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STAD cooperative learning supported by question cards for figurative language learning: Implementation, impacts, and challenges in an Islamic elementary school

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ABSTRACT

Figurative language instruction in Islamic elementary schools plays an important role in developing students' language skills, yet many students still struggle to identify figurative language types and interpret figurative meanings. To address this problem, teachers implemented the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) cooperative learning model assisted by Question Cards as an alternative instructional strategy. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the STAD cooperative learning model, assisted by Question Cards, in figurative language learning, focusing on its implementation, impacts, and challenges. This study used a descriptive qualitative case study including one fourth-grade teacher and fourteen fourth-grade students. Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then examined through the Miles and Huberman model. The findings revealed that the implementation of the STAD model integrated with Question Cards effectively improved students' learning processes and outcomes. Students' engagement and collaboration increased throughout the learning activities, with the average learning score improving from 61 to 84. The use of Question Cards supported students' understanding of figurative language, strengthened peer interaction, and enhanced learning motivation. However, the implementation encountered several challenges, including limited instructional time, variations in students' abilities, and the management of heterogeneous groups. The study shows that STAD, when supported by Question Cards, effectively improves students' understanding of figurative language, participation, and learning outcomes, though effective time management and classroom organization are necessary. This study adds to the strengthening empirical evidence on integrating STAD and Question Cards in figurative language instruction while providing an alternative strategy to improve student participation and academic results in Islamic elementary schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Figurative language is an essential component of Indonesian language instruction because it contributes to the development of students' language proficiency, literary appreciation, and critical thinking skills. However, understanding figurative language remains challenging for elementary school students because its meanings do not always correspond to their literal interpretations, making it abstract and difficult to comprehend (Kasmi, 2020; Purba, 2022; Ningrum & Agustina, 2025). Similar difficulties have been identified among students in Islamic elementary schools, particularly in interpreting figurative meanings and distinguishing between personification and metaphor (Wiejak, 2014; Minda, 2021). These challenges are further exacerbated by the continued use of conventional teaching methods and the limited availability of instructional media that can facilitate students' understanding of abstract concepts (Çeken & Taşkın, 2022; Mayen et al., 2025). Therefore, innovative instructional approaches are needed to present figurative language concepts in a more concrete, interactive, and meaningful manner for students.

Numerous previous studies have examined STAD and Question Card media, either separately or in combination. These studies can be classified into three major research strands. First, STAD, through the formation of heterogeneous groups, has been shown to improve students' understanding of learning materials, collaboration, motivation, and classroom interaction (Rijal, 2015; Murtihapsari et al., 2023; Arsil et al., 2025). Second, STAD supported by interactive learning media has been found to enhance students' engagement, motivation, and conceptual understanding (Almusaed et al., 2023; Brahmani et al., 2025; Dai et al., 2025). Third, Question Card media can promote student participation, interaction, discussion, and understanding of the subject matter through more structured and focused learning activities (Diantari et al., 2017; Rahmadani et al., 2025; Maksum et al., 2025). Although previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of STAD and Question Card media in improving students' understanding, motivation, and interaction, their application has largely been examined separately and within the context of general subject matter. The novelty of the present study lies in integrating the Question Card-assisted STAD model into figurative language instruction in an Islamic elementary school and comprehensively examining its implementation, impacts, instructional contributions, and practical challenges.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Question Card-assisted STAD cooperative learning model in figurative language instruction at an Islamic elementary school. The analysis focuses on the implementation process, improvements in student participation and learning outcomes, the instructional contribution of Question Cards, and the challenges encountered during implementation. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) How is the Question Card-assisted STAD cooperative learning model implemented in figurative language instruction at an Islamic elementary school? 2) How does the implementation of Question Card-assisted STAD improve student participation and learning outcomes? 3) How do Question Cards contribute to improving students' understanding, learning activities, collaboration, and motivation within the STAD learning model? 4) What challenges arise in implementing Question Card-assisted STAD in figurative language instruction? Theoretically, this study extends the cooperative learning literature by examining the integration of STAD and Question Cards in figurative language instruction. Practically, it provides teachers with an alternative instructional strategy for creating active, collaborative, student-centered learning environments. It also supports the development and use of innovative instructional media in Islamic elementary schools.

The central argument of this study is that students' limited understanding of figurative language is closely associated with their insufficient active engagement in Indonesian language instruction at Islamic elementary schools. This issue warrants scholarly attention because understanding figurative language is not only related to students' ability to interpret non-literal meanings but also contributes to the development of their language skills, literary appreciation,

and critical thinking abilities. This study is grounded in Vygotsky's social constructivist perspective, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, collaboration, and scaffolding within learning groups. By implementing the Question Card-assisted STAD model, this study makes a theoretical contribution by strengthening the understanding of how cooperative learning facilitates student interaction and collaborative knowledge construction. In practice, it offers an alternative instructional strategy to enhance students' understanding, participation, collaboration, and motivation in figurative language instruction.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study approach. A descriptive qualitative approach aims to describe and provide an in-depth understanding of phenomena, events, and social situations within the research setting, grounded in real-life conditions (Sundler et al., 2019). According to Bogdan and Biklen, qualitative research generates data in the form of words, narratives, and images that describe the phenomenon under investigation rather than emphasizing statistical measurement (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Pyo et al., 2023). This approach was selected because it aligns with the study's objective of exploring the implementation of the STAD cooperative learning model assisted by Question Cards in figurative language learning and understanding how its implementation enhances the understanding of figurative language, student participation, collaboration, and learning motivation among fourth-grade students at MI Syumusul Huda.

The study was conducted at MI Syumusul Huda Kuanyar. The research site was selected for its relevance to the research objectives and for providing access to the required data. Data collection was conducted across three consecutive learning sessions to observe the implementation of the STAD cooperative learning model, assisted by Question Cards, across the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of figurative language instruction. The study participants included one fourth-grade teacher and 14 fourth-grade students at MI Syumusul Huda. Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the learning process. The fourth-grade teacher was chosen as the primary informant because of her role in planning and implementing the instruction, while three students were selected as supporting informants to provide insights into their learning experiences during the implementation of the STAD model assisted by Question Cards. The student informants were selected to represent different levels of academic ability and classroom participation.

Table 1
Characteristics of Participants

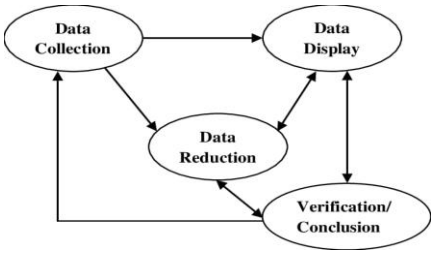
Participant	Gender	Position
Wahyu	Female	Fourth-grade teacher
Miska	Female	Fourth-grade student
Rifa	Female	Fourth-grade student
Akmal	Male	Fourth-grade student

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted during the learning process to examine the teacher's implementation of the STAD learning procedures, the use of Question Cards, and students' participation in figurative language learning activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the fourth-grade teacher and three students to obtain in-depth insights into their experiences, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with implementing the STAD cooperative learning model assisted by Question Cards. In addition, document analysis was used to complement the data by examining classroom photographs, teaching modules, instructional materials, and students' assessment results relevant to the research focus.

The research procedure consisted of three stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. During the preparation stage, the researcher identified the learning context and examined the teacher's instructional planning for implementing the STAD cooperative learning model assisted by Question Cards. The implementation stage was carried out over three figurative language learning sessions following the STAD instructional procedures, including presenting the learning objectives, delivering the instructional materials, forming heterogeneous groups, conducting group discussions using Question Cards, administering evaluations, and providing group recognition. The evaluation stage focused on examining students' development in understanding figurative language, participation, collaboration, and learning motivation, as well as on identifying challenges encountered during the implementation of the learning model.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman data analysis model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Bradley et al., 2007; Susilawati et al., 2020). During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, and organized the observation, interview, and documentary data according to the research objectives. The data were then presented as thematic narratives describing the planning, implementation, evaluation, impacts, and challenges of implementing the STAD cooperative learning model assisted by Question Cards. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by identifying patterns and themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Figure 1
Interactive Model of Qualitative Data Analysis



Source: Adapted from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014).

Qualitative data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of four interconnected processes: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. These processes were conducted iteratively throughout the study, allowing continuous refinement of codes, themes, and interpretations.

To ensure the credibility of the research findings, this study employed methodological triangulation and source triangulation (Leatherwood, 2025). Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, whereas source triangulation involved comparing information collected from the teacher and students. In addition, the study adhered to research ethics by obtaining permission from the school before data collection and ensuring the confidentiality of all informants throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Planning stage of question card-assisted STAD cooperative learning

The findings revealed that the planning stage of figurative language instruction using the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) cooperative learning model in a fourth-grade class at MI Syumusul Huda involved five main components: preparing instructional materials, selecting the instructional model, preparing learning media, organizing student learning groups,

and designing assessment strategies. These components were prepared prior to the learning process to guide the implementation of the STAD instructional procedures and support the delivery of figurative language instruction.

Table 2
Teacher Planning Components for Question Card-Assisted STAD Implementation

No.	Planning Component	Field Findings	Description
1	Instructional Materials	Teaching Module	The teacher prepared a teaching module containing learning objectives, instructional materials, learning activities based on STAD procedures, and assessment instruments.
2	Instructional Model	Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) Cooperative Learning Model	The teacher selected the STAD cooperative learning model as the instructional approach for figurative language learning activities.
3	Learning Media	Question Cards	The teacher prepared Question Cards as instructional media to support group discussions and practice activities in identifying and analyzing figurative language.
4	Learning Group Organization	Heterogeneous Groups Based on Academic Ability and Gender	The teacher formed heterogeneous groups by considering students' academic ability and gender to create balanced group composition and facilitate peer interaction.
5	Assessment Strategy	Group and Individual Assessment	The teacher prepared group assessment to evaluate collaborative activities and individual assessment to measure students' mastery of figurative language materials.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Table 2 indicates that the planning stage of figurative language instruction consisted of five interconnected components supporting the implementation of the STAD cooperative learning model. The teacher prepared a teaching module that included learning objectives, instructional materials, learning procedures, and assessment instruments. In addition, the teacher selected STAD as the instructional model and prepared Question Cards as learning media to facilitate group discussions and students' practice activities. The teacher also organized students into heterogeneous groups based on academic ability and gender and designed assessment procedures consisting of both group and individual assessments.

The findings further show that the instructional planning incorporated various elements required for STAD implementation. The teaching module served as a guide for organizing the learning objectives, instructional content, learning activities, and assessment procedures. The Question Cards were prepared to support students in discussing figurative language concepts, identifying figurative expressions, and analyzing their meanings during group activities. Furthermore, the formation of heterogeneous groups enabled students with different academic abilities to work collaboratively during the learning process. The assessment strategy combined group and individual assessments to evaluate students' participation in collaborative activities and their individual understanding of figurative language materials.

Implementation stage of question card-assisted STAD cooperative learning

The implementation of the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) cooperative learning model assisted by Question Cards in figurative language instruction was conducted over three learning sessions in a fourth-grade class at MI Syumusul Huda. Classroom observation findings showed that the implementation followed the main stages of the STAD instructional model, including the presentation of learning objectives, delivery of instructional

content, organization of learning groups, group learning activities, individual quizzes and evaluation, and group recognition. During the group learning stage, Question Cards were used as instructional media to facilitate student discussions and support students in identifying and analyzing figurative language.

The observation findings were supported by an interview with Ms. Wahyu, the fourth-grade teacher, who explained the implementation procedures of the STAD model:

> "In the first stage, the teacher introduces the learning objectives and motivates the students. Next, the teacher presents the lesson through a class presentation, followed by organizing students into learning groups. The teacher then facilitates group activities, administers individual quizzes, conducts the evaluation, and finally provides recognition to the groups."

Regarding the organization of learning groups, Ms. Wahyu explained that group formation was conducted heterogeneously by considering students' academic ability and gender. The teacher arranged students into groups consisting of four to five members to ensure that each group included students with different learning abilities. As stated by Ms. Wahyu:

> "The groups are formed by the teacher, with each group consisting of four or five students. The members include both boys and girls, and students with different academic abilities are distributed across all groups so that higher-achieving students are represented in every group."

The interview findings indicate that the implementation of STAD involved structured instructional procedures and heterogeneous group organization. These findings were further supported by classroom observation data presented in Table 2.

Table 3
Implementation of Question Card-Assisted STAD Cooperative Learning Model

No.	STAD Implementation Stage	Main Findings	Description
1	Presentation of Learning Objectives	The teacher communicated the learning objectives clearly, although no specific motivational activity was provided at the beginning of the lesson.	The teacher began the lesson by greeting students, leading a joint prayer, checking attendance, and asking introductory questions to stimulate students' thinking. The teacher then explained the learning objectives so that students understood the lesson content, expected learning outcomes, and learning procedures.
2	Delivery of Instructional Content	The teacher delivered the figurative language materials systematically, although some students were not fully attentive during the explanation.	The teacher explained the definition, types, examples of figurative expressions, and learning procedures before students participated in group discussions. Observation results showed that some students remained less focused during the explanation stage.
3	Formation of Learning Groups	The teacher formed heterogeneous groups based on students' academic ability and gender.	Students were organized into groups consisting of four to five members based on academic ability and gender in accordance with STAD principles. However, rearranging students' seating arrangements required additional instructional time.
4	Group Learning Activities Using Question Cards	Students' participation and collaboration increased during group discussions using Question Cards.	The teacher facilitated each group, monitored discussions, and assisted students who experienced difficulties. Students' participation was limited during the first meeting but increased in the second and third meetings as students became more involved in discussions,

			collaborated with peers, and asked questions to the teacher.
5	Group and Individual Assessment	The teacher conducted group and individual assessments according to STAD procedures.	The teacher assessed students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects through observations of attitudes, participation, collaboration, Question Card activities, and individual quizzes in the form of written tests. Individual quiz scores were combined with group scores as part of the final assessment.
6	Group Recognition	The teacher provided recognition to groups achieving the best results.	Recognition was provided through verbal praise, applause, and simple rewards. The teacher used group recognition to encourage students' motivation, confidence, and participation in subsequent learning activities.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Table 3 illustrates that the implementation of the STAD cooperative learning model consisted of six instructional stages. The teacher communicated learning objectives at the beginning of the lesson, although motivational activities were not specifically provided. The instructional content was delivered systematically before students participated in group activities. The teacher organized heterogeneous groups based on academic ability and gender, although the seating arrangement process required additional time. During group discussions, Question Cards were used to facilitate interaction among students, and student participation increased across the three learning sessions. The assessment process involved both group and individual assessments covering students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. At the final stage, the teacher provided recognition through verbal praise, applause, and simple rewards for groups with the best performance.

The findings show that the STAD implementation followed its instructional procedures, although several classroom management aspects were identified during the learning process. Challenges were observed in maintaining students' attention during instructional explanations and managing the time required for group organization. Nevertheless, the use of Question Cards was accompanied by increased student participation and collaboration during group learning activities. The implementation also included assessment and group recognition activities as part of the STAD learning process.

Evaluation stage of question card-assisted STAD cooperative learning

The evaluation stage in the implementation of the Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) cooperative learning model assisted by Question Cards was conducted through two forms of assessment: group assessment and individual assessment. Group assessment was carried out through observation of students' discussion processes, including participation, collaboration, engagement, and the accuracy of group responses. This assessment was conducted during group activities as part of the learning process before students completed individual quizzes. Meanwhile, individual assessment was conducted through written tests (individual quizzes) to measure students' understanding of figurative language materials. The results of both assessments were used by the teacher to identify students' learning achievement and determine follow-up learning activities.

The results of the group assessment showed changes in students' participation across the three learning sessions. During the initial implementation, students' involvement in group discussions was still limited. However, in the subsequent sessions, students became more actively involved in discussions, exchanged ideas with group members, assisted peers in identifying types of figurative language, explained the meanings of figurative expressions, and collaboratively constructed figurative sentences. Students' responses to the Question Cards also showed their ability to understand and apply figurative language concepts, as presented in Table 3.

Table 4
Examples of Student Responses to Question Cards

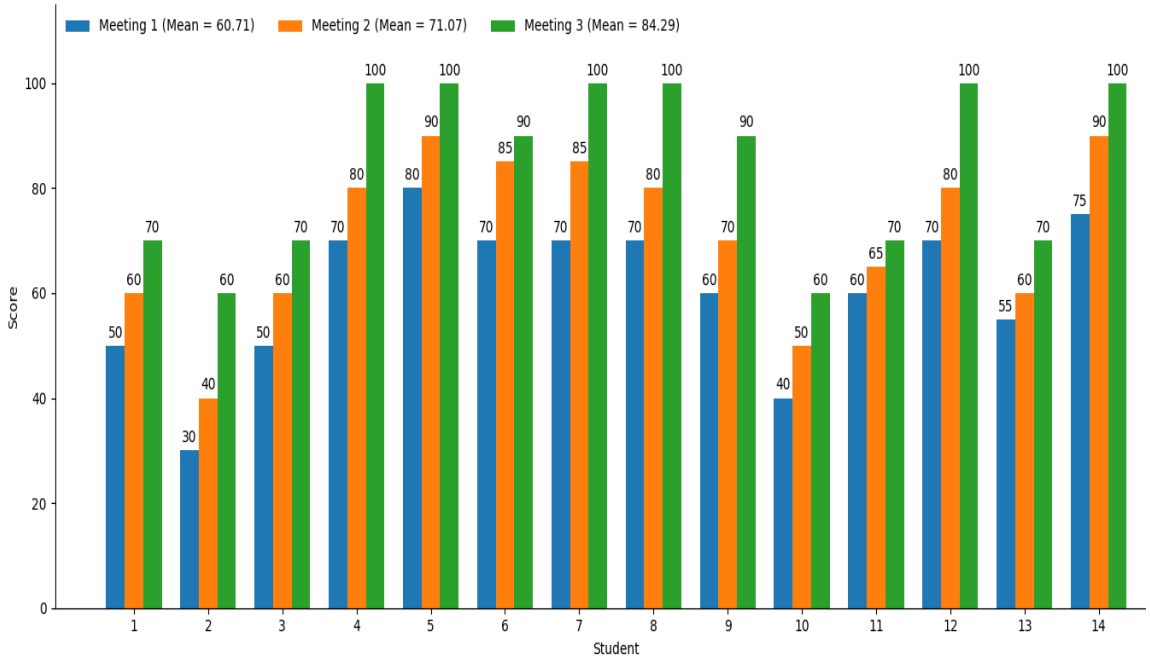
No.	Question Card	Students' Responses
1	What is meant by personification in figurative language?	Personification is a figure of speech that gives human characteristics to inanimate objects.
2	What do you know about metaphor?	Metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is described as another thing without using direct comparison.
3	The sun smiled brightly in the morning. What figure of speech is used in this sentence? What does it mean?	Personification. Meaning: The sun shone brightly in the morning.
4	Rina is the apple of her father and mother's eyes. What kind of figure of speech is used in this sentence? What does it mean?	Metaphor. Meaning: Rina is a beloved daughter of her parents.
5	Make an example sentence using a metaphor!	Devi is a "bookworm."

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Observation results indicated that Question Cards facilitated student interaction during group discussions. Most students actively responded to questions, explained their answers to group members, and exchanged ideas to obtain appropriate responses. However, one student remained relatively passive, demonstrated limited confidence in expressing opinions, and tended to depend on other group members during discussion activities.

The results of the individual assessment showed an increase in students' learning achievement in figurative language instruction. In the first meeting, most students experienced difficulties in understanding figurative meanings and distinguishing between personification and metaphor. In the second and third meetings, students demonstrated improved abilities in identifying figurative expressions, distinguishing types of figurative language, interpreting figurative meanings, and constructing figurative sentences. However, two students still required additional guidance and support. The distribution of students' learning outcomes is presented in Figure 2.

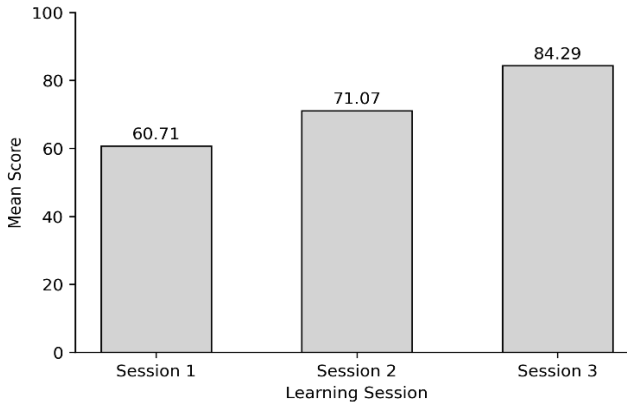
Figure 2
Learning Outcomes



Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Figure 2 shows the learning outcomes of each student across the three learning sessions. Most students demonstrated a consistent improvement in their scores, although two out of fourteen students showed relatively slower progress than their peers. Despite these individual differences, the overall pattern indicates positive learning development throughout the implementation of STAD cooperative learning assisted by Question Cards. This trend is further confirmed by the increase in the class average presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Average Students' Learning Outcomes



Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Figure 3 illustrates that the class average increased from 60.71 in the first meeting to 71.07 in the second meeting and reached 84.29 in the third meeting. The steady increase in average scores indicates progressive improvement in students' mastery of figurative language throughout the instructional intervention. The collaborative structure of STAD, supported by Question Cards, encouraged active discussion, peer interaction, and knowledge sharing, which likely contributed to the observed improvement in learning outcomes.

Impacts and challenges of question card-assisted STAD implementation

The findings from classroom observations indicated that the implementation of the Question Card-assisted Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD) cooperative learning model was accompanied by several changes in the learning process, including improvements in students' understanding of figurative language, learning engagement, and peer interaction. At the same time, several challenges were identified during the implementation, including limited instructional time, differences in students' ability levels, and difficulties in organizing learning groups.

These findings were supported by an interview with the fourth-grade teacher regarding the learning benefits of Question Card-assisted STAD. The teacher explained that discussion-based learning encouraged students to become more active because they were able to learn from their peers. When some students experienced difficulties in understanding the material, explanations from classmates helped them comprehend the concepts more easily. As stated by the teacher:

> "Discussion-based learning makes students more active because the learning process is centered on them. Therefore, when some students do not fully understand the material, they can receive explanations from their peers, as children's language is often easier for other children to understand when they explain something to one another."

The teacher further described that the implementation of the model encouraged students to participate, exchange ideas, collaborate with classmates, and develop their learning and social skills. The teacher stated:

> "The students become more active, share experiences, exchange ideas, and improve their learning outcomes and social skills. They are able to collaborate with their classmates, and

the model also increases their enthusiasm for learning. Students who are initially less motivated tend to become more enthusiastic when they are placed in groups because they can share knowledge with their peers."

Regarding the challenges encountered during implementation, the teacher identified time management as one of the main issues, particularly during the process of organizing students into groups and rearranging seating positions. The teacher explained:

"The main challenge is time because we have to organize the students into groups. When they are asked to form groups, they do not organize themselves immediately, and I have to rearrange their seating positions. This process takes a considerable amount of time."

The teacher also reported differences in students' participation levels during group discussions. Although all students participated in the activities, some students with lower ability levels tended to be less active and relied more on their group members. The teacher stated:

"Yes, all students participated in the discussions. However, one or two students with lower ability levels tended to follow the activities passively. They were involved in the group work, but they were not as active as the other students."

Table 5
Impacts and Challenges of STAD Using Question Cards.

No.	Aspect	Main Finding	Description
1	Impact	Improved understanding of figurative language	Students who initially experienced difficulties distinguishing between personification and metaphor demonstrated better understanding after participating in discussions using Question Cards. They were able to identify types of figurative language, interpret figurative meanings, and construct figurative sentences more accurately.
2	Impact	Increased student engagement and collaboration	Students participated more actively in discussions, exchanged ideas, assisted one another in understanding the material, and shared knowledge during group activities, thereby creating a more student-centered learning environment.
3	Impact	Increased learning motivation	Most students demonstrated greater enthusiasm during the learning process and were more motivated to participate in group activities.
4	Challenge	Limited instructional time	Organizing students into groups and rearranging seating required considerable time, thereby reducing the time available for instructional activities.
5	Challenge	Differences in students' ability levels	Although most students actively participated in group discussions, one or two students with lower ability levels tended to remain passive and rely on other group members.
6	Challenge	Difficulties in group formation and management	Some students preferred to select their own group members. Therefore, the teacher needed to manage the group-formation process carefully to maintain heterogeneous group composition in accordance with the principles of STAD.

Source: Prepared by the authors (2026).

Table 5 shows that the implementation of the Question Card-assisted STAD cooperative learning model was associated with several learning benefits and implementation challenges. The identified benefits included improved understanding of figurative language, increased student engagement, collaboration, and motivation during learning activities. Meanwhile, the main challenges involved limited instructional time, differences in students' ability levels, and difficulties in maintaining heterogeneous group composition during group formation.

Discussion

This study identified four main findings regarding the implementation of the Question Card-assisted Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD) model in figurative language instruction. First, the learning process was systematically conducted through planning, implementation, and evaluation in accordance with STAD procedures. Second, student participation in group discussions increased, accompanied by a rise in the mean learning score

from 61 to 84 across three meetings. Third, Question Cards improved students' understanding of figurative language, learning engagement, collaboration, and motivation by creating a more student-centered environment. Fourth, implementation challenges included limited instructional time, differences in students' ability levels, and difficulties in managing heterogeneous groups, requiring effective classroom management. Overall, the Question Card-assisted STAD model improved learning outcomes and classroom participation. However, better time management and additional support for lower-achieving students remain necessary to ensure that the model's benefits are optimized and distributed equitably among all students within diverse ability groups during classroom instruction.

The implementation of the Question Card-assisted Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD) model in figurative language instruction is relevant to current challenges in Indonesian primary education, particularly in Islamic elementary schools. Limited student engagement and the continued dominance of teacher-centered practices often result in passive, less motivated learners (Qafa et al., 2024). This study found that group discussions supported by Question Cards encouraged students to participate actively, exchange ideas, and collaborate in understanding figurative language. These findings are consistent with those of Motwani et al. (2022) and Talkhan et al. (2025), who describe STAD as an approach centered on collaborative discussion and interaction within small groups. Waluyo and Balazon (2024) further emphasize that playful and engaging learning activities can reduce boredom and academic stress. Therefore, integrating STAD with Question Cards addresses the urgent need for more interactive, collaborative, and student-centered instruction while improving the quality of primary education in Indonesia.

These findings indicate that the improvement in students' understanding of figurative language through the Question Card-assisted STAD model is consistent with Vygotsky's social constructivist perspective, which positions social interaction as the foundation of knowledge construction (Hedges, 2012; Lehtinen et al., 2023). According to Vygotsky, understanding develops through communication and collaboration with teachers and peers rather than solely through individual experience (Erbil, 2020; Scotland, 2022). In the present study, the increase in the mean learning score from 61 to 84 across three meetings suggests that STAD-based group discussions facilitated scaffolding, with more capable peers supporting students within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Kim et al. (2020) and Rumiantsev et al. (2023) emphasize that heterogeneous groups expand opportunities for peer learning, thereby enhancing both subject-matter understanding and social skills. Therefore, from a theoretical perspective, these findings confirm that the effectiveness of STAD derives not merely from group work itself, but from the quality of social interactions that promote students' cognitive development.

This study shows that successful learning depends not only on selecting instructional models and media but also on teachers' preparedness and management of classroom dynamics (Elbertson et al., 2025). Although the Question Card-assisted STAD model improved learning outcomes, challenges involving limited instructional time, differences in students' ability levels, and heterogeneous group management require attention (Murphy et al., 2017; Aluvalu et al., 2024). The findings confirm that teachers function not merely as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators, motivators, and adaptive classroom managers responsive to diverse student needs. Because students differ in characteristics and learning pace, collaborative learning is essential for promoting a more equitable distribution of understanding. Teachers, therefore, need knowledge of collaborative learning principles and skills in time management and instructional resource use (van Leeuwen & Janssen, 2019; de Jong et al., 2022). Meaningful learning emerges when students feel supported, motivated, and actively engaged as their pedagogical competence continues to develop.

These findings are consistent with previous studies on the effectiveness of the STAD cooperative learning model and extend the existing literature by integrating Question Card media. Nurfadilah et al. (2025) reported that STAD enhances social interaction and cooperation

within heterogeneous groups, thereby making the learning process more meaningful. This finding is consistent with the increased collaboration and participation observed among students during group discussions in the present study. Similarly, Yang et al. (2021) and Nguyen and Oanh (2025) found that STAD improves students' understanding through peer assistance and concept explanation while simultaneously developing communication and teamwork skills. Riwu et al. (2020) further demonstrated that STAD promotes active participation, learning interest, and student achievement. The novelty of the present study lies in the use of Question Cards to facilitate discussions in figurative language instruction. Rahmadani et al. (2025) emphasized that this instructional medium can enhance critical thinking, peer interaction, and student collaboration. Therefore, integrating STAD and Question Cards not only strengthens elementary school students' conceptual understanding but also develops their social and collaborative skills.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to optimize the implementation of the Question Card-assisted STAD model. First, teachers should manage instructional time more efficiently by preparing the classroom layout in advance and providing clear instructions for group formation, thereby ensuring a more effective learning process. Second, lower-achieving students should receive additional support through peer tutoring and individualized encouragement to strengthen their confidence and promote more active participation in group discussions. Third, schools should provide continuous professional development on cooperative learning and the use of innovative instructional media to enhance teachers' pedagogical competence. Fourth, Question Cards should be developed with a wider variety of questions and progressively increasing levels of difficulty to accommodate students with diverse ability levels. Fifth, future studies should examine the effectiveness of this model across different subjects and educational levels to broaden the generalizability of the findings and maximize its positive impact on a wider range of students.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Question Card-assisted STAD cooperative learning model effectively supported figurative language instruction in an Islamic elementary school. Four major findings emerged. First, the model was implemented systematically through planning, implementation, and evaluation in accordance with STAD procedures, indicating careful teacher preparation. Second, student participation in group discussions increased, while the mean learning score rose from 61 in the first meeting to 84 in the third, demonstrating stronger active engagement. Third, Question Cards enhanced students' understanding of figurative language, learning engagement, collaboration, and motivation by creating a more student-centered learning environment. However, the implementation faced challenges related to limited instructional time, differences in student ability, and managing heterogeneous groups. Overall, the model improved learning outcomes and classroom participation. Nevertheless, effective time management and additional support for lower-achieving students remain necessary in practice to ensure that the benefits are optimized and distributed equitably among all learners.

This study contributes to strengthening Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which emphasizes the central role of social interaction in knowledge construction. The improvement in students' learning outcomes through group discussions supports the view that scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development can enhance students' understanding. The study also extends the cooperative learning literature by integrating Question Cards as discussion prompts that foster critical thinking and collaboration. From a practical perspective, this study offers an innovative instructional model that teachers can adopt to foster a more active, student-centered learning environment. Question Cards were found to be effective in facilitating group discussions, increasing student participation, and deepening students' conceptual understanding of figurative language. The findings also provide teachers with insight into the importance of

effective time management, the formation of heterogeneous groups, and additional support for lower-achieving students in optimizing cooperative learning.

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted at a single Islamic elementary school with only 14 students, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Second, it focused solely on figurative language, so the model's effectiveness for other Indonesian language topics remains uncertain. Third, the three-meeting duration restricted the examination of long-term effects on students' retention. Fourth, the study did not investigate external factors, including socioeconomic background and parental support, in depth. Future research should therefore test the Question Card-assisted STAD model with larger samples, across different educational levels and subject areas, and over longer intervention periods. Experimental studies involving control groups are also needed to assess the model's effectiveness more rigorously, comprehensively, and validly in diverse educational contexts and learner populations.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Sintia Nailussa'adah: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Writing Original Draft; Writing Review & Editing. **Suci Herwani:** Formal Analysis; Supervision; Validation Writing Review & Editing.

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