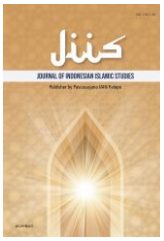
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e-ISSN 2808-8395

Journal of Indonesian Islamic Studies
Vol 6, No. 1, Oktober 2026, pp. 769 - 775



JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAMIC STUDIES

https://ejournal.iainpalopo.ac.id/index.php/jiis/index

Implementation of Interactive and Collaborative Methods in Social Studies Learning and Their Empirical Effect on Student Learning Interest

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Articles Information

History:
Received: October 1, 2026
Approved: October 29, 2026
Publish: October 11, 2026

Keywords:
Interactive Methods;
Collaborative Methods;
Social Studies Learning;
Student Learning Interest

Abstract

Social Studies Education (IPS) plays a crucial role in developing middle school students' understanding of social phenomena, community dynamics, and surrounding environmental issues. However, conventional teacher-centered learning practices often limit student participation, leading to sub-optimal learning interest. This empirical research aims to analyze the implementation of interactive and collaborative methods in Social Studies instruction and to measure their significant influence on students' learning interest. Using a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design, data were gathered from 64 eighth-grade students divided into an experimental class (utilizing interactive-collaborative techniques, n = 32) and a control class (utilizing traditional lectures, n = 32). Data collection techniques included a validated 5-point Likert scale interest questionnaire and direct classroom observation rubrics. The empirical findings demonstrated a statistically significant increase in the experimental group's learning interest post-test score (mean = 84.50) compared to the control group (mean = 71.20). Independent sample t-test analysis yielded $t_{count} = 5.412$ with $p < 0.001$, confirming that the integration of interactive dialogue and collaborative group investigation significantly boosts student enthusiasm, attention, active participation, and learning drive in Social Studies.

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Introduction

Social Studies Education (Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial / IPS) is an integrative academic discipline that plays a fundamental role in shaping students into intelligent, active, character-driven, and socially conscious citizens. At the lower secondary school level (Sekolah Menengah Pertama / SMP), Social Studies learning does not merely rely on the passive transfer of factual knowledge across geography, history, economics, and sociology; rather, it emphasizes the development of essential social skills, including effective communication, collaboration, empathy, and collective problem-solving regarding societal issues (Rahmad, 2016). By facilitating a comprehensive understanding of social reality, Social Studies enables students to bridge abstract academic theories with the dynamic social environment surrounding them.

Despite its strategic importance within the national curriculum, empirical reality in classroom settings reveals persistent pedagogical challenges. Traditional teacher-centered instructional practices dominated by passive expository lectures remain prevalent. This approach positions students as passive recipients of information, directly undermining their cognitive and emotional engagement. Consequently, students frequently exhibit low learning interest, classroom boredom, and a widespread perception that Social Studies is a monotonous subject centered purely on memorization and detached from real-life relevance (Astri, 2021; Yanti & Puspasari, 2024).

Learning interest serves as a primary internal determinant governing student achievement and the overall quality of educational outcomes. As conceptualized by Djaali (2012), learning interest reflects an internal drive that prompts individuals to dedicate full attention, demonstrate curiosity, and experience intrinsic satisfaction throughout the learning process. Hidi and Renninger (2006) further emphasize that interest directly regulates attentional focus, goal orientation, and the depth of information processing. Without cultivating strong learning interest, pedagogical efforts to deliver core Social Studies concepts fail to yield meaningful or lasting comprehension.

To address these empirical challenges, a methodological transformation focusing on active student engagement is essential. Implementing a combination of interactive and collaborative teaching methods offers a robust pedagogical solution. Interactive methods facilitate two-way communication through Socratic questioning, stimulating prompts, and structured classroom discussions. Simultaneously, collaborative methods provide a structured framework for students to work within heterogeneous teams, investigate social issues cooperatively, share diverse perspectives, and co-construct knowledge (Munir, 2012; Bitu et al., 2024). Based on this rationale, the present empirical research aims to evaluate the implementation of interactive and collaborative methods in Social Studies instruction and to rigorously test their statistical impact on improving the learning interest of eighth-grade middle school students.

Theoretical Framework and Philosophy of Science

1. Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Dimensions in Social Studies Education

From the perspective of the philosophy of science, any pedagogical innovation must be grounded in solid ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations. Ontologically, the primary object of inquiry in Social Studies education is the essence of human beings as social entities interacting within dynamic societal structures. Students

are viewed not as passive empty vessels (tabula rasa), but as active subjects possessing prior knowledge, cognitive potential, and critical capacities to construct meaning from their social environment.

Epistemologically, valid Social Studies knowledge cannot be acquired dogmatically through one-way teacher indoctrination. Authentic and meaningful knowledge is constructed through iterative processes of verification, critical analysis, dialogue, argumentative exchange, and empirical evaluation of social phenomena. Interactive and collaborative methods establish this epistemological engine by transforming the classroom into an active social science laboratory. Axiologically, the ultimate value and utility of Social Studies knowledge lie in cultivating socially responsible, empathetic, tolerant, and collaborative problem-solvers capable of addressing real-world societal challenges (Nursid, 2008).

2. Lev Vygotsky's Social Constructivism

Theoretically, this study is anchored in Lev S. Vygotsky's social constructivist learning theory. Vygotsky (1978) posited that cognitive development and conceptual understanding do not occur in isolation, but are fundamentally mediated through social interaction, language, and interpersonal collaboration. Knowledge is co-constructed within a social context prior to being internalized individually (moving from the inter-psychological to the intra-psychological plane).

A core element of Vygotsky's framework relevant to collaborative learning is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—defined as the distance between a learner's actual development level (independent problem-solving) and their potential development level achieved through adult guidance or peer collaboration with a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). By offering instructional scaffolding within collaborative learning teams, students achieve higher cognitive comprehension and elevated learning interest, as they feel supported, valued, and empowered within their learning community (Nurjamilah et al., 2025).

3. John Dewey's Educational Pragmatism

Complementing Vygotsky's constructivism, John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy provides a powerful foundation for interactive and collaborative pedagogy. Dewey (1938) asserted that education is a continuous reconstruction of experience ('learning by doing'). Genuine knowledge is not a static body of abstract concepts memorized for examination, but an active instrument for solving concrete life problems (instrumentalism).

In Social Studies learning, pragmatism dictates that curricular content must be contextually connected to students' lived social realities. Interactive and collaborative methods allow students to co-investigate actual social issues—such as local environmental sustainability, economic dynamics, or community interactions—evaluate potential solutions, and reflect on their findings. This communicative, experiential learning process naturally sparks intrinsic interest and curiosity among students.

Method

This study employed a quantitative methodology utilizing a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design. This design was specifically selected to systematically examine the effect of the independent variable (implementation of interactive and

collaborative teaching methods) on the dependent variable (students' Social Studies learning interest) within intact, non-randomly assigned classroom groups.

The research population comprised all eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 16 Malang during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. Purposive sampling was utilized to select two classes demonstrating equivalent baseline capability based on pre-test scores. Class VIII E was assigned as the experimental group (n = 32), receiving Social Studies instruction integrated with interactive-collaborative methods (such as the Group Investigation model and structured interactive panel discussions). Class VIII F served as the control group (n = 32), taught using conventional expository lecture methods.

Data were gathered using two primary instruments: (1) a Student Learning Interest Questionnaire structured around 5 key indicators (Enjoyment, Interest, Attention, Active Participation, and Drive for Further Learning) scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree); and (2) a Classroom Engagement Observation Rubric to track qualitative behavioral markers during instruction. The questionnaire underwent content validation by expert reviewers, while construct validity and reliability tests confirmed high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.891). Data analysis involved parametric statistical checks (Shapiro-Wilk normality test and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance), followed by hypothesis testing using an Independent Sample t-test executed via SPSS at a significance level of alpha = 0.05.

Results

Descriptive Changes in Student Learning Interest

Descriptive statistical analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores collected across both sample groups yielded the comparative data detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Summary of Student Learning Interest Scores and N-Gain

Group	N	Mean Pre-Test	Mean Post-Test	N-Gain Score	Effectiveness Category
Experimental (Interactive-Collaborative)	32	62.40	84.50	0.58	Moderate - High
Control (Conventional)	32	61.80	71.20	0.24	Low
Mean Difference	-	0.60	13.30	0.34	-
Significance (p-value)	-	-	< 0.001	-	-

Table 1 shows that the mean pre-test learning-interest score was 62.40 in the experimental group and 61.80 in the control group, a descriptive difference of 0.60 points. After the six-session instructional intervention, the mean post-test scores were 84.50 and 71.20, respectively. The experimental group therefore increased by 22.10 points, whereas the control group increased by 9.40 points. The between-group difference in mean post-test scores was 13.30 points. The normalized gain (N-Gain) scores reported in Table 1 were 0.58 for the experimental group and 0.24 for the control group. These results describe larger improvements in the experimental group; they do not, on their own, establish baseline statistical equivalence.

Assumption Checks and Hypothesis Testing

The reported assumption checks indicated Shapiro–Wilk p-values above 0.05 and a Levene's test p-value of 0.412. The reported independent-samples t-test yielded $t = 5.412$ with 62 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.001$). On the basis of this result, the null hypothesis of no difference between the groups was rejected at the 0.05 significance level. The manuscript reports these statistics as evidence of a significant between-group difference in learning interest following the intervention. The specific outcome entered into the t-test (post-test scores or gain scores) should be confirmed against the original statistical output.

Discussion

Interpretation of the Between-Group Difference

The descriptive and inferential findings suggest that interactive and collaborative Social Studies instruction was associated with greater reported learning interest than conventional lecture-based instruction in the two sampled classes. The experimental group showed a larger increase in its mean interest score (22.10 points versus 9.40 points), and the reported between-group test was statistically significant. This pattern is consistent with the study's rationale that opportunities for dialogue, questioning, and shared inquiry may create a more engaging classroom experience. However, because intact classes were assigned without randomization, these findings should be interpreted as evidence from a quasi-experimental comparison rather than as definitive proof of causality.

Connections with Social Constructivism and Pragmatism

A possible explanation lies in Vygotsky's (1978) account of learning as socially mediated. Collaborative investigation may create opportunities for peer explanation, dialogue, and instructional support within learners' zones of proximal development. Such interactions could help students engage with challenging Social Studies topics, including economic stratification and social mobility. Similarly, Dewey's (1938) educational pragmatism provides a framework for understanding why inquiry into social issues connected to students' everyday experiences may make learning feel more relevant. These theoretical interpretations are compatible with the overall pattern of results, but the available numerical data do not isolate the effects of particular instructional activities.

Implications and Limitations

The findings support the practical value of incorporating structured discussion and collaborative investigation into Social Studies lessons. They should nevertheless be read alongside several limitations: the study involved only two intact eighth-grade classes at one school, the groups were not randomly assigned, and the presented results do not report separate numerical scores for the five learning-interest indicators. Consequently, the manuscript cannot establish which indicator changed most or whether the observed pattern would generalize to other student populations. Future research could report indicator-level outcomes, baseline comparisons, confidence intervals, and standardized effect sizes, alongside more detailed observational evidence.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that students taught through interactive and collaborative methods reported higher post-test learning-interest scores than those taught through conventional instruction (84.50 versus 71.20). The experimental group also showed a larger descriptive increase from pre-test to post-test, and the reported independent-samples t-test indicated a statistically significant difference ($t(62) = 5.412$, $p < 0.001$). These findings support the potential usefulness of interactive and collaborative approaches for fostering interest in eighth-grade Social Studies within the study setting.

The findings can be interpreted through Vygotsky's social constructivism and Dewey's pragmatism: dialogue, peer collaboration, and engagement with meaningful social issues may contribute to students' interest in learning. Because the study used a non-randomized comparison of two classes, broader claims of causal impact and generalizability require further investigation. Teachers may consider integrating structured interactive dialogue and collaborative group tasks while monitoring students' interest across its different dimensions.

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