, in reality, there is still a tendency to use learning models that lack variety and are unable to accommodate students' diverse learning needs. This results in low student participation in learning, thus hindering the process of developing conceptual understanding.

To address these various issues, innovations in learning are needed that can increase student engagement and encourage social interaction throughout the learning process. One alternative is the cooperative learning model. This model emphasizes collaboration among students in groups, enabling interaction, discussion, and the exchange of information, which can help students develop a deeper understanding of concepts (Slavin, 2018).

One type of cooperative learning model that can be implemented is the Team Games Tournament (TGT). This model combines learning activities with elements of games and academic competition, creating a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment. In its implementation, students are divided into heterogeneous groups and participate in various activities such as discussions, games, and academic tournaments designed to test their understanding of the material they have learned (Huda, 2017). Through these activities, students not only learn individually but also gain learning experiences through social interactions with peers.

Several previous studies have shown that the TGT learning model can improve students' learning activities and conceptual understanding. Group interactions provide opportunities for students to help each other, exchange ideas, and strengthen their understanding of the learning material (Wulandari et al., 2019; Putri et al., 2021). However, most of this research has focused on quantitative learning outcomes, resulting in limited in-depth studies of the process of implementing the TGT model to improve conceptual understanding, particularly for students transitioning from elementary to junior high school.

Although the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model has been widely studied and proven effective in improving student learning outcomes, most previous research has focused on quantitative aspects of learning achievement. Research specifically examining the implementation of the TGT model to improve conceptual understanding, particularly among seventh-grade students transitioning from thematic learning in elementary school to subject-based learning in junior high school, is relatively limited. Therefore, this study offers a novel element by emphasizing an in-depth analysis of the learning process, the dynamics of student interactions, and the factors influencing the successful implementation of the TGT model in improving understanding of social studies concepts.

Based on this description, it is clear that the low understanding of social studies concepts in seventh-grade students is influenced by various factors, including learning methods, student engagement, and academic readiness, due to differences in learning characteristics between elementary and junior high schools. Therefore, research is needed that can examine in depth how the implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model improves understanding of social studies concepts.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model in improving the understanding of social studies concepts in seventh-grade junior high school students. Furthermore, this study also aims to identify the learning process, interactions between students, and factors that support and hinder the successful implementation of the model. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more innovative and effective social studies learning strategies.

## **2. Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive methods, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT)

cooperative learning model in improving students' understanding of social studies concepts. The qualitative approach was chosen because it can reveal learning phenomena in depth, contextually, and in accordance with real-world conditions.

The study was conducted at SMPN 3 Tarogong Kidul, involving one social studies teacher and 36 seventh-grade students as research subjects. The research subjects were selected based on their suitability to the research objectives, namely classes that had implemented the TGT learning model in their social studies learning process, ensuring that the data obtained were relevant to the focus of the study.

Data collection was conducted through an integrated technique of observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observations were conducted to identify learning activities, student engagement, and the dynamics of classroom interactions. In-depth interviews were conducted with the teacher and several students to gather information regarding learning experiences, perceptions, and challenges encountered during the implementation of the TGT model. Documentation was used to strengthen the research data through the collection of evidence in the form of field notes, activity photographs, and other supporting documents related to the learning process. The research instruments consisted of observation and interview guidelines developed based on indicators of understanding social studies concepts, which include the ability to explain concepts, link concepts, and apply concepts in everyday contexts. Instrument development was carried out systematically to produce valid, focused data that aligns with the research objectives.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive analysis model consisting of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the reduction stage, data was selected, focused, and simplified according to the research needs. Next, the data was presented in a systematic narrative description for ease of understanding. The final stage, drawing conclusions, was conducted continuously based on patterns and findings that emerged during the data analysis process.

The validity of the data in this study was ensured through the application of triangulation techniques, namely source triangulation and technical triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from teachers and students, while technical triangulation was conducted by confirming data from observations, interviews, and documentation.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The results of this study begin with a presentation of data and findings related to the analysis of the application of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model in improving the understanding of social studies concepts in seventh-grade students at SMPN 3 Tarogong Kidul. The analysis was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, namely by reviewing data obtained during the research process.

#### *Condition of Students' Conceptual Understanding*

The research results show that students' conceptual understanding in social studies learning remains relatively low. This finding aligns with Gillies, R.M.'s findings that teacher-dominated learning tends to limit students' cognitive engagement, resulting in poor conceptual understanding (Gillies, 2016). This low conceptual understanding is evident in students' inability to re-explain the material in their own words, indicating that the knowledge construction process has not yet occurred optimally.

This low conceptual understanding is reflected in students' inability to re-explain the material they have learned in their own words. Students tend to repeat information in a limited way without being able to elaborate on the meaning or essence of the concept. This condition indicates that the process of internalizing knowledge has not yet occurred optimally in students. Furthermore, students experience difficulty connecting concepts, even though conceptual interconnections are central to social studies learning. This aligns with Slavin, R.E.'s opinion that good conceptual understanding can only develop through active interaction and knowledge elaboration (Slavin, 2018). Students' inability to connect concepts results in partial and in-depth understanding.

Another problem identified is students' poor ability to apply learned concepts to everyday life. Students are unable to connect learning material to the realities they encounter in their surroundings. This indicates that ongoing learning remains theoretical and not fully contextual. According to Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T. (2019), learning processes that do not provide students with opportunities for direct experience and social interaction tend to result in shallow and less contextual understanding.

This condition is closely linked to the teacher-centered learning process. Teachers tend to dominate learning activities through lecture methods, leaving students with limited opportunities for active participation. As a result, students become passive, acting only as recipients of information without direct involvement in the learning process.

On the other hand, student background factors also contribute to poor conceptual understanding. Seventh-grade students entering junior high school come from elementary school environments that still use a thematic approach. At this stage, social studies material has not been studied in depth as a structured discipline.

The transition from thematic learning in elementary school to subject-based learning in junior high school requires a challenging adjustment for students. The greater complexity of social studies material in junior high school, coupled with the demands for abstract thinking skills, means students are not accustomed to understanding concepts in depth. This is a major factor contributing to students' low conceptual understanding in the early stages of learning in seventh grade. The differences in learning systems between the thematic elementary school and the subject-based junior high school also impact student understanding. This transition demands higher levels of abstract thinking skills, necessitating more adaptive and interactive learning strategies to help students adjust (Tran, 2019).

### *TGT in Social Studies Learning*

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model in social studies learning is carried out through several systematic stages. These stages include the formation of study groups, the delivery of material by the teacher, the implementation of academic games, and tournament activities as a form of learning evaluation. The materials used in this study cover historical concepts including oral, written, and material sources, which are adapted to the basic competencies of grade VII junior high school.

In the initial stage, the teacher forms heterogeneous study groups based on students' academic abilities. This group formation aims to create balanced interactions among group members, allowing students to help each other understand the learning material. Once the groups are formed, the teacher briefly introduces the material before students move on to the group activity phase.

The next stage is the implementation of an academic game designed to test students' understanding of the material they have learned. In this activity, students actively participate in answering questions, discussing, and exchanging information with their group members. The game used can create a more relaxed yet meaningful learning atmosphere, so students do not feel burdened during the learning process. According to Wulandari et al. (2019), the implementation of game elements in the learning process can create a more enjoyable atmosphere, thus increasing student motivation and active involvement in learning activities.

The activity continued with a tournament, where students represented their groups in competitions with other groups. This tournament was one of the most engaging aspects of the TGT model, as it increased student learning motivation through a healthy competitive element. Students demonstrated high enthusiasm in participating in this activity and strived to achieve the best possible results for their group. This finding aligns with research by Putri et al. (2021), which showed that the competitive element in the TGT model can increase student learning motivation due to a sense of responsibility for group performance.

Throughout the learning process, there was an increase in student engagement in learning activities. Students who had previously tended to be passive began to show more active participation, both in group discussions and in games. Interactions between students also intensified, helping them build conceptual understanding together.

Furthermore, group discussions provide students with opportunities to explain unfamiliar material to one another. This process allows for the exchange of knowledge between students, making the concepts learned easier to grasp. Thus, learning is not simply a one-way process from teacher to student, but also involves active interaction between students.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of the TGT model can create a more enjoyable, interactive, and participatory learning environment. This model not only increases student motivation but also supports a deeper understanding of concepts through structured discussions, games, and competitions. Therefore, the TGT model can be an effective learning alternative for improving the quality of social studies learning in seventh-grade junior high school.



Picture of learning implementation

### *The Impact of Implementing the TGT Model on Concept Understanding*

The research results show that the implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model has a positive impact on improving students' conceptual understanding in social studies. This finding aligns with the findings of Zainuddin et al. (2020), who demonstrated that learning that emphasizes student activity and interaction can increase student engagement, thus contributing to improved conceptual understanding. This impact is evident in changes in student learning behavior, who become more active and directly involved in the learning process. Students no longer merely act as recipients of information, but begin to participate in various activities that require cognitive and social engagement.

This improvement in students' conceptual understanding is demonstrated through their courage in asking questions, expressing opinions, and engaging in group discussions. These activities reflect a deeper thinking process, where students not only receive information but also strive to understand and process it independently and with their peers. This situation indicates that learning becomes more meaningful because it involves active student participation. This aligns with Sailer and Homner (2020), who stated that learning that encourages active student participation can increase cognitive engagement and deepen the quality of understanding.

Interaction within study groups is also a crucial factor in improving students' conceptual understanding. Through group work, students have the opportunity to help each other understand material they haven't mastered. Students with better understanding can provide explanations to their groupmates, resulting in an effective exchange of knowledge. This social interaction plays a role in strengthening collective conceptual understanding. The findings of this study align with those of Chen et al. (2021), which showed that social interaction in collaborative learning plays a role in strengthening conceptual understanding through the exchange of knowledge between students.

Furthermore, the game element in the TGT model also contributes to increasing student learning motivation. Games and tournaments create a fun and non-monotonous learning environment, making students more interested in participating in the learning process. This high level of motivation results in increased student attention and engagement in understanding the material.

The presence of competition in tournaments also encourages students to strive for maximum effort in their learning. Students learn not only for themselves but also to make the best contribution to their group. This fosters a sense of responsibility and increases students' enthusiasm for learning, leading to a deeper understanding of social studies concepts.

By combining group work, social interaction, and game elements, the TGT model creates a learning environment conducive to the development of students' conceptual understanding.

Learning becomes more dynamic, interactive, and student-centered, enabling the process of knowledge formation to occur more optimally.

The findings of this study align with previous research that found the TGT learning model to be effective in improving conceptual understanding through social interaction and collaborative learning activities (Wulandari et al., 2019; Putri et al., 2021). Therefore, implementing the TGT model can be a relevant learning alternative for improving students' conceptual understanding in social studies.

### *Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of the TGT Model*

Research findings indicate that the successful implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model in social studies learning is inseparable from the presence of supporting and inhibiting factors. Both factors play a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of the learning process and its success in improving students' conceptual understanding.

The first supporting factor is high student interest and engagement during the learning process. Students were seen to respond positively to learning activities structured through games and tournaments. This situation made students more enthusiastic about learning, encouraging them to actively participate in every classroom activity. The supporting factor of high student interest and engagement is reinforced by the findings of Fredricks et al. (2019), which showed that student engagement is a crucial aspect in determining learning success, as active students generally have higher learning motivation and achieve more optimal learning outcomes.

Furthermore, cooperation among students within groups is also a factor supporting learning success. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) explain that social interaction in the learning process allows students to build understanding through collaboration, discussion, and the exchange of ideas, making the concepts learned more meaningful and easier to grasp. Through group interaction, students can exchange information, discuss, and help friends who are having difficulty understanding the material. This collaborative process allows for the joint construction of knowledge, allowing for optimal conceptual understanding.

Another supporting factor is the creation of a fun and relaxed learning environment. This is supported by research by Plass et al. (2020), which shows that a positive and enjoyable learning environment can increase students' motivation and emotional engagement in the learning process. The use of the TGT model, which incorporates elements of play, creates a more relaxed and engaging learning atmosphere. This makes students feel comfortable during the learning process, making them more open to active participation and expressing opinions.

On the other hand, several obstacles hinder the implementation of the TGT model. One of the most prominent obstacles is a lack of self-confidence among some students. Some students still hesitate to participate in discussions or express their opinions, thus limiting their involvement in learning. Furthermore, a tendency for students to become dependent on more active peers or those with higher academic abilities was also found. In group activities, less active students often simply participate without making significant contributions. This results in an uneven learning process and potentially hinders the development of individual conceptual understanding.

Another obstacle relates to limited time allocation for learning. The TGT model, which consists of several stages, requires a relatively long time to be implemented optimally. This limited time often prevents some activities from running optimally, resulting in learning objectives not being fully achieved.

Based on this description, it is clear that the success of implementing the TGT model is greatly influenced by the teacher's ability to manage supporting factors and overcome various obstacles that arise. This aligns with the view of Darling-Hammond et al. (2020), who emphasized that the quality of teacher learning management is a key factor in determining the success of implementing innovative learning models. Therefore, appropriate learning strategies are needed to ensure effective learning and optimal outcomes.

Based on research findings, this discussion focuses on analyzing the relationship between students' initial conceptual understanding, the implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model, and its implications for improving the quality of social studies

learning. This analysis is also strengthened by theoretical foundations and previous research findings to strengthen its academic validity.

First, the low level of students' conceptual understanding indicates that the social studies learning process has not yet fully fostered optimal knowledge construction. This situation indicates that learning is still oriented toward memorizing information, rather than developing in-depth understanding. From the perspective of Anderson and Krathwohl's Revised Bloom's Taxonomy, conceptual understanding is at a higher cognitive level than mere memorization, necessitating learning strategies that develop advanced thinking skills.

Furthermore, students' limitations in connecting concepts and applying them to everyday life indicate that the knowledge transfer process has not been effective. This reflects a lack of contextual learning and meaningfulness. In line with David Ausubel's theory, learning will be more effective when new information is linked to students' existing cognitive structures, thus facilitating comprehension and retention.

Second, the implementation of the TGT model in this study has proven effective in transforming learning patterns to become more student-centered. This model provides ample opportunities for students to actively participate through group discussions, academic games, and structured competitions. Thus, the learning process is no longer dominated by the teacher but rather involves the active participation of all students.

These findings align with the concept of cooperative learning proposed by Robert E. Slavin, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in improving learning outcomes. Through group collaboration, students can help each other understand the material, resulting in a cognitive elaboration process that strengthens conceptual understanding.

Furthermore, the presence of game and tournament elements in the TGT model significantly contributes to increasing student learning motivation. Learning becomes more engaging and less monotonous, thereby increasing student engagement. This demonstrates that an approach that integrates cognitive and affective aspects can create a more effective learning experience.

Third, the impact of implementing the TGT model on student conceptual understanding is evident in increased activeness and engagement in the learning process. Students begin to demonstrate more complex thinking skills through questioning, discussion, and expressing opinions. This indicates an improvement in higher-order cognitive abilities, such as analysis and evaluation.

Social interaction within groups also functions as a form of scaffolding, as explained in Lev Vygotsky's theory. Through the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), students with higher abilities can help other students achieve better understanding. Thus, learning becomes collaborative and supports optimal cognitive development. Furthermore, the increased learning motivation generated by game and competition activities results in increased student attention to the learning material. This implies better information processing, making the concepts learned easier to understand and remember long-term.

Fourth, regarding supporting and inhibiting factors, the success of implementing the TGT model is greatly influenced by various aspects, both internal and external. High student interest and enthusiasm are key supporting factors in creating effective learning. On the other hand, obstacles such as low self-confidence and dependence on more active students indicate differences in learning readiness among students.

This emphasizes the importance of the teacher's role as a facilitator in optimally managing group dynamics. Teachers need to ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to participate, so that domination within the group does not occur. Furthermore, time constraints also pose a challenge in implementing the TGT model, given that this model has several stages that require effective time management.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the TGT cooperative learning model is highly effective in improving understanding of social studies concepts, especially for seventh-grade students who are in the transition phase of learning. This model impacts not only cognitive aspects but also social and motivational aspects of students.

Thus, the implementation of the TGT model can be used as an alternative, innovative and relevant learning strategy to improve the quality of social studies learning. This approach is able

to address the challenges of modern learning that demand active student involvement and the development of a deeper and more meaningful understanding of concepts.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on research findings, it can be confirmed that seventh-grade students' conceptual understanding in social studies remains low. This is reflected in students' limitations in rephrasing concepts in their own words, connecting concepts, and applying them to everyday life contexts. This condition is influenced by a learning pattern that is still dominated by teachers, minimal active student involvement, and the difficulty of adapting due to the transition from thematic learning in elementary school to subject-based learning in junior high school.

The implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) cooperative learning model has shown positive results in creating more active and student-oriented learning. Through structured learning stages, such as forming heterogeneous groups, discussion activities, academic games, and tournaments, students become more engaged and motivated in the learning process.

The implementation of the TGT model also has an impact on improving students' conceptual understanding. This is indicated by increased student participation in discussions, increased confidence in expressing opinions, and the development of deeper thinking skills. The social interactions that occur within groups also contribute to helping students build understanding collaboratively.

The successful implementation of this model was supported by high student enthusiasm, strong group cooperation, and a conducive and enjoyable learning environment. However, several obstacles were encountered, including low self-confidence among some students, dependence on certain group members, and limited time for learning.

In general, the TGT cooperative learning model was found to be effective in improving the understanding of social studies concepts in seventh-grade students. Therefore, this model is worthy of being used as an alternative, innovative learning strategy to support more meaningful, interactive, and contextual learning.

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