



The Use of Crossword Puzzle Learning Media to Improve Social Studies' Motivation and Learning Outcomes in Students

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the need to improve students' cognitive learning outcomes in Social Studies (IPS), which remain below the Minimum Learning Mastery Criteria (KKTP) of 75 in class VIII-A at MTsN 1 Pamekasan. The purpose of this research is to enhance students' cognitive learning outcomes through the implementation of the Snowball Throwing learning model. The study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design conducted in two cycles, involving 26 students as subjects. Each cycle consisted of planning, action, observation, and reflection stages. Data were collected through documentation, observation, and tests, and were analyzed descriptively. The success indicators were the achievement of the KKTP score of 75 and an increase in classical learning completeness. The results showed a significant improvement in student learning outcomes. In cycle I, the average score was 66.42 with a learning completeness of 38.46%. In cycle II, the average score increased to 80.15 with a learning completeness of 76.92%. These findings indicate that the Snowball Throwing learning model is effective in improving students' cognitive learning outcomes in Social Studies.

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Introduction

Social Studies (IPS) is a subject that plays a strategic role in shaping students' character and national insight. Through social studies, students are equipped with an understanding of social,

economic, political, cultural, and historical aspects, all of which are crucial for social and national life. Therefore, IPS serves not only as a cognitive subject but also fosters social awareness and critical thinking skills from an early age [1]. Unfortunately, according to research by Permana and Sinitia (2021), students' understanding of social values in social studies remains relatively low. This is due to low student engagement in the learning process, which tends to be passive and does not foster critical awareness [2]. Similar findings were also presented by Pangestuti and Wana (2021), who showed that conventional learning methods were less effective in optimally transferring social studies values to junior high school students [3].

One of the fundamental problems in social studies learning is the still-conventional approach. Many teachers still rely on lectures and written assignments, which create a one-way learning process. In this learning model, students become mere recipients of information, not active subjects constructing their own knowledge.[4] This condition causes low student involvement in learning, so that social studies learning becomes monotonous and less interesting in the eyes of students.

This situation also occurred at SMP Negeri 2 Pamekasan, particularly in class VIII E, where social studies lessons tended to be passive and non-interactive. Initial observations by the subject teacher indicated that most students appeared unenthusiastic during the lesson. They rarely asked questions, were reluctant to answer questions, and participated little in group activities. This indicated that the learning process was not optimally motivating students.[5] Initial observations indicated that most students in the class exhibited signs of boredom during social studies learning. This was indicated by minimal active student participation, such as rarely asking questions, being unenthusiastic during discussions, and tending to be passive in group assignments. This finding aligns with research by Permana & Sintia (2021), which stated that the use of conventional lecture methods tends to tire students out and make them bored easily, while crossword puzzles have been shown to stimulate learning enthusiasm and significantly increase student engagement.[1]

In addition, an interview with a social studies teacher, Mrs. Zainab, at SMP Negeri 2 Pamekasan also confirmed that more than half of the students she taught appeared passive, less focused on listening to explanations, and reluctant to work together on group assignments, reflecting the low enthusiasm and activeness of students in class.[6]

Low student participation is a key indicator of weak learning motivation. Documentation of learning activities reveals that only around 30% of students actively interact in class. Most other students tend to remain silent, do not respond to questions, and even appear to lack understanding of the objectives of the ongoing learning activities. This low level of active participation results in suboptimal knowledge transfer and impacts student competency achievement. Based on the results of the mid-semester Social Studies (IPS) test in class VIII-E of SMP Negeri 2 Pamekasan, out of 36 students, only 3, or approximately 8.3%, achieved scores above the learning completion threshold of 75. Meanwhile, 33 students, or 91.7%, still scored below this threshold. This fact reflects a significant gap between learning objectives and student learning outcomes, which is suspected to be related to low learning interest and a lack of active participation in the IPS learning process. This situation demands the implementation of innovative and enjoyable learning strategies to increase active student engagement, such as with crossword puzzles (TTS).

In general, low student learning outcomes are not only caused by cognitive aspects, but also by weak motivation to learn. Many students find social studies lessons theoretical, boring, and difficult to understand because they are not presented in an engaging manner. The lack of variety in teaching methods used by teachers and the minimal active student involvement are factors that exacerbate this situation.[3] Therefore, learning innovations are needed that can balance students' cognitive and affective aspects.

One of the main weaknesses in social studies learning is the lack of innovative methods that can arouse students' interest in the subject matter [7]. Teachers often use conventional approaches that discourage students from actively participating in learning activities. However, in modern learning contexts, active student engagement is crucial for improving learning outcomes and building meaningful learning experiences [8]. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to start exploring more enjoyable and participatory learning methods.

Crossword puzzles (TTS) have emerged as a viable solution for learning social studies. Crossword puzzles are a form of educational game that presents material in a challenging and engaging way. Besides training memory, crossword puzzles can also improve conceptual understanding and engage students in the learning process. This learning medium is considered relevant for presenting verbal and theoretical material such as social studies [9].

Crossword puzzles work by focusing students' attention on chunks of information structured in the form of a crossword grid. This mechanism encourages students to think critically, search for



the correct answer, and work collaboratively in groups. This process is not only fun but also involvelivelieritive and affective aspects [1]. In this way, learning not only becomes more lively, but also more easily accepted by students. "The use of crossword puzzles in social studies learning has been proven to increase student interest and motivation by creating a more enjoyable and interactive learning environment. Furthermore, this medium also trains concentration, strengthens memory, and encourages active student involvement in understanding the material." [10]

In addition to increasing motivation, the crossword puzzle method also has a direct impact on student learning outcomes. Mariana (2023) reported an increase in average grades from 68 to 82 after three cycles of implementing the crossword puzzle method in social studies learning [2]. These results strengthen the evidence that interactive and engaging learning strategies can deliver better results than conventional methods. Adopting such an approach, especially for subjects considered boring, is crucial. Not only that, but student engagement in learning also increased significantly. Wana (2021) explained that more than 80% of students became active in group discussions when the crossword puzzle method was implemented. They engaged in answering questions, discussing questions, and even competing healthily to solve puzzles quickly and correctly [4]. This shows that this method can build a positive collaborative and competitive learning atmosphere.

Another advantage of TTS method is its practicality and affordability. Teachers don't need sophisticated equipment to implement it. Simply by designing puzzle-style questions based on the social studies material being taught, teachers can incorporate this method into learning activities, either as an introduction, main topic, or conclusion [11]. With this flexibility, TTS becomes an applicable learning medium for various classroom situations. The use of TTS learning media also aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum policy, which emphasize student-centered, enjoyable, and contextual learning. This approach provides space for students to learn actively, creatively, and orientate themselves toward meaningful learning experiences [12]. Therefore, the TTS method is not only innovative, but also relevant to the current direction of national education reform.

The efficacy of the Crossword Puzzle (TTS) method has received widespread support from various previous studies in various contexts. In Krangkeng, Indramayu, a study using a Classroom Action Research (CAR) approach was conducted to improve the interest and learning outcomes of eighth-grade students through the implementation of TTS. The results showed significant improvement, with student interest increasing from 58.3% to 91.6% and average grades increasing from 65.27 to 78.88, despite the limitation of only two cycles [13]. In a similar vein, Jita (2022) conducted a study at the UPT SMP Negeri 1 Alla, Enrekang Regency, implementing CAR in three cycles. The results showed that students became more active in learning, and their grades consistently improved with each cycle. This study shares similarities with the current study, namely the use of TTS and targeting eighth grade students but differs in location and social context [14]. In addition to the CAR approach, studies using other research designs have also demonstrated the benefits of the TTS method. Rahmawati, Nashir, and Amin (2023) used a quasi-experimental approach at Al Hadi Islamic Junior High School and found that crossword puzzles (TTS) had a positive impact on student achievement and reduced boredom during learning, although they did not provide an in-depth description of the teacher's reflection process and learning outcomes [15]. Utamiyosa (2023) also demonstrated that crossword puzzles were effective in improving motivation and learning outcomes in ninth-grade junior high school students' Biology, indicating that the benefits of this method extend beyond social studies [16]. These previous studies conclude that the TTS method has proven effective in various contexts and subjects. However, there remains a gap in research regarding the application of crossword puzzles to junior high school students in Surabaya, particularly for eighth-grade social studies, with adjustments made to local student characteristics.

Given these challenges and potential, intervention through proven effective learning methods such as crossword puzzles is the right choice. The low motivation and learning outcomes of class VIII E students at SMP Negeri 2 Pamekasan require an immediate strategic response. One such approach is conducting Classroom Action Research (CAR) to design, implement, and evaluate the use of crossword puzzles as a learning medium to systematically and sustainably improve the quality of social studies learning.

Method

This research employed a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the learning phenomenon [17]. The qualitative approach was used to describe the dynamics of classroom interactions, student motivation, and the

implementation of the crossword puzzle method in a realistic learning environment, allowing for exploration of students' emotional responses and attitudes [18]. Meanwhile, the quantitative approach was used to measure numerical data such as pretest and posttest scores, as well as the results of a learning motivation questionnaire, to support objectivity in evaluating the effectiveness of the learning interventions [19]. The research method employed was Classroom Action Research (CAR) using the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which includes four main stages in a spiral cycle: Planning, Implementation, Observation, and Reflection, which can be repeated until optimal improvement is achieved [20]. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Pamekasan with 34 students of class VIII E in the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The study used observation sheets, learning outcome tests, and data collection techniques such as observation, testing, and documentation.

The planning stage is the initial step that determines the success of the research. At this stage, teachers develop a teaching module that integrates the Crossword Puzzle (TTS) method as a social studies learning strategy. They prepare learning instruments such as crossword puzzle sheets, learning motivation questionnaires, observation sheets, and learning outcome evaluation tests to measure the achievement of objectives [17]. Furthermore, teachers establish success indicators, including group division, time management, and the selection of appropriate materials to be converted into crossword puzzles. In cycle 1, planning is carried out with researchers to develop crossword puzzle-based learning tools, including teaching modules, crossword puzzle-style student worksheets, learning interest observation instruments, and student learning outcome tests.

In cycle 2, re-planning is carried out by revising the crossword puzzle media, instructions, and delivery methods based on the results of cycle 1 reflections, for example, by adding visual cues or providing sample questions beforehand. The Implementation and Observation stages are structured to ensure optimal implementation and monitoring [21]. During the implementation stage, teachers implement the learning according to the developed teaching module by dividing students into small groups or individually based on learning objectives, providing instructions for using the crossword puzzle, and distributing prepared worksheets to encourage active engagement, discussion, and the development of critical and collaborative thinking skills [22]. In cycle 2, learning was carried out with improved strategies such as more detailed guidelines and extended group work time. Observations were conducted systematically by the teacher or collaborator to record student activities, learning engagement, group interactions, speed and accuracy of completing the crossword puzzle, and responses to the method. They also noted any obstacles that arose. Data was collected through observation sheets, learning interest questionnaires, test results, and photo or video documentation. In cycle 2, observations focused on changes in student behavior, collecting more detailed data using an observation rubric [23].

The reflection stage was conducted after the implementation of the actions and data collection to evaluate and develop improvements. The teacher analyzed the observation and test results to assess the achievement of success indicators, including learning outcomes, student interest levels, and the effectiveness of the crossword puzzle method [17]. Based on these findings, the teacher developed improvements for the next cycle, such as clarifying the crossword puzzle instructions, adjusting the difficulty level of the questions, or rearranging the group assignment strategy. In cycle 1, reflections were conducted with the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions and design improvements if deficiencies were identified. In cycle 2, a final evaluation was conducted to compare the results between cycles 1 and 2. The cycle was terminated if the motivation indicator reached the target of 2.4 and 85% of students achieved learning outcomes [24]. Data analysis was carried out using two approaches, namely qualitative descriptive analysis to see student motivation through indicators of perseverance, interest and attention, enthusiasm for learning, and independence in learning, and quantitative analysis to measure improvements in student learning outcomes through calculating the average class value and percentage of student completion.

Results and Discussion

This study aims to improve the motivation and learning outcomes of students in grade VIII E SMP Negeri 2 Pamekasan using Crossword Puzzle learning media in social studies subjects. The research process is carried out in three stages, namely pre-cycle, cycle I, and cycle II. The pre-cycle stage is used as a basis for comparison to determine the development of motivation and learning outcomes before being given action. At this initial stage, the researcher conducts pre-tests and observations of learning activities according to the modules that have been prepared. Pre-cycle results show that student motivation and learning outcomes are still low, so further action is needed to improve them in the next cycle. The entire learning process lasts for 2x40 minutes with learning



stages that begin with greetings, perception, goal delivery, and orientation to social materials that relate to the examples of students' daily lives.

At the preliminary stage, the teacher provided an explanation of the material of social institutions in the use of natural and human resources. Teachers try to focus students' attention by providing explanations, checking attendance, checking learning readiness, and trying to create a conducive atmosphere through ice breaking. In the core activities, teachers explain the main material, organize students to learn, and provide LKPD to be done individually. The teacher then guides the LKPD process by going around from student to student and providing additional explanations if needed. Although learning activities have been carried out as usual, at this stage teachers have not used TTS media as a learning aid so that motivation results and learning outcomes are still low and do not meet the standards of learning completeness.

Table 1. Pre-Cycle Learning Outcomes

Component	Result
Average	69,98529412
Completeness	50%

The results of pre-cycle learning showed that out of 34 students, only 17 students were declared complete. The highest score reached 88 and the lowest score was at 60. The total number of student scores is 2379.5 with an average of 69.98. In test activities, many students still answered the wrong questions, and there were also some students who got very low scores. This shows that there are problems in the learning process that cause students to not understand the material well. In addition, students' learning motivation at the pre-cycle stage was also low with an average score of 1.42625, indicating that students were less diligent, less interested, less enthusiastic, and lacked initiative in the learning process.

Entering the first cycle, the researcher began to apply TTS media according to the modules that have been prepared to increase student motivation and learning outcomes. In the planning stage of the first cycle, the researcher determines the date of the research, compiles learning modules, prepares teaching materials, and prepares research instruments such as test sheets and observation sheets for learning motivation. The implementation of the first cycle began on October 6, 2025, with a learning duration of 2x40 minutes. In the early stages of learning, the teacher opens the class with greetings, asks how things are going, prays together, and conveys the learning objectives and the scope of the material to be learned. Teachers continue to use the same perceptual strategies as the precycle but have added the use of TTS media in core learning activities.

In the core activities of the first cycle, teachers orient students to problems, explain social institution materials in the use of natural and human resources, and distribute LKPD that must be done individually. The teacher then acts as a facilitator by going around to see the results of the students' work and giving directions. After that, some students were asked to present their LKPD work in front of the class and other students gave feedback. At the end of the activity, the teacher asks students to do TTS as an evaluation of their understanding of the material. With the use of TTS in cycle, I began to provide a different learning atmosphere compared to the pre-cycle and made students more interested in working on the questions.

Table 2. Learning Outcomes of Cycle I

Component	Result
Average	72,30882353
Completeness	61,76%

In the first cycle, there was an increase in learning outcomes compared to pre-cycles. The average score increased to 72.30 and learning completeness increased to 61.76%. This shows the development of student understanding after the implementation of TTS media, although it still does not reach the minimum class completion target. Learning motivation also increased with an average score of 2.05. This increase shows that TTS media is starting to influence students' interest and enthusiasm for learning, even though it is not optimal[25]. Some students still look passive and do not fully understand how to do TTS, so teachers need to provide more intense assistance.

In the reflection stage of cycle, I researchers found several obstacles that must be fixed in cycle II. Some of them are the classroom atmosphere that is still not fully conducive, the existence of students who are still confused about doing TTS, and the lack of teacher firmness in managing

the classroom. In addition, there are still some students with low scores who need special attention. Therefore, the researcher improved several aspects in cycle II such as improving class mastery, providing clearer direction, and providing stronger motivation so that the classroom atmosphere becomes more active and conducive.

Entering cycle II, the improvements planned by the researcher began to be implemented. The research in cycle II will be carried out on October 17, 2025. Teachers again started learning with greetings, attendance checks, and joint prayers as in the previous cycle. However, at this stage, the teacher makes the classroom atmosphere more assertive and more structured. The teacher also relates the previous material to the material to be delivered so that students can more easily understand the relationship between the materials. In addition, the teacher provides a more systematic explanation based on the results of the reflection of the first cycle.

In the core activity of cycle II, the teacher explained material about social institutions in the use of natural and human resources. Teachers then distribute LKPD to students, provide opportunities for discussion, and provide guidance more optimally. Students are seen to be much more active and compact than in cycle I. In the implementation of TTS in cycle II, students seem to understand the steps to work better and can deal with the problems more confidently. Teachers strengthen motivation by giving praise and accompanying students who are experiencing difficulties.

Table 3. Cycle II Learning Outcomes

Component	Result
Average	75,07352941
Completeness	85,29%

The learning outcomes of cycle II showed a very significant increase. The average score increased to 75.07 and learning completeness reached 85.29%, which means that it has exceeded the minimum completeness limit. Almost all students managed to achieve completeness and grades increased consistently compared to the previous cycle. This improvement shows that the improvement in learning and the use of TTS media has a positive impact on student understanding. In addition, learning motivation increased to 2.5875, in the highest category. This shows that students are starting to show better perseverance, enthusiasm, attention, and initiative in participating in social studies learning.

Table 4. Comparison Learning Outcomes Precycle, Cycle I and Cycle II

Phase	Average	Completeness
Precycle	69,98	50%
Cycle I	72,30	61,76%
Cycle II	75,07	85,29%

The increase in motivation from pre-cycle to cycle II is also very clearly visible. In the precycle the motivation score of 1.42625 indicates a low category. In cycle I it increased to 2.05 which means the medium category. In cycle II it increased further to 2.5875, which indicates a high category. This data shows that TTS media makes a great contribution to increasing students' interest, enthusiasm, and activeness in learning.

Table 5. Pre-Cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II Learning Motivation

Phase	Motivation Score
Precycle	1,42625
Cycle I	2,05
Cycle II	2,5875

The results of the study in cycle II also showed that class control increased drastically. Teachers are better able to adjust to student needs, be more assertive, and make learning more effective. Students look more compact, more confident in asking questions, and more serious in doing assignments. The use of TTS as an evaluation medium makes it easier for students to understand important terms in social studies material. In addition, students also became more active in responding to their classmates' presentations.



The reflection at the end of cycle II confirms that learning using TTS media is effective in increasing student motivation and learning outcomes. Almost all students were able to achieve the set completion. This is proof that the use of educational games such as TTS can increase students' activeness, understanding, and ability to remember the material that has been learned. The improvement of classroom management applied in cycle II also greatly helps create more targeted and enjoyable learning for students.

Theoretically, the results of this study are in line with the research [13], [14] and [2] who found that TTS-based learning methods are able to increase student motivation and learning outcomes. The three studies confirm that the use of educational games can create a more interactive learning atmosphere and encourage students to actively think. This research also supports the principle of active and joyful learning, which is emphasized in the Independent Curriculum, where students play the role of learning subjects who must be actively involved.

This research also has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the study was only conducted in one class with a limited number of students, so the results could not be generalized widely. Second, the research only focuses on one learning material, namely social institutions in the use of natural and human resources. Third, the research was conducted in a limited time span so that it could not measure the long-term impact of the use of TTS on students' abilities. Therefore, advanced research is recommended to involve a larger sample, a variety of other learning materials, and involve more learning variables such as learning styles and environmental support.

Overall, this study proves that the application of Crossword Puzzle (TTS) media in social studies learning can significantly increase student motivation and learning outcomes. The use of TTS makes students more challenged and actively involved, while teachers become more creative in managing learning. The increase in student motivation is reflected in the increased motivation score in each cycle, while the increase in learning outcomes is also evident from the increase in average scores and the percentage of completeness which reached 85.29%. Thus, it can be concluded that TTS media is an effective learning alternative to be used in social studies subjects.

Conclusion

In the preliminary stage, students of grade VIII E SMP Negeri 2 Pamekasan showed a low level of learning motivation. This is reflected in the average motivation score of only 1.42625, which is calculated based on indicators such as perseverance in learning (average score 0.755), interest and attention (average score 1.55), enthusiasm for learning or active participation (average score 1.8), and independence/initiative in learning (average score 1.6). This low motivation has an impact on learning outcomes, where the percentage of student learning completeness only reaches 50% and the average class score is 69.98529412. This means that out of 34 students, only about 17 students achieved grades above learning outcomes (CP). Teachers' activities in pre-cycle activities were also considered less than optimal with a percentage of 60%, which was obtained from observations of teacher activities which included preparation, delivery of materials, interaction with students, and learning evaluation. This data indicates the need for improvement in the teaching methods and approaches that teachers use to arouse students' interest and motivation.

After the implementation of crossword puzzle learning media (TTS) in cycle 1, there was an increase in students' learning motivation, even though it had not reached the expected target. The average motivation score increased to 2.05, which was the result of an increase in motivation indicators, namely perseverance in learning (average score 2.1), interest and attention (average score 2.1), enthusiasm for learning or active participation (average score 2.0), and independence/initiative in learning (average score 2.0). Learning outcomes also improved with an increase in the percentage of learning completeness to 61.76% and the average class score to 72.30882353. This means that the number of students who have achieved learning outcomes (CP) has increased to around 21 students. Teachers' activities were considered good, with a percentage of 71%, which reflected teachers' efforts in implementing TTS media, providing guidance, and motivating students. However, improvements are still needed in classroom management, providing opportunities for students to ask questions and opinions, and variations in the delivery of material to make it more interesting.

In cycle 2, students' learning motivation increased significantly to reach the high category, with an average motivation score of 2.5875. This increase was supported by the acquisition of scores on each indicator, namely perseverance in learning (average score 2.55), interest and attention (average score 2.45), enthusiasm for learning or active participation (average score 2.75), and independence/initiative in learning (average score 2.6). Student learning outcomes have also made rapid progress, with the percentage of student learning completeness reaching 85.29% and the

average class score increasing to 75.07352941. This shows that out of 34 students, about 29 students managed to achieve learning outcomes (CP). The teacher's activity was rated very good, with a percentage of 87%, which reflects the teacher's success in managing the classroom effectively, providing adequate guidance, and creating an interactive and fun learning atmosphere. This improvement shows that the application of TTS learning media is very effective in improving student motivation and learning outcomes and has achieved the target expected in this study.

Suggestion

To the next researcher, this study has limitations in samples and learning materials. Therefore, researchers are further advised to conduct research with a larger and more diverse sample, as well as covering a wider range of learning materials in social studies subjects. In addition, it is necessary to consider other factors that can affect student motivation and learning outcomes, such as learning styles, student interests, and support from the learning environment to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

To the UIN Madura campus, the results of this research can be a reference for UIN Madura in developing innovative and contextual curriculum and learning materials, especially in the Social Sciences Tadris Study Program. The campus can encourage similar research to identify effective learning methods and media in improving the quality of social studies learning. In addition, the campus can provide training and workshops to teachers related to the use of educational game-based learning media, such as crossword puzzles to increase student motivation and learning outcomes.

Teachers are advised to use crossword learning media (TTS) as an alternative to creative and fun learning strategies in social studies subjects. Teachers can develop TTS according to the learning material and student characteristics. In addition, teachers need to create an interactive and participatory learning atmosphere to maximize TTS media in improving student motivation and learning outcomes. The results of this research can be an inspiration for teachers to continue to innovate in creating more meaningful and relevant learning for students.

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