

ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STAD IN TEACHING READING AT VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores English teachers' perceptions of implementing Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) in teaching reading at Vocational High Schools (VHS). The study focuses on its benefits, challenges, and strategies. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. The participants comprised five EFL vocational teachers selected via purposive sampling. The data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and classroom observation as supporting data and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that teachers perceived STAD as beneficial in increasing students' enthusiasm, improving time efficiency, promoting peer tutoring, developing students' self-awareness, and enhancing social interaction during reading activities. Teachers reported that STAD's cooperative team structure supports students in discussion so that their understanding of vocabulary and key ideas of functional texts is improved. However, challenges included students' limited background knowledge, time-consuming preparation, student passivity, technology dependence, classroom management challenges, students' role distortion, and inadequate facilities. Teachers applied continuous monitoring, thorough preparation, maintaining teacher credibility, providing motivation and rewards, and extra classes to address these challenges. Overall, STAD was perceived positively because it supported cooperative learning while strengthening reading comprehension and social affective outcomes in VHS. This study contributes to the understanding of STAD implementation in teaching reading at VHS.

Keywords: cooperative learning, EFL reading comprehension, STAD method, teacher perceptions, vocational education

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a foundational skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it enables learners to understand texts, expand their vocabulary, improve comprehension, and develop critical thinking. Reading comprehension is an active, constructive process in which readers integrate textual information with prior knowledge to construct meaning (Snow, 2002). Thus, reading proficiency plays a crucial role in students' ability to understand texts, acquire new knowledge, and engage successfully in learning across different contexts (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Nation, 2009). Reading skills hold significance in the context of Vocational High School (VHS) because students are expected not only to understand English texts in a school environment but also to use reading skills in workplace-related contexts. Students do not merely study texts in general; they focus on themes related to the work environments of their respective majors, such as technical manuals, standard operating procedures (SOP), and workplace safety instructions. These types of texts use specialized vocabulary and phrases, setting them apart from typical EFL classes. This helps students understand specialized terminology and use effective reading strategies. Learning materials developed for professional contexts increase students'

understanding of functional texts (Sari et al., 2024). In addition, mastery of real-world texts is intrinsically related to work ability and professional literacy (Kholifah et al., 2025).

However, VHS students often have varied academic abilities, mixed motivation levels, and diverse English proficiency, making reading instruction complex and demanding for teachers. These differences lead to varying levels of reading comprehension, with lower-proficiency students often struggling to recognize technical vocabulary, break down long sentences, and derive meaning from the text as a whole, which relies on prior knowledge. This gap indicates that some students can understand texts independently, while others still require support. This gap is what makes heterogeneous groups in cooperative learning effective: students with varying proficiency levels can share strategies and knowledge that might be difficult to acquire individually, especially for lower-proficiency students. Therefore, instructional approaches that encourage interaction, peer support, and active participation are needed to facilitate students' reading comprehension. One approach that supports positive interaction between students and fosters soft-skill development is cooperative learning, which allows students to work together, exchange ideas, express opinions, and motivate one another in a relaxed learning atmosphere (Wang, 2020).

Among various cooperative learning methods, Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) is one of the most extensively researched and implemented models. STAD consists of five instructional stages: class presentation, team study, individual quiz, improvement points, and rewards. The teacher typically conducts the class presentation to introduce the text and key vocabulary and demonstrate reading strategies before students work independently. Students work in heterogeneous groups to discuss the text and ask each other questions to deepen their understanding during the team study phase. At this stage, students engage in more in-depth discussions to uncover explicit meaning, draw deeper insights from implied meaning, and connect it to their prior knowledge. Individual quizzes ensure that all students are engaged in the group discussion and share a common understanding. Improvement points are then calculated by comparing quiz scores taken after the discussion with previous scores, focusing not on final results but on students' progress. The group with the greatest improvement receives rewards, so students understand that their individual progress contributes to the group's success.

STAD has been applied across various language skills, including speaking, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Student involvement in group work motivates students to be active and supportive, which can significantly improve understanding and participation (Morsi & Rezk, 2025; Ningrum et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2024). Therefore, teachers' perceptions of STAD play a significant role in shaping how the method is practiced and how effectively it promotes student learning. Several previous studies have examined teachers' perceptions of the use of Cooperative Learning. Overall, three gaps exist in these previous studies. First, Chakyarkandiyil & Prakasha (2023) examined perceptions of challenges and influencing factors in implementing CL in general, without exploring its benefits and implementation strategies. Second, Nguyen et al. (2021) investigated teachers' perceptions of the benefits, challenges, and strategies for implementing CL without focusing specifically on the STAD method. Third, while Ariesa et al. (2021) specifically

examined teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges in implementing the STAD method in Indonesia, the study focused solely on speaking skills. Research on teachers' perceptions of implementing STAD in reading instruction remains limited, as reading involves text comprehension and strategies. Additionally, previous studies were not conducted in a VHS setting, where students exhibit diverse characteristics, and the curriculum focuses on preparing students for workplace needs. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by specifically exploring English teachers' perceptions as a foundation influencing instructional strategies and classroom practices in teaching reading at VHS. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are English teachers' perceptions regarding the benefits of implementing STAD in teaching reading at VHS?
2. What challenges do English teachers encounter when implementing STAD in teaching reading at VHS?
3. What strategies do English teachers employ to overcome these implementation challenges?

METHOD

1. Research Design

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore English teachers' perceptions, experiences, and strategies in implementing the Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) method in teaching reading at Vocational High Schools. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research aimed to understand individuals' experiences and perspectives in natural settings. This study employed a qualitative research design because it aligned with the focus on human perceptions of social phenomena (Ary et al., 2018). Therefore, this method described teachers' perceptions, challenges, and strategies in implementing the STAD method in teaching reading at VHS.

2. Participants / Subjects

This study was conducted at a Vocational High School (VHS). The researchers used purposive sampling to select participants with experiences relevant to the research focus. The participants met the following criteria: (1) Vocational High School English teachers, (2) teachers who had implemented the STAD method in teaching reading, and (3) teachers who were willing to provide detailed explanations of their experiences and perceptions in implementing the STAD method. The study involved 5 English teachers. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research emphasizes the depth and richness of data rather than the number of participants. To provide contextual background for interpreting the interview excerpts presented in the findings, Table 1 summarizes the demographic and professional profiles of the five participating teachers, anonymized using the codes T1-T5.

Table 3.1 Participants' Profile

Participant	Gender	Years of ELT Teaching Experience	Educational Qualification		Major Taught		Grade Level Taught
T1	Female	8 years	S1	English Education	Office Department		1 st & 2 nd
T2	Female	5 years	S1	English Education	Computer Network Engineering & Visual Communication Design	and	1 st & 2 nd
T3	Male	34 years	S1	English Education	Culinary & Beauty Hairdressing	and	1 st & 2 nd
T4	Male	25 years	S1	English Education	Accounting & Institutional Finance Hospitality	and	1 st & 2 nd
T5	Male	8 years	S1	English Education	Visual Communication Design & Tourism Services		1 st & 2 nd

3. Instruments

This study used three research instruments: semi-structured interviews, an observation checklist, and field notes. The semi-structured interview served as the primary instrument and consisted of 15 questions designed to address the three research questions. The first section focused on teachers' perceptions, including their initial perceptions, motivation, and the perceived benefits and effectiveness of STAD in developing students' reading skills. The second section discusses students' conditions and responses based on teachers' observations, including students' reading abilities before implementing STAD, their responses and motivation during the activities, and the difficulties they faced. Meanwhile, the third section discusses the implementation of STAD, specifically how teachers ensured each stage proceeded smoothly and the strategies used to address challenges during implementation. Accordingly, the interview questions covered teachers' general perceptions, students' conditions and responses, and the strategies and challenges of implementing STAD. This structure aligns with the three research focuses: the benefits, challenges, and implementation strategies of STAD. The interview guide was adapted from Awada et al. (2020); Chakyarkandiyil & Prakasha (2023).

The study also used an observation checklist and field notes to supplement information obtained through interviews. Both instruments documented how

STAD was implemented in the classroom and were developed based on the five components of STAD (Slavin, 1995, 2014). The observation checklist covers several aspects of each stage of STAD implementation: class presentations, team study, quiz administration, individual progress assessment, and team recognition. Observations include explanations of learning objectives, content delivery, teaching of vocabulary and strategies, and modeling of understanding during the class presentation stage. Observed aspects include forming heterogeneous groups, group discussions, peer assistance, student participation, and teacher monitoring. The quiz administration stage involves task completion and assessing individual student understanding. Meanwhile, assessing individual progress considers previous scores and each student's opportunities to contribute. The team recognition phase includes announcing scores, presenting awards, and noting their impact on student motivation and participation. Field notes document aspects not fully covered by the checklist, such as classroom management practices, unexpected student behaviors, and instructional conditions.

All research instruments underwent expert evaluation by a senior ELT specialist. This process ensured the instruments had content validity and were appropriate for the research context. Credibility was achieved by triangulating data from interviews, classroom observations, and field notes. Dependability is maintained by consistently and systematically documenting the research process, including instrument development and data collection procedures. Meanwhile, confirmability is supported by maintaining an audit trail that includes raw data, coding decisions, and analytical memos. Thus, the research findings can be traced back to the data collected, rather than solely to the researcher's interpretations or biases.

4. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observation. The researcher obtained permission from the school and informed consent from all participants before the data collection. The researcher selected participants based on the predetermined criteria and scheduled interviews and observations according to the teachers' availability. The interviews were conducted face-to-face using the interview guide and were audio-recorded with the participants' permission. The researchers then conducted classroom observations using an observation checklist and field notes to support and verify the interview data. Finally, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed together with the observation notes for data analysis.

5. Data Analysis

The data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were analyzed using thematic analysis adapted from Braun & Clarke (2006). The researcher conducted data analysis through six interrelated phases. In the first phase, data familiarization, the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts and observation notes. The researcher made preliminary notes on ideas or patterns that emerged regarding teachers' perceptions of STAD implementation. In the

second phase, initial coding, the researcher systematically coded relevant portions of the data. Coding identified data related to teachers' perceptions, benefits, challenges, and strategies in implementing STAD. In the third phase, theme identification, the researcher grouped related codes into themes and subthemes. In the fourth phase, theme review, the identified themes were re-examined by reviewing the coded data and the entire research dataset. Themes lacking sufficient supporting data could be merged, separated, or eliminated. In the fifth phase, defining and naming themes, each theme was clarified through an appropriate definition and name. In the final phase, report writing, the researcher interpreted and presented the identified themes in relation to the research questions and relevant literature. The analysis results were also supported by excerpts from interview data and observations. The researcher conducted a peer debriefing with the research advisor to enhance the reliability of the coding process. During this process, the researcher discussed the initial codes, identified themes, and re-examined them against the raw data. This helped identify potential differences in interpretation and reduce researcher bias. The team resolved coding discrepancies through discussion until it reached consensus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Teachers' Perceptions of the Benefits of Implementing STAD in Teaching Reading at Vocational High School

The thematic analysis of the interview and observation data indicates that teachers have a positive perception of STAD implementation in teaching reading. Five main themes emerged through the coding process from the five participating teachers. These themes highlight STAD's benefits in both affective and learning aspects. The affective aspect is evident in students' increased enjoyment and self-confidence, while the learning aspect is evident in time efficiency and the structure of reading activities. This indicates that teachers recognize STAD's benefits across multiple aspects of the learning process simultaneously.

Table 4.1 Themes and Empirical Evidence of the Benefits

Aspects of Benefit	Supporting Evidence
Increased Enthusiasm	"The students will be more engaged and feel interested in experiencing this kind of method." (T4)
	"I want to make reading activities more interactive and less boring." (T5)
	"My students became more active during group discussion. They enjoy working in groups, especially on familiar topics. Some students were still shy but gradually began to participate. They show more interest in vocation-related texts." (T5)

Time Efficiency	“After the method was implemented, it took a maximum of two sessions, whereas before it could take 2 to 3 sessions for a single text.” (T1)
	“It can minimize the time needed to achieve the goals of the teaching-learning process.” (T5)
Peer Tutoring	“STAD supports my belief in student-centered learning. I believe students learn better through collaboration.” (T5)
	“Fast learners can help slow learners; there is mutual care among friends. So the social function is there.” (T3)
	“Each student can improve and enrich their vocabulary by gaining information from others.” (T4)
	“In vocational education, teamwork is important. It supports inclusive learning, making this group inclusive because of the diverse skill levels.” (T3)
	“So they work together, they look up the dictionary and find the meanings together. Also, understanding or comprehending the reading text together regularly.” (T1)
Self-Awareness	“If they’re in a group, maybe their responsibility is greater, right? When working in a group, they become more responsible and more active.” (T2)
	“There is much more massive student involvement. After getting involved, they are motivated and feel like, ‘I’m actually useful, it turns out.’” (T3)
	“Their friends can encourage them, ‘Let’s look it up in this dictionary. Don’t say you can’t, you can definitely do it’.” (T1)
	“Sometimes I tell each leader first. If a friend asks a question, don’t get angry.” (T1)
Social Interaction	“I believe that reading is a social process of constructing meaning, and STAD aligns perfectly with this. It changes the atmosphere in the classroom. Students didn’t just listen, but they also shared their opinions.” (T1)
	“Interdependence with peers, positive interdependence, that is, where they ask each other questions, help one another, and communicate. Their relationships with their peers aren’t as close as they were before STAD.” (T3)
	“Supporting classmates who are struggling, you know, to motivate them.” (T3)
	“Personally, I prefer teamwork. When working individually, I tend to be more passive. I like it, I often form groups because Vocational High School students are naturally active, you know.” (T2)

Several patterns emerge from the five benefit themes presented in Table 1. First, increased enthusiasm and social interaction appear to be interrelated in the

teachers' explanations. T1 and T5, for example, describe a shift in classroom atmosphere from passive listening to more active sharing. Second, teachers most frequently discussed peer guidance. Four out of five teachers (T1, T3, T4, and T5) mentioned this benefit. Teachers linked peer guidance to concrete reading activities, such as looking up vocabulary meanings together (T1) and expanding vocabulary by exchanging information with peers (T4). This finding supports the idea that groups with varying abilities can help students understand vocabulary and text content through collaboration. Third, self-awareness and social interaction were seen as complementary outcomes. Both are related to the presence of positive interdependence within the group (T3). They also feel more supported and encouraged by their peers because of greater responsibility within the group. This indicates that collaboration in STAD can increase student responsibility without reducing interaction within the group.

Overall, these findings are consistent with those of Wang (2020) and Slavin (1995), who explained that cooperative learning can support the development of students' academic and social skills. These findings also indicate that the "team study" phase in STAD can help students understand vocabulary and the meaning of text through interaction and collaboration with their peers.

2. Teachers' Perceptions of the Challenges of Implementing STAD in Teaching Reading at Vocational High School

Although the STAD method offers numerous benefits for VHS students' academic and social skills, several challenges were encountered during implementation. Classroom observation results support some of these challenges, indicating student engagement and difficulties in managing group activities. The data collected revealed seven interrelated themes.

Table 4.2 Themes and Empirical Evidence of the Challenges

Aspects of Challenge	Supporting Evidence
Students' Background Knowledge	"I initially thought that STAD would be challenging because my students have low English proficiency. Their vocabulary knowledge was very limited." (T5)
	"The first issue is the students' background knowledge; the only thing they're fluent in is daily speaking. Even in first grade, they're still learning the basics, like speaking daily. They can't do skimming or scanning here yet." (T1)
	"The first thing is the students' background knowledge itself. The students have a low profile and low cognitive ability." (T4)
	"So it is difficult when I have to put them into groups, but there are only a limited number of smart students." (T1)
	"The time required to prepare the material and select materials that meet those needs isn't easy." (T3)

Preparation Time-Consuming	“Then the second thing is designing their assignments. The reading assignments should be effective yet still challenging, you know. So they don’t get bored.” (T2)
	“It’s just that sometimes there’s a bit of difficulty, it takes a lot of time. So we need to set aside special time to form, because forming groups isn’t something you do haphazardly, right?” (T3)
	“So the class durations in a week are different from the regular ones. The adaptive and normative subjects have fewer class hours than the vocational subjects.” (T4)
Student Passivity	“Some students rely too much on stronger students in a group.” (T5)
	“They are lazy and low motivation because when they see there are so many words they don’t know.” (T1)
	“They’re still hesitant to ask their peers; there’s a mental block. It happens, but not to everyone. Some are apathetic because family background and other factors also play a role.” (T3)
Technology Dependency	“Some difficulties I have encountered here are related to students being ‘AI-holic’ or ‘Google-holic’. It’s a big problem because my students are too AI-holic. They don’t use their brain to complete their task.” (T4)
	“Now there’s AI, right? If they aren’t given more responsibility, it’s done in a minute. They can just click and it’s finished.” (T2)
Classroom Management	“Classroom management, how do we group students so they don’t get crowded.” (T2)
	“Maintaining student focus during group work.” (T5)
Role Distortion	“As for me, well, since the students are still in the same group, balancing independent work with group work is a bit of a challenge.” (T3)
Inadequate Facilities	“It is also about the English laboratory. Actually, I need a very specific room, which we call the English laboratory.” (T4)

These seven challenges in Table 2 fall into three interrelated categories. The first category relates to student readiness, such as limited background knowledge and student passivity. T1, T4, and T5 mentioned limited background knowledge. This condition is also linked to student passivity, as some students tend to withdraw or rely on peers with stronger abilities, particularly when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary. This aligns with T1’s observation that some students “are not yet able to skim or scan here”. These findings suggest that differences in student ability within the VHS class can make it harder to understand vocabulary and extract information from text. The second group relates to the structural and logistical demands teachers face. These challenges include time-consuming preparation, classroom management, and inadequate facilities. Teachers need to prepare materials appropriate for students’ abilities and organize groups within limited class time. This situation becomes even more challenging in vocational subjects, as T4 noted that the available class time is

relatively limited. The third group consists of technology dependence and role distortion. These two themes highlight challenges in implementing cooperative learning in STAD. T2 and T4 observe that easy access to AI tools allows some students to bypass the reading process altogether. Furthermore, T3 emphasized the importance of “balancing independent work with group work”. This indicates a challenge in maintaining students’ individual accountability during group activities, as discussed in Slavin (1995) framework.

Interestingly, the technology dependence described by teachers using the terms “AI-holic” and “Google-holic” was not found in previous studies on STAD or cooperative learning, such as those by Ariesa et al. (2021) and Chakyarkandiyil & Prakasha (2023). These findings suggest that technology dependence may be a newer challenge in implementing cooperative reading instruction.

3. Teachers’ Strategies in Overcoming Implementation Challenges in Teaching Reading at Vocational High Schools

Teachers needed to apply several strategies to address the challenges that arise to ensure the successful implementation of the Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) method. As explained below, these strategies are not applied in isolation but are often paired with specific challenges identified in Table 2, reflecting a largely reactive, context-sensitive classroom management approach rather than a fixed, predetermined implementation plan.

Table 4.3 Themes and Empirical Evidence of the Strategies

Aspects of Strategies	Supporting Evidence
Continuous Monitoring	“I have to monitor the students from the moment they enter the classroom until the end of the session. So I have to check each group.” (T1)
	“I provide more guidance during group discussion.” (T5)
	“Monitoring their progress from both passive and active aspects. Ensuring they’re actually working on it, maybe by walking around and monitoring their work. There’s also a time limit, perhaps within a certain timeframe.” (T2)
Preparation	“Student Worksheet (LKPD) that supports the learning process. If the LKPD isn’t good, it can’t bridge the gap from one concept to another. The second point is that the material must range from very simple to complex.” (T3)
	“I sometimes simplify the stage to suit the students’ level. I use bilingual instruction.” (T5)
	“Sometimes I combine; it’s not just STAD. I combine it with a text-based approach. So I have to evaluate and improve it.” (T1)
	“Forming a group that meets the criteria I want and preparing the material in advance so that the material can be meaningful to the students.” (T3)

Teacher's Credibility	“Credibility. I do make jokes, you know. Are there any students who get out of line? None. Why? I’m very firm. There are boundaries and there are solutions. I’m very firm, very strict with children who like to bully.” (T3)
	“The first thing is that I have to be patient because this is my students’ problem.” (T4)
Motivation & Rewards	“I prepare some presents for them as rewards, like candy, ice cream, and extra points.” (T4)
	“We should value the active students and remind the less active ones to adjust their efforts in class and during learning. Even if your grades are very poor, as long as you’re diligent and responsible, willing to take on tasks, even if you make mistakes here and there, it’s okay, and I value that.” (T3)
	“I remind them, ‘You’ll be given various tasks, so you must be smart about building teamwork. Don’t just rely on close friends if they can’t contribute to your group because your choices determine your group’s success.’” (T3)
Extra Classes	“So I set up study sessions outside of regular class hours. They can last up to 2 or 3 hours.” (T3)

Overall, the five strategies presented in Table 3 can be mapped back to the specific challenges discussed in Table 2, indicating that teachers’ responses are largely tailored rather than generic continuous monitoring, for example, is primarily aimed at countering student passivity and role distortion, allowing teachers to detect and guide students who are withdrawing from active participation in their teams. Thorough preparation, including developing differentiated worksheets (LKPD) and bilingual instruction (T5), directly addresses gaps created by students’ limited background knowledge while also tackling the time-consuming, logistically demanding work of designing STAD-based reading materials. Maintaining teacher credibility, exemplified by T3’s emphasis on firmness balanced with patience, serves primarily as a classroom management strategy, establishing behavioral boundaries for effective group work. Motivation and rewards range from tangible incentives such as candy and extra points (T4) to verbal encouragement for passive students, while reinforcing individual accountability by explicitly linking rewards to each student’s contributions rather than the group’s collective performance. Finally, supplementary classes are a more resource-intensive response, used to compensate for limited instructional time in vocational subjects and to give students with larger gaps in prior knowledge extra opportunities to catch up outside regular class hours.

Overall, these strategies indicate that teachers approach STAD not as a fixed procedure applied uniformly, but as a flexible framework that requires continuous adaptation in response to the specific challenges that arise in their vocational classrooms.

Discussion

1. Teachers' Perceptions of the Benefits of Implementing STAD in Teaching Reading at Vocational High School

The findings indicate that teachers view the implementation of the STAD method positively. Teachers found that STAD increased students' enthusiasm, making them more engaged in reading instruction. Collaborative activities that involve shared responsibility can enhance students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Gillies, 2016). Additionally, the findings indicated that STAD can reduce the time required to develop reading skills. Cooperative learning within the STAD method facilitates students' discussion of difficult vocabulary, effective understanding of texts, and division of tasks to achieve shared goals (Slavin, 1995). Furthermore, Students can become more independent and effective in understanding material if provided with the appropriate method (Suhaila et al., 2025).

Another finding relates to peer teaching, which teachers consider one of the STAD method's greatest benefits. Grouping students with heterogeneous abilities allows them to help one another academically (Slavin, 1995). Similarly, social constructivism occurs when students interact and collaborate with peers to understand material (Johnson & Johnson, 2019). In addition to academic benefits, teachers believe the STAD method can develop students' social skills, such as teamwork, and improve communication skills that will benefit them in the workplace. Cooperative learning not only improves students' academic abilities but also fosters empathy, tolerance, and communication skills (Gillies, 2008). Further findings show that, in addition to improving students' social skills, STAD enhances students' self-awareness.

2. Teachers' Perceptions of the Challenges of Implementing STAD in Teaching Reading at Vocational High School

Although teachers view the Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) method as a positive approach, the findings also reveal challenges in its implementation. Linguistic knowledge, including vocabulary knowledge, significantly influenced EFL students' reading comprehension (Hamid et al., 2020). Differences in students' academic abilities make it more difficult to teach English using cooperative learning methods (Padauleng et al., 2025).

Another challenge is related to preparation, which requires more time. Systematic preparation and structured instruction influence the success of implementing the STAD method (Slavin, 1995). Cooperative learning can create participation asymmetry, in which high achievers dominate the discussion while low achievers remain passive (Cohen & Lotan, 2014). Furthermore, this study's results support Chakyarkandiyil & Prakasha (2023), who found that the main barriers to implementing the STAD method stem from students' low collaboration skills and lack of learning habits. In addition to these structural barriers, this study also identifies a prominent contemporary challenge: students' heavy dependence on technology, which teachers refer to as "AI-holic" and "Google-holic." This issue relates closely to the technology dependency framework, in which dependence on artificial intelligence (AI) occurs when digital tools begin to replace essential human cognitive processes

(Zhang et al., 2024). Rather than viewing reliance on AI solely as an obstacle, teachers can use AI as a tool to help students critically analyze texts. They can ask students to compare their own interpretations with AI-generated summaries and evaluate the differences. The use of AI can become a reflective activity that helps improve students' understanding, rather than simply being used to obtain answers quickly in this way.

The next challenge identified in this study relates to classroom management. Controlling noise levels, enforcing discipline, and managing the classroom are crucial challenges in cooperative learning (Nguyen et al., 2021; Padauleng et al., 2025). Another challenge encountered during the implementation of STAD was role distortion, in which some students became so dependent on group discussions that they neglected their individual responsibilities when completing quizzes. Asymmetry in participation and excessive dependence on certain group members are relatively common excesses in cooperative learning (Cohen & Lotan, 2014). These findings highlight a challenge in STAD: balancing group cooperation with individual accountability. Cooperative learning can be effective when each member is evaluated and rewarded based on their individual performance, rather than solely on the group's overall results (Slavin, 1995). The teacher in this study conducted ongoing monitoring of group learning activities. The teacher monitored to identify students who were less engaged in group discussions. The teacher also incorporated individual quizzes as an important component of the learning process. Students were reminded that peer help during group activities was intended to support understanding, not to replace the understanding they were expected to demonstrate. These findings align with Cohen & Lotan (2014), who explain that differences in participation levels in cooperative learning need active management. This can be achieved by assigning clear responsibilities and providing clear assessments, ensuring that every student remains engaged in the learning process.

Overall, the findings indicate that challenges in implementing the STAD method are influenced by students' academic abilities, learning preparation, classroom conditions, technology's impact, and students' psychological readiness. However, teachers continue to implement the STAD method while evaluating shortcomings in its application because they believe in the method's benefits for developing students' academic and social skills.

3. Teachers' Strategies in Overcoming Implementation Challenges in Teaching Reading at Vocational High Schools

The findings reveal that teachers use several strategies to address challenges that arise during implementation of the STAD method. The first strategy involves consistent monitoring throughout the learning process. This interactive approach directly eliminates student passivity and aligns with the findings of Nguyen et al. (2021), who suggest the importance of consistently monitoring group progress to minimize classroom management barriers and ensure active participation from every member.

The next strategy involves preparing materials and carefully planned, precise learning activities. Findings on the importance of this preparation include providing a

pre-reading vocabulary list. Proper preparation enables teachers to facilitate learning more effectively and minimize potential challenges during classroom implementation (Slavin, 2014). The effectiveness of material delivery and the clarity of instructions are directly correlated with students' comprehension capacity (Suranto & Zalukhu, 2025)

Furthermore, teachers can adapt the classroom environment by integrating the STAD method with other approaches, such as text-based or genre-based approaches, as needed. The articulation of classroom practices is greatly influenced by teachers' perceptions and adaptability (Acharya, 2025). Positive support from the learning environment can enhance self-confidence and foster positive interactions among students (Harianingsih & Jusoh, 2022). This strategy reflects the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) matrix by Ryan & Deci (2020), which states that while extrinsic rewards can serve as an initial stimulus, validating students' effort is key to sustaining internal commitment. Peer motivation within a group and the provision of rewards can stimulate individual student motivation, which in turn contributes to the group's collective success (Slavin et al., 2003).

As Sobandi et al. (2020) argue, adequate learning facilities can enhance students' engagement and support the implementation of learning activities more effectively, particularly in cooperative learning settings such as STAD where group discussion and student interaction are central. Additionally, to support students' limited background knowledge, teachers provide vocabulary before learning and implement step-by-step learning activities. Strategic learning helps students strengthen their understanding (Suhaila et al., 2025).

These findings indicate that implementing STAD in reading instruction at VHS must take students' digital habits into account. Teachers should not view AI solely as an obstacle to learning. Teachers can use various activities to ensure AI serves as a tool to support, rather than replace, students' understanding. Such activities may include providing vocabulary before reading, assigning text sections to each group member through jigsaw reading, and asking students to offer a brief explanation before using digital tools. In addition, teachers need to allow sufficient time to prepare STAD materials and assign clear roles within each group. This can help reduce disparities in participation levels among group members and maintain individual accountability during group activities. Thus, cooperative learning can continue without diminishing each student's involvement.

This study has several limitations, including that the sample consisted of only five teachers from a single vocational school, so the findings cannot yet be generalized widely. In addition, the data came primarily from teachers' perceptions and did not include direct measurements of students' reading comprehension. The theme of dependence on AI was also identified through general observations and did not involve specific instruments to examine students' interactions with AI.

CONCLUSION

This study explores English teachers' perceptions of implementing Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD) in teaching reading at Vocational High School (VHS). The findings indicate that teachers hold a positive perception of STAD implementation in teaching reading, as the method was perceived to support the development of students' academic abilities, motivation, social skills, cooperation, and self-awareness. However, several challenges remain, including teacher readiness, classroom management, students' varying ability levels, and the need for appropriate learning strategies during implementation. Based on these findings, several pedagogical recommendations emerge for teachers intending to implement STAD in reading instruction: they should prepare thoroughly, particularly by adapting relevant texts and forming balanced, heterogeneous groups. Additionally, teachers should evaluate implementation consistently, especially during the team discussion phase, to ensure all students participate equally, avoid dependence on peers, and prevent role distortion. This study was limited to VHS teachers' perceptions on a small scale rather than a direct assessment of student learning outcomes. Future research should examine STAD implementation across different contexts, skills, educational levels, student perceptions, and larger participant groups to provide more comprehensive findings on its application in English language learning. Furthermore, future studies could incorporate student perspectives and assessments of students' reading comprehension to provide more comprehensive results on implementing STAD in teaching reading.

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