Archipel: Journal of Indonesian Interdisciplinary Studies
E-ISSN : 3124-6621
Vol. (2) No. (3) November 2026
https://ojsap.com/index.php/archipel
DOI : https://doi.org/10.65739/archipel.v2i3.100

Implementing the Discussion Method to Improve Fifth-Grade Students' Motivation to Learn Indonesian at MIS Nurul Iman Pematang Gajah

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Article Information:
Received October 02, 2026
Revised October 25, 2026
Accepted November 10, 2026
Published November 19, 2026

Keywords: *discussion method; learning motivation; Indonesian language; explanatory text; classroom action research*

Abstract

This study addresses the low learning motivation of fifth-grade students in Indonesian language lessons at MIS Nurul Iman Pematang Gajah. Low motivation was evident in students' reluctance to ask questions, their lack of confidence in expressing opinions, and the dominance of lecture-based teaching. The study aimed to determine whether and how the discussion method could improve students' learning motivation. It employed a Kemmis and McTaggart classroom action research design over two cycles of three meetings each, involving 26 fifth-grade students and using explanatory texts as learning material. Data were collected through a 20-item motivation questionnaire based on Uno's six indicators, observation sheets of teacher and student activities, interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed descriptively in percentages and qualitatively through data reduction, display, and verification. The results show that classroom learning motivation rose from 71.59% at pre-cycle to 73.99% in Cycle I and 79.18% in Cycle II, exceeding the 75% success criterion. The number of students with an individual score of at least 75% increased from 14 (53.85%) to 25 (96.15%). Teacher activity rose from 85.56% to 88.89%, and student activity from 83.33% to 88.89%. The largest gain occurred after the discussions were strengthened with contextual prompting questions, clear group roles, and teacher appreciation. The discussion method built around explanatory texts is therefore a feasible strategy for improving motivation to learn Indonesian in Islamic elementary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Basic education is the foundation of human resource development because it is at this level that learning habits, character, and language skills begin to form. Indonesia's Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System defines education as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and process in which learners actively develop their potential. The phrase "actively develop" positions students as agents rather than passive recipients in the learning process. National education is also intended to shape citizens who are creative, knowledgeable, responsible, and democratic (Hermanto, 2020). Such goals are

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difficult to achieve when classrooms are still dominated by one-way teacher explanation.

Among the subjects taught in Islamic elementary schools (*madrasah ibtidaiyah*, MI), Indonesian language plays a central role. It serves not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for thinking and a bridge to understanding other subjects. Indonesian language learning in elementary schools aims to enable students to communicate effectively and politely in both spoken and written forms (Wahyuni et al., 2023). This demand has become more urgent because Indonesian students' reading literacy remains low. In PISA 2022, Indonesia's reading score was 359, a 12-point decline from PISA 2018 and among the lowest in ASEAN (OECD, 2023; Databoks, 2023). This low achievement suggests that problems in language learning cannot be solved merely by adding more content. They require a change in how students engage with texts.

Student engagement in learning is strongly determined by motivation. Learning motivation is understood as an internal or external drive that initiates, directs, and sustains learning behavior toward a particular goal (Fernando et al., 2024). Uno (2018) breaks learning motivation down into six indicators: the desire to succeed, the drive and need to learn, hopes and aspirations, appreciation in learning, engaging learning activities, and a conducive learning environment. The last two indicators show that motivation is not solely innate to students. It is also shaped by the activities and classroom climate that teachers create. Self-determination theory supports this view. Intrinsic motivation grows when students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met within learning activities (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In other words, the teaching method is one of the most tangible levers teachers have to influence student motivation.

Conditions in the fifth-grade class at MIS Nurul Iman Pematang Gajah, Muaro Jambi Regency, showed that this lever had not been used optimally. Initial observation revealed that Indonesian language lessons were still dominated by lecturing. Students appeared passive, rarely asked questions, lacked confidence when asked for their opinions, and tended to wait for the teacher's instructions. Initial interviews with students revealed that they quickly became bored and found the material hard to understand when they only listened to explanations. Some students also felt afraid or embarrassed to speak in front of the class even though they had ideas. The classroom teacher acknowledged difficulty in raising students' enthusiasm and in finding more effective strategies. Mapped onto Uno's (2018) indicators, these conditions most clearly weakened the indicators of engaging learning activities, the drive to learn, and the confidence to pursue success. The problem was not primarily students' cognitive ability. The main problem was the lack of opportunities for students to use language actively.

The discussion method offers a solution that fits the nature of this problem. The discussion method is a way of presenting lessons in which students face a problem, in the form of a problematic statement or question, to be examined and solved together (Maryati, 2022). Through discussion, students exchange information, defend their opinions, and seek solutions together with the teacher and their peers (Pakaya, 2019). A study at MAS Tarbiyatul Islamiyah showed that the discussion method fostered active learning because students were directly involved in critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Ruslandi et al., 2025). Internationally, the meta-analysis by Murphy et al. (2009) found that classroom discussion affects students' comprehension of text. This effect appeared mainly

when discussion required students to interpret and reason about what they read rather than merely recall information. Howe et al. (2019) also showed that classroom dialogue in which students elaborate on and respond to others' ideas is associated with better learning outcomes.

However, evidence on the effect of interaction-based learning on motivation is not uniform. The meta-analysis by Damayanti et al. (2023) reported that the effect of cooperative learning on learning motivation was larger at the junior high school level than at the elementary and senior high levels. A meta-analysis by Shobirin et al. (2025) on cooperative models in elementary schools even found a statistically non-significant effect on affective learning outcomes. These findings are a reminder that forming groups does not automatically foster motivation. The quality of the discussion task, the assignment of roles, and the way teachers manage interaction are decisive. Johnson and Johnson (2009) emphasize that group work is effective only when positive interdependence and individual accountability are present. Without these two elements, discussions are easily dominated by a few prominent students while the others remain passive. This weakness is also recognized in studies of the discussion method in Indonesia (Sudiyono, 2020).

Previous Indonesian studies have generally treated the discussion method as a means of improving learning outcomes or active participation, for example in Biology (Maryati, 2022), active learning in Islamic senior high schools (Ruslandi et al., 2025), and learning outcomes in general (Pakaya, 2019). Research that specifically makes learning motivation the main variable in Indonesian language learning in Islamic elementary schools remains limited. Moreover, most studies do not link the design of discussion tasks to the characteristics of the text genre being studied. Yet explanatory texts, which present sequences of processes and cause-and-effect relationships, naturally provide problematic questions worth discussing, such as why an event happens and what its consequences are. Motivation measurement in many classroom action research studies also relies only on class averages. As a result, students who remain behind a rising average often go unnoticed.

Based on these gaps, this study offers three contributions (novelty). First, the discussion method was designed to follow the structure of explanatory texts. Each group task required students to identify the topic, trace the process, and reason about cause-and-effect relationships in events close to their own experience, such as how rain forms, keeping the school environment clean, and flooding. Second, the improvements between cycles focused on the elements that the literature identifies as decisive for successful discussion. These elements are contextual prompting questions, role assignments that ensure individual accountability, and priority speaking turns for passive students. Third, motivation was measured by triangulating a questionnaire based on Uno's six indicators, observation of teacher and student activities, and individual mastery analysis, so that improvement is not read from the class average alone. The setting of a private Islamic elementary school in rural Muaro Jambi also adds evidence from a context rarely represented in the literature.

In line with this background, the study aims to answer two questions. The first question is whether the discussion method can improve fifth-grade students' motivation to learn Indonesian at MIS Nurul Iman Pematang Gajah. The second question is how the discussion method is implemented so that it improves that motivation. Theoretically, the findings are expected to enrich research on the relationship between discussion design and learning motivation in basic education.

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Practically, the findings are expected to provide concrete steps that MI teachers can adapt in Indonesian language lessons.

METHODS

This study used a collaborative classroom action research (CAR) design based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model. The model takes the form of a spiral in which each cycle consists of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Kemmis et al., 2014). CAR was chosen because the problem arose in the researcher's own classroom and its solution needed to be tested step by step in real teaching. The researcher acted as the implementer of the action, while the fifth-grade classroom teacher served as the observer.

Setting and participants. The study was conducted at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Swasta (MIS) Nurul Iman, a private Islamic elementary school in Pematang Gajah Village, Jambi Luar Kota District, Muaro Jambi Regency, Jambi Province. The school was founded in 2002 and holds B accreditation. The participants were all 26 fifth-grade students. The objects of the study were the implementation of the discussion method and students' learning motivation in Indonesian language lessons on explanatory texts.

Action procedure. The study began with a pre-cycle stage to capture baseline motivation through observation and a questionnaire. Cycle I took place on 3, 6, and 10 November 2025 using the explanatory texts "How Rain Forms" and "Keeping the School Environment Clean". Cycle II took place on 13, 17, and 20 November 2025 using the texts "Flooding in the School Environment" and "Keeping the School Environment Clean". Each meeting followed the steps of the discussion method: forming groups, explaining discussion rules, distributing the text and problem questions, teacher guidance, presenting results, responses from other groups, and drawing conclusions together (Sudiyono, 2020). The motivation questionnaire was administered at the third meeting of each cycle. The full procedure is shown in Figure 1.

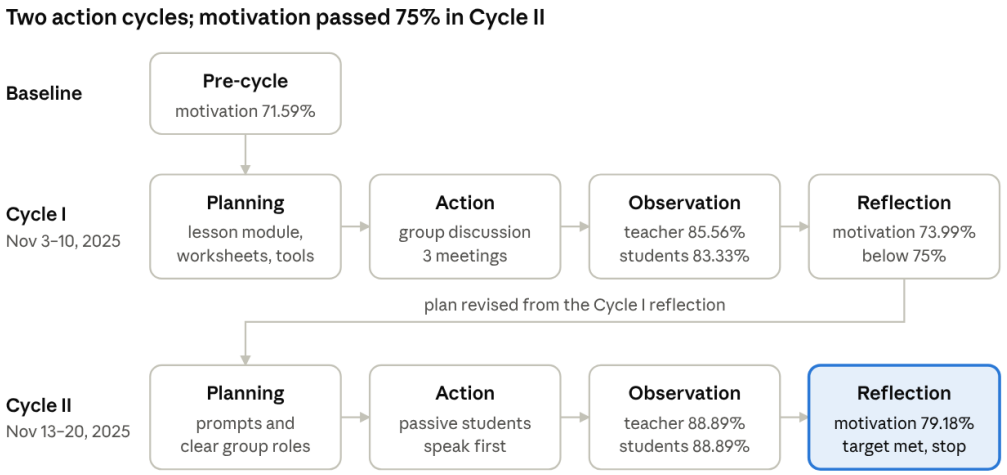


Figure 1. Classroom action research flow based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model (Source: Research design, 2025)

The Cycle I reflection produced three improvements for Cycle II: prompting questions linked to students' own experiences, clear roles within each group, and priority speaking turns for students who had previously been passive.

Instruments. The main instrument was a learning motivation questionnaire

of 20 closed statements on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire was developed from Uno's (2018) six indicators of learning motivation, as shown in Table 1. Supporting instruments were teacher and student activity observation sheets, each covering 18 aspects rated on a 1–5 scale, an eight-question interview guide for the classroom teacher, and documentation in the form of lesson modules, activity photos, and the school profile.

Table 1. Blueprint of the learning motivation questionnaire

No	Indicator (Uno, 2018)	Item numbers	Number of items
1	Desire to succeed	1–4	4
2	Drive and need to learn	5–7	3
3	Hopes and aspirations	8–10	3
4	Appreciation in learning	11–13	3
5	Engaging learning activities	14–17	4
6	Conducive learning environment	18–20	3
	Total		20

Source : Adapted from Uno (2018)

Data analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively as percentages, without inferential statistics, in keeping with the nature of CAR. The percentages of individual and classroom learning motivation, as well as of teacher and student activity, were calculated with the following formula.

$$P = (F / N) \times 100\%$$

P is the percentage, F is the score obtained, and N is the maximum score. The maximum questionnaire score is 80 per student and 2,080 for the whole class (20 items × 4 × 26 students). The maximum observation score is 90 (18 aspects × 5). Observation results were categorized as very good (81–100%), good (61–80%), fairly good (41–60%), poor (21–40%), and very poor (0–20%). Qualitative data from observations, interviews, and field notes were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014).

Success criteria. The action was considered successful if classroom learning motivation reached at least 75%. This criterion was complemented by individual mastery, namely that at least 75% of students obtained an individual motivation score of at least 75%, in line with the school's Learning Objective Achievement Criteria (KKTP).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion method raised fifth-grade students' learning motivation from 71.59% at pre-cycle to 79.18% in Cycle II, and both success criteria were met in the second cycle. This section presents the baseline, the results of each cycle, and the comparison across stages, and then discusses why the improvement occurred.

Baseline learning motivation

At the pre-cycle stage, 26 students completed the questionnaire, yielding a total score of 1,489 out of a maximum of 2,080, or 71.59%. This figure was below the 75% success criterion. Initial observation showed symptoms consistent with this figure. Students quickly became bored when listening to explanations, rarely asked or answered questions, and most were reluctant to express their opinions. The item-level recapitulation allows the baseline to be mapped onto Uno's (2018) indicators, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Pre-cycle motivation scores by indicator

Indicator	Items	Score obtained	Maximum score	Percentage
Desire to succeed	1–4	289	416	69.47%
Drive and need to learn	5–7	219	312	70.19%
Appreciation in learning	11–13	221	312	70.83%
Engaging learning activities	14–17	299	416	71.88%
Conducive learning environment	18–20	226	312	72.44%
Hopes and aspirations	8–10	235	312	75.32%
Total	1–20	1,489	2,080	71.59%

Source *:* Pre-cycle questionnaire data, processed (2025)

Table 2 shows that only the hopes and aspirations indicator exceeded 75%. The other five indicators remained below this threshold, with the lowest scores for the desire to succeed (69.47%) and the drive and need to learn (70.19%). The lowest-scoring item was item 12, feeling pleased when one's learning is appreciated by the teacher or classmates, with a score of 66 out of 104 (63.46%). This pattern suggests that students did have aspirations but had not yet found learning experiences that made them want to try and feel that their efforts were valued. This gap was the target of the discussion method.

Results of Cycle I

Cycle I consisted of three meetings using explanatory texts on how rain forms and on keeping the school environment clean. In the first meeting, many students remained passive and simply followed their peers' answers. After the teacher encouraged them and gave every group member a turn, some students began to answer and ask questions within their groups. By the third meeting, interaction among students had increased, and several students began responding to other groups' presentations.

Observation showed teacher activity at 85.56% and student activity at 83.33%, both in the very good category. The motivation questionnaire yielded a total score of 1,539 out of 2,080, or 73.99%. This was an increase of 2.40 percentage points from the pre-cycle but still below the target. Individually, 14 of 26 students (53.85%) obtained a score of at least 75%, so the individual mastery criterion was not yet met either.

Reflection with the classroom teacher identified four obstacles. Some students remained passive during discussion, willingness to ask questions was uneven, several students relied on more active peers, and presentation time was not managed effectively. Based on these findings, Cycle II was designed with prompting questions close to students' experiences, clear roles within each group, and priority speaking turns for students who had previously been silent.

Results of Cycle II

In Cycle II, the teacher opened lessons with prompting questions such as "What happens if there is a lot of litter around the school?". The discussions then used texts on flooding in the school environment and keeping the school environment clean. Each group member was given a specific responsibility. Students who had been passive in Cycle I were asked to give their opinions before the more dominant students. The observation results of teacher and student activities in both cycles are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Observation results of teacher and student activities

Aspect observed	Cycle I	Cycle II	Category in Cycle II
Teacher activity (score out of 90)	77 (85.56%)	80 (88.89%)	Very good
Student activity (score out of 90)	75 (83.33%)	80 (88.89%)	Very good

Source : Observation sheets, processed (2025)

Student activity rose by 5.56 percentage points, more than the 3.33-point rise in teacher activity. This difference indicates that the teacher's improved management of discussion translated into broader student engagement. The Cycle II motivation questionnaire yielded a total score of 1,647 out of 2,080, or 79.18%. The distribution of individual scores in both cycles is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of individual student motivation scores

Individual score range	Cycle I (students)	Cycle II (students)
80% or higher	0	14
75% to below 80%	14	11
70% to below 75%	11	1
Below 70%	1	0
Lowest–highest score	68.75%–76.25%	73.75%–82.50%

Source : Cycle I and Cycle II questionnaire data, processed (2025)

All 26 students improved their individual scores from Cycle I to Cycle II, with gains of between 2 and 6 score points. The number of students reaching at least 75% increased from 14 to 25 (96.15%). Only one student remained below the threshold, at 73.75%. This student also had the lowest score in Cycle I, so an improvement was still recorded even though the target was not reached.

Comparison across stages

Figure 2 summarizes the development of both success criteria from the pre-cycle to Cycle II.

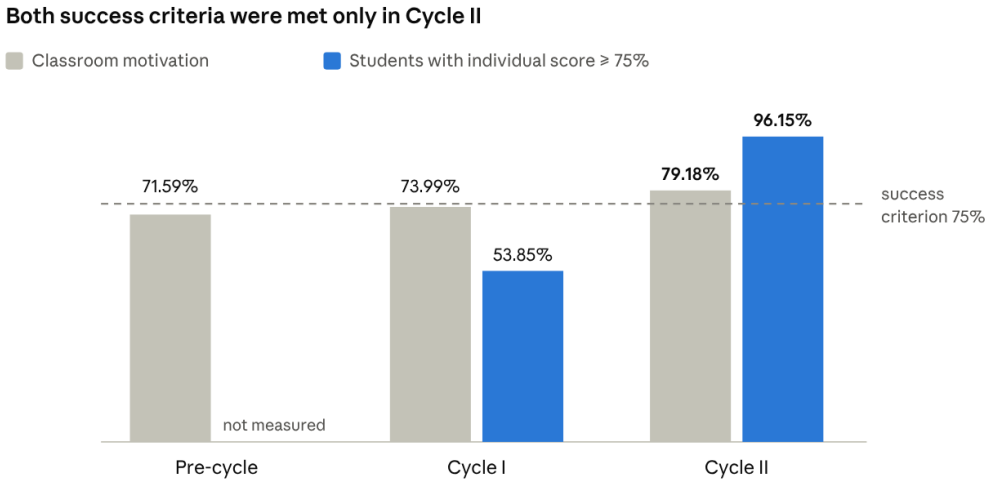


Figure 2. Classroom learning motivation and individual mastery by stage (Source: Questionnaire data, processed, 2025)

Classroom motivation rose by 7.59 percentage points from the baseline, and the gain from Cycle I to Cycle II (5.19 points) was more than twice the gain in Cycle I (2.40 points). Individual mastery rose much more sharply, from 53.85% to 96.15%. Because both criteria were exceeded, the study ended after Cycle II.

Discussion

The discussion method improves motivation, but its design determines

the size of the gain. The most important finding of this study is not simply that motivation increased, but that most of the increase occurred after the discussion was redesigned. In Cycle I, group discussions were already running and both teacher and student observations were rated very good. Yet motivation rose by only 2.40 points, and nearly half of the students had not reached the individual threshold. This is consistent with the meta-analyses by Damayanti et al. (2023) and Shobirin et al. (2025), which found that the effect of cooperative learning on the affective outcomes of elementary students is not always strong. Forming groups and assigning a topic proved insufficient. The gain only accelerated after Cycle II added role assignments and priority speaking turns for passive students. These two elements embody the positive interdependence and individual accountability that Johnson and Johnson (2009) identify as conditions for successful group work.

The improvement rested on students who had initially lagged behind. Individual analysis reveals what the class average conceals. The 5.19-point gain in classroom motivation in Cycle II looks moderate, but the number of students reaching mastery grew by 11. This happened because students in the 70–75% range in Cycle I were pushed past the threshold. At the same time, 14 students moved into the range of 80% or higher. This pattern is consistent with the Cycle II policy of giving passive students the first turn. Within self-determination theory, a guaranteed opportunity to speak meets the need for competence, while group work meets the need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When both needs are met, previously silent students gain an internal reason to participate.

Explanatory texts provide worthwhile material for discussion. The discussion questions in this study followed the structure of explanatory texts: what happens, why it happens, what its consequences are, and what can be done. Cause-and-effect questions of this kind have no single memorized answer, so every student has something to contribute from their own experience of rain, litter, or flooding. Murphy et al. (2009) showed that discussion is most beneficial when it requires students to interpret a text rather than merely recall its content. Mercer and Howe (2012) describe this form of conversation as exploratory talk, in which students test one another's ideas with reasons. The link to everyday experience also addresses the indicators of engaging learning activities and a conducive learning environment in Uno's (2018) framework, both of which were below 75% at pre-cycle.

Teacher appreciation addressed the weakest indicator. At pre-cycle, the lowest-scoring item concerned appreciation of learning outcomes. Throughout both cycles, the teacher consistently reinforced and praised students who dared to ask, answer, and present, and other groups were asked to give positive responses. Sardiman (2018) states that praise and recognition are effective forms of extrinsic motivation when given at the moment students show effort. This finding is also in line with Ruslandi et al. (2025), who reported that discussion fosters active participation among Islamic school students when the teacher acts as a facilitator who encourages participation.

Limitations. This study involved one class of 26 students and two cycles conducted over less than three weeks. Therefore, the findings cannot yet be generalized, and the durability of the motivation gain has not been tested. Motivation was measured with a self-report questionnaire completed immediately after the lessons, so responses may have been influenced by students' wish to give expected answers. Individual scores at the pre-cycle stage were also unavailable, so individual mastery could only be compared between Cycle I and Cycle II. In addition,

observation was conducted by the classroom teacher, who was involved in the study. Future research could add independent observers, measure motivation several weeks after the action ends, and compare results with other classes.

CONCLUSIONS

The discussion method was shown to improve fifth-grade students' motivation to learn Indonesian at MIS Nurul Iman Pematang Gajah. Classroom learning motivation rose from 71.59% at pre-cycle to 73.99% in Cycle I and 79.18% in Cycle II. The number of students with an individual score of at least 75% also increased from 14 to 25 out of 26. Both success criteria were therefore exceeded in Cycle II.

The improvement was achieved through group discussions that followed the structure of explanatory texts. Students read the text, traced processes and cause-and-effect relationships, presented their results, responded to other groups, and drew conclusions with the teacher. The largest gain occurred after the discussions were strengthened with contextual prompting questions, clear group roles, priority speaking turns for passive students, and teacher appreciation. At this stage, teacher and student activities both reached 88.89%, in the very good category.

MI teachers are encouraged to use the discussion method in Indonesian language lessons by giving every group member a clear role and linking discussion questions to students' experiences. Future research should involve more classes and independent observers, and should measure how well motivation is sustained some time after the action ends.

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