

## INTEGRATING COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND MUSIC: THE TALKING STICK STRATEGY TO IMPROVE SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE ACHIEVEMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** Grammar mastery, particularly the simple present tense, is crucial in developing students' English proficiency. However, many junior high school students still face challenges in applying this tense accurately, leading to low achievement and reduced motivation in grammar lessons. Combining music and the Talking Stick creates a pedagogical synergy that targets the affective, social, and cognitive aspects of learning. This study aimed to examine the effect of integrating the Talking Stick technique with music on students' achievement in the simple present tense. This research employed a quantitative quasi-experimental design with a one-group pre-test and post-test format. The sample of the study consisted of 12 seventh-grade students of SMP Taman Harapan Sidoarjo in the 2024/2025 academic year. Data were collected through simple present tense tests and analysed using the Wilcoxon test. This is evidenced by the increase in their average scores, from 60.3 in the pre-test to 74.7 in the post-test, indicating a meaningful academic gain. These findings demonstrated that combining the Talking Stick technique with music can effectively enhance students' achievement in the simple present tense, encourage active participation, and create a more engaging learning atmosphere. This approach can be a valuable alternative to traditional teaching methods, especially in junior high school.

**Keywords:** *Talking stick, music, cooperative learning, simple present tense*

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## INTEGRASI PEMBELAJARAN KOOPERATIF DAN MUSIK : STRATEGI *TALKING STICK* DALAM MENINGKATKAN PENGUASAAN SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE

**ABSTRAK:** Penguasaan tata bahasa, khususnya simple present tense, memegang peranan penting dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbahasa Inggris siswa. Namun, banyak siswa SMP masih mengalami kesulitan dalam menerapkan tenses ini secara tepat, yang berdampak pada rendahnya capaian akademik dan motivasi belajar mereka. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui pengaruh penerapan teknik Talking Stick yang dipadukan dengan musik terhadap pencapaian siswa dalam simple present tense. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain eksperimen semu (one group pre-test and post-test design). sampel penelitian adalah 12 siswa kelas VII SMP Taman Harapan Sidoarjo tahun ajaran 2024/2025. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes tata bahasa kemudian dianalisis menggunakan uji Wilcoxon. Hasil penelitian memperlihatkan bahwa hipotesis alternatif (Ha) diterima, sedangkan hipotesis nol (Ho) ditolak. Temuan ini membuktikan bahwa kombinasi teknik Talking Stick dengan musik secara efektif dapat meningkatkan prestasi tata Bahasa siswa, mendorong aktivitas kelas, dan menciptakan suasana pembelajaran yang lebih menarik.

**Kata Kunci:** *Talking Stick, music, cooperative learning, simple present tense*

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## INTRODUCTION

English is a global lingua franca that underpins communication across academic, professional, and social domains. In Indonesia, English is a compulsory subject from junior high school onward. Grammar, especially the simple present tense, is fundamental in English teaching. This tense is used in everyday conversation, written texts, and academic assignments because it expresses habits, routines, general truths, and scheduled actions. However, many learners struggle to apply it correctly, particularly with subject-verb agreement and using the endings *-s/-es* for the third-person singular, a difficulty highlighted in various qualitative and quantitative studies (Rusdin, 2022).

Grammar is a basic competency that plays a crucial role in English language acquisition. This ability impacts all language skills, such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Therefore, for EFL learners, learning grammar communicatively is crucial for achieving fluency in English, both orally and in writing (Arimuliani, 2018). This means effective grammar teaching, especially tenses, requires contextual communicative activities, not rote repetition. To address this issue, academics have advocated a cooperative learning approach based on social constructivism and social interdependence theories.

According to Biehler and Snowman (1997) in Wijaya et al. (2022), cooperative learning methods have been proven effective in increasing learning motivation and self-confidence, changing the way students interpret success and failure, building positive relationships between students, and improving the ability to understand, reason, and solve problems. This method also encourages students to respect each other and acknowledge the diversity of skills and learning styles that each individual has (Cohen, Brody, and Shevin in Febriyanti (2018)). This approach includes a work group to successfully learn material (Apriana & Dianti, 2020). It encourages shared responsibility, interaction, and scaffolding between peers. Empirical evidence shows that cooperative learning models such as Jigsaw and Teams Games Tournament (TGT) significantly improve grammar achievement among Indonesian EFL learners, compared to traditional teaching methods (Febriyanti, 2018). Another model, namely the round robin technique, also shows a positive influence. The students who were taught using the Round Robin technique could perform better in speaking skills than the students who were not taught using this technique (Ria & Hartati, 2021). According to Wijaya et al. (2022), there are several types of cooperative learning models, including Numbered Heads Together, Cooperative Script, Student Teams Achievement Division (STAD), Team Games Tournament (TGT), Snowball Throwing, Jigsaw, and Talking Stick.

According to Kagan (2009), as quoted in Stasya et al. (2019), the Talking Stick method is a learning strategy that uses sticks to increase student participation. It is a form of cooperative learning that uses sticks as a medium in the learning process. Students holding the sticks are tasked with answering questions from the teacher. According to Suprijono (2009), the talking stick strategy is a cooperative learning strategy where students are encouraged to express their opinions to others by using the sticks. Saidah (2019) adds that this method trains students' courage in speaking and creates a fun learning atmosphere, and encourages all students to be more active. Tanjung (2020), who conducted research using the Talking Stick, found that the Talking Stick technique significantly improved students' writing skills and created a more enjoyable learning atmosphere. In its application, Kagan explained that the teacher must prepare the sticks and deliver the learning material to students. After that, students are asked to compose a

conversation based on the material that has been learned. The stick is then given to one of the students, and while the music is playing, the stick is passed from one student to another. When the music stops, the student holding the stick must present the conversation with their friend to the class. This process is repeated until all students have had a turn and actively participated in the learning activities, focusing on developing speaking skills. At the end of the session, the teacher evaluates student performance and summarises the material covered (Stasya et al., 2019).

In Stasya et al. (2019), Kagan also explains that the Talking Stick strategy offers an inclusive and dynamic technique. Students pass an object (a stick) while music plays; the student holding it during pauses must respond to commands. The learning process is more engaging and enjoyable with music. Learning a song is easier and quicker than learning the curriculum, since the human mind enjoys music (Vadivel et al., 2021). According to Simpson (2015) in (Vadivel et al., 2021), Music is undeniably an effective medium for improving memory. Memorising songs tends to be easier and faster than memorising lesson material, as the human brain naturally enjoys music. This technique is particularly relevant in foreign language learning. Music as a pedagogical tool has increased learner motivation, reduced anxiety, and strengthened memory, primarily through rhythmic exposure to sentence structures (Kara & Aksel, 2013). Ramadhanti & Haryudin (2021) found that using songs effectively supports grammar learning, particularly the simple past tense, in junior high schools in Indonesia, promoting enjoyment and retention without excessive grammar practice.

The Talking Stick strategy and the use of music have been widely studied. Still, separately as media to increase student engagement and the effectiveness of language learning, only a few studies have examined the integrated application of these two methods within a cooperative learning framework, particularly for teaching grammar, such as tenses. Integrating cooperative learning (Talking Stick) and music offers a pedagogical synergy that addresses the cognitive, social, and affective dimensions of learning. This multimodal approach aligns with the principles of communicative language teaching, which uses interaction as both a means and an end in itself. Also, it emphasises using authentic texts and students' personal experiences to create meaningful and contextual learning (Lei, 2025). This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the effect of integrating the Talking Stick strategy and music within a cooperative learning context on students' achievement in mastering the simple present tense. Specifically, this study seeks to answer whether the implementation of this strategy can improve students' achievement in using the simple present tense, and whether there is a significant difference between student learning outcomes before and after learning with the Talking Stick method combined with music in seventh-grade students of Taman Harapan Junior High School.

## METHODOLOGY

### 1. Research Design

To evaluate the impact of integrating cooperative learning and music on grammar mastery, this study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental research design using a one-group pretest-posttest format. The research focused on the seventh-grade students of Taman Harapan Junior High School, Sidoarjo, and aimed to assess how applying the Talking Stick strategy combined with music could improve students' understanding of the simple present tense.

In this design, one group of participants received instruction through a treatment involving the Talking Stick technique, which promotes active participation and collaboration, integrated with music as a mood-enhancing and mnemonic tool. The independent variable in this study was the Talking Stick technique combined with music. In contrast, the dependent variable was the students' achievement in mastering the simple present tense.

Before the treatment, a pre-test ( $X_A$ ) was administered to measure students' baseline performance using the simple present tense. After receiving instruction through the integrated strategy, a post-test ( $X_B$ ) was conducted to determine any improvement in students' grammar achievement. The difference in scores between  $X_A$  and  $X_B$  reflected the effectiveness of the pedagogical approach. This allowed the researcher to analyse how integrating cooperative learning and music through the Talking Stick method measurably enhanced grammar outcomes.

## 2. Research Sample and Population

The sample of this study consisted of 12 seventh-grade students from Taman Harapan Junior High School in the academic year 2024/2025, serving as the experimental class. In addition, the population consists of 22 students in the control class. This group was chosen because they were learning the simple present tense as part of their English curriculum, and was taken as a comparison. Their inclusion was deemed relevant to investigate the effectiveness of integrating cooperative learning strategies, particularly the Talking Stick technique, with music to enhance grammar achievement. The homogeneity of the class in terms of educational level, curriculum exposure, and instructional setting ensured this population's suitability for examining the intervention's potential impact on students' grammatical performance.

## 3. Techniques in Collecting the Data

The researcher employed a quantitative data collection method using a structured test format. Tanzeh (2011, p. 57) highlights that it is a systematic and standardized procedure involving activities, for instance:

### 3.1 Standardized tests

In this research, the primary data collection method was a test instrument, composed of a pre-test and a post-test.

- 3.1.1. Pre-test: The pre-test was administered on 13 January 2025 during the initial meeting. It consisted of 35 short-answer questions to measure the students' basic understanding and achievement in the simple present tense before the treatment. This represented the  $X_A$  variable: students' achievement before being taught using the Talking Stick technique combined with music.
- 3.1.2. Treatment: The treatment phase involved implementing the Talking Stick strategy in a cooperative learning setting, enhanced with selected background music. The learning activity focused on engaging students to construct simple present tense structures actively. The technique encouraged verbal participation, memory retention, and collaborative grammar practice. This intervention occurred over three sessions for the seventh-grade students at Taman Harapan Junior High School, Sidoarjo.
- 3.1.3. Post-test: Following the treatment, a post-test—identical in format to the pre-test—was administered on 28 February 2025. This test consisted of 35 short-

answer items and measured students' grammar achievement after the intervention ( $X_B$ ).

According to Suharsimi (2013, p. 134), an instrument is a tool used for data collection. The instrument in this study, adapted from the grammar module used at Taman Harapan Junior High School, was validated through expert judgment and aligned with the curriculum objectives. The test format was based on the achievement test type (Isnawati, 2012, p. 14) designed to measure how students achieved instructional goals, specifically in understanding the simple present tense.

### 3.2. Observations.

The observation checklists are used to support the standardized test instrument in proving there was enrichment of simple present tense achievement by using the talking stick with music as follows.

*Table 1.* The observation checklists

No	Observation Aspects	Score			
		1	2	3	4
1.	The students make more than one attempt to answer grammar questions.				
2.	The students are enthusiastic about listening to the teachers' explanation of grammar.				
3.	The students raise their hands, asking questions to the teacher about grammar				
4.	The students express their grammar understanding.				
5.	The students pay attention to English grammar learning.				
6.	The students complete the English grammar learning assignment correctly.				
7.	The students apply English grammar in daily activities				
8.	The students actively take part in group discussions				

(Sugiyono, 2015, p. 137)

### 4. Techniques for Analysing the Data

The researcher employed a quantitative data analysis technique using statistical formulas. Since the collected data were numerical test scores, a statistical approach was essential to analyse differences in students' achievement before and after applying the treatment. Based on the results obtained in the field, the sample group consisted of only 12 students. This number falls below the generally accepted minimum of 30 participants to assume a normal distribution. Consequently, it can be inferred that the data do not meet the normality and homogeneity criteria. Given these conditions, the analysis of the field data was conducted using the Wilcoxon test as a non-parametric alternative. The researcher used the Wilcoxon test (z-test) to calculate students' scores in the pre-test ( $X_A$ ) and post-test ( $X_B$ ). This test was used to examine whether the difference in students' grammar achievement after receiving instruction using the Talking Stick technique combined with music was statistically significant.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Findings

#### 1.1. Students' Achievement Before Applying Talking Stick Combined with Music

The students' achievement before the implementation of the treatment was measured through a pre-test consisting of 35 short-answer items. The pre-test score is described in the table below.

*Table 2. Students' Pre-test Scores*

No	Student	Pre-test
1	S1	42
2	S2	39
3	S3	61
4	S4	71
5	S5	75
6	S6	66
7	S7	58
8	S8	48
9	S9	70
10	S10	50
11	S11	63
12	S12	81
NP		724

According to the total pre-test score of 724 across 12 students, the mean score was calculated as follows:

*Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Pre-Test*

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRE-TEST	12	42	39	81	724	60.33	13.296
Valid N (listwise)	12						

This result indicates that most students scored below the minimum completeness criterion ( $KKM = 70$ ), suggesting generally low achievement in the simple present tense before the intervention. A cooperative learning strategy, specifically the Talking Stick technique combined with music, was deemed necessary to stimulate student interest and improve learning outcomes.

#### 1.2. Students' Grammar Achievement After Applying the Talking Stick Combined with Music

Post-intervention, the same students were given a post-test using the same format and structure as the pre-test.

Table 4. Students' Post-test Scores

No	Names	Post-test
1	Tara	70
2	Ucik	68
3	Tasya	75
4	Firda	80
5	Bayu	70
6	Firda	82
7	Reza	76
8	Sani	72
9	Nita	67
10	Nada	73
11	Dimas	80
12	Dina	83
NP		896

Based on the scores above, the researcher accounted for the students' average score on the post-test as follows.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Post-Test

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
POST-TEST	12	16	67	83	896	74.67	5.549
Valid N (listwise)	12						

The results show that the average score of students' post-test is 74.7, indicating that 12 students met or exceeded the minimum completeness criterion. It can be interpreted that they achieved high results in the simple present tense after applying the talking stick combined with music. That combination is very effective and supports the students' improvement in achievement. The use of the talking stick technique should be maintained when applying to achieve what is difficult. The scores above indicate that the talking stick technique is very influential and can potentially improve the students' achievement of the simple present tense. It is also supported by selecting music that makes them happy and helps them stay engaged in class. This can help keep their mood to study even over a long time. Among the 12 students, only two students, or 17%, do not pass the minimum completeness criterion. A few can enjoy the learning process well, but fail in class on the simple present tense.

Table 4. Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test

Sample (n)	X <sub>A</sub> (PRE-TEST)	X <sub>B</sub> (POST-TEST)	Mean Rank X <sub>B</sub> - X <sub>A</sub>	Ranks	Sign Ranks +	-
1.	42	70	+ 28	11.0	11.0	
2.	39	68	+29	12.0	12.0	
3.	61	75	+14	5.0	5.0	
4.	71	80	+9	4.0	4.0	
5.	75	70	-5	3.0	0.0	3.0
6.	66	82	+16	6.0	6.0	
7.	58	76	+18	8.0	8.0	
8.	48	72	+24	10.0	10.0	

9.	70	67	-3	2.0	0.0	2.0
10.	50	73	+23	9.0	9.0	
11.	63	80	+17	7.0	7.0	
12.	81	83	+2	1.0	1.0	
SUM					T = 73	5

(Note: determining ranks starting from the smallest mean ranks up to the biggest ones)

#### Description:

- ✓  $X_A$ : Pre-test score
- ✓  $X_B$ : Post-test score
- ✓ n: data  $n = 12 \longrightarrow$  asymp. sign (2-tailed)  $< 0.05$
- ✓  $T_{table} = 14$

According to Table 3, the smallest  $T = 5$ ,  $n = 12$ , with a significance level of 5%, so  $T_{table} = 14$ . If the smallest  $T \leq T_{table}$ , integrating the Talking Stick strategy and music could enhance students' achievement of the simple present tenses.

Otherwise, there is another way to prove significance level determination by using the Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test, as follows.

$$Z = \frac{T - \mu_T}{\sigma_T}$$

$$\mu_T = \frac{n(n+1)}{4}$$

$$\sigma_T = \sqrt{\frac{n(n+1)(2n+1)}{24}}$$

$$\mu^T = \frac{n(n+1)}{4} = \frac{12(12+1)}{4} = 39$$

$$\sigma_T = \sqrt{\frac{n(n+1)(2n+1)}{24}} = \sqrt{\frac{12(12+1)(2 \cdot 12+1)}{24}} = 12,7$$

$$Z = \frac{5 - 39}{12,7} = -2,67$$

#### Description:

- ✓ T: small rank
- ✓ n: data  $n = 12 \rightarrow$  asymp. sign (2-tailed)  $< 0.05$
- ✓  $T_{table}: 14$
- ✓  $\mu_T$ : mean

The data above states that  $z_{table} = 1.96$  in asymp. sign (2-tailed)  $< 0.05$ , it gets  $z_{count} = -2.667$ . It is claimed that  $z_{count} \geq z_{table}$ ; hence, it could be interpreted that the alternative hypothesis is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected. It proves that although the same data is calculated using two different methods, they yield the same result. Therefore, it could be said that applying the talking stick method with background music integration is highly significant in enhancing students' grammar learning outcomes.

In this case, observation checklist data reveal students' enthusiasm for learning the simple present tense by integrating the talking stick and music. This data is described in the table below:



Table 5. Observation Checklist

Observation Checklist	Experimental Group	Control Group
Pre-observation checklist	74%	70%
Post-observation checklist	92%	78%

## 2. Discussion

Referring to the Wilcoxon test data, the signed rank and sum rank tests showed that the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) was accepted. This confirms that the treatment significantly affected students' grammar achievement, especially in the sub-theme, mastering the simple present tense.

Following the calculation of mean scores from the pre-test and post-test, results revealed an increase from a pre-test average of 60.3 to a post-test average of 74.7. This score difference reflects a measurable change in students' mastery of the simple present tense. This research reinforced that students could better grasp the grammar material after combining the Talking Stick technique with music in classroom instruction. Otherwise, the students who never got treatment this term or were in a control class obtained poor scores in learning the simple present tense. Their scores averaged 61.8, below the minimum completeness criterion, to 70. It was found that students in the control group had less focus and understanding than the experimental group in mastering the simple present tense without applying the talking stick with music. It badly impacted their achievement in learning English grammar, the simple present tense.

Integrating the Talking Stick method with background music appeared to contribute positively to the classroom environment. Students were more relaxed and attentive and showed greater willingness to participate in activities. The rhythm and flow of the music created an engaging and less intimidating atmosphere. At the same time, the talking stick encouraged equal participation and accountability among learners. As a result, students were more involved in the learning process, and their confidence in using the target structure improved.

The data collection process in this study was carried out through three stages. Initially, a pre-test was given to assess students' baseline understanding of the simple present tense. This was followed by a treatment phase, during which instruction was delivered using the Talking Stick technique supported by music as a pedagogical tool. The final stage involved a post-test to measure student performance changes after the intervention. This structured approach allowed for a clear comparison of students' progress and facilitated the identification of instructional impact.

This strategy also allowed students time to organise their thoughts before speaking, as they waited for the talking stick to reach them. Meanwhile, the inclusion of music served not only to maintain students' focus but also to enhance their mood, reducing anxiety and creating a more enjoyable learning environment that supported deeper engagement with the material.

Integrating the Talking Stick technique with music offers a dynamic and inclusive classroom experience. This approach helps students feel more confident and connected, even when interacting with peers of varying abilities. As Suprijono (2015) explains, the Talking Stick encourages learners to bravely voice their opinions, overcoming shyness and hesitation to speak in the classroom. From a pedagogical standpoint, this technique nurtures patience and mutual participation. Candle (2013, p. 4) notes that since each student has a limited opportunity to contribute, it is signaled by their turn with the stick. They remain attentive and engaged, awaiting their chance to speak. It fosters a respectful

and orderly learning environment, especially during grammar instruction. Moreover, the Talking Stick strategy integrates seamlessly with the principles of cooperative learning. It prompts students to think, reflect, and collaborate. They engage actively with the material, respond more effectively, and build social and cognitive skills. The classroom becomes more lively and relaxed when paired with music—students learn while enjoying the rhythm and atmosphere. Riyanto (2019) found that using the Talking Stick in speaking practice made lessons less monotonous, reduced anxiety, and nurtured a cooperative but positively competitive environment. Students felt less stressed and more communicative, even within structured activities.

The talking stick and music techniques can significantly enhance students' mastery of the simple present tense. In Taman Harapan Junior High School Sidoarjo, students showed more enthusiasm, reduced confusion, and greater enjoyment during lessons. The learning process became more vibrant and conducive, encouraging independence, courage, and collaboration. Music added another layer of engagement, calming the mind, sharpening focus, and stimulating thinking by engaging both brain hemispheres. The results of this study align with prior research in related domains. Tanjung (2020) reported improved vocabulary acquisition and student enthusiasm through Talking Stick activities, confirming its effectiveness. Although Arief (2017) used only the Talking Stick without music, that study also demonstrated significant gains in vocabulary mastery. This research extends those findings, showing that combining music with Talking Stick increases student grammar achievement and reduces monotony in instruction.

Discussing pre-observation checklist data, it was shown that the students in the experimental class scored 74%. In contrast, those in the control class scored 70%. The differences in percentages between experimental and control classes were very close. It was only 4%. This means that in the beginning, both had a similar enthusiasm level in learning English grammar, the simple present tense, before they received treatment.

Furthermore, the experimental class was 92% and the control class was 78% based on post-observation checklist data. It represented that the students who belonged to the experimental class significantly improved in mastering the simple present tense after they were given treatment. Therefore, it could be stated that this research was effective and appropriate. Several factors supported this research's success, for instance, the talking stick was very simple to implement, melodies created from music made students feel more relaxed than others, making them learn the simple present tense enjoyable and easy.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness of integrating the Talking Stick technique with music in improving students' achievement in the simple present tense. The findings demonstrate that students showed a notable improvement in their grammar performance after being taught using this combination. This is evidenced by the increase in their average scores, from 60.3 in the pre-test to 74.7 in the post-test, indicating a meaningful academic gain. Statistical analysis, including the Wilcoxon test (also known as the z-test), signed-rank test, and sum rank test, confirms the rejection of the null hypothesis and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. This signifies that the Talking Stick technique, when combined with music, significantly improves students' mastery of the simple present tense.

In addition to measurable improvements in academic performance, the classroom implementation revealed positive student behavioral responses. Learners participated more enthusiastically, demonstrated reduced anxiety, and showed increased confidence

in expressing their ideas. These observations suggest that this interactive approach enhances linguistic proficiency and supports students' affective development in the learning process. Based on these results, the study can generalise that integrating cooperative learning techniques like the Talking Stick with musical elements can be an effective pedagogical strategy to improve grammar achievement, particularly in teaching the simple present tense. This approach can be a valuable alternative to traditional teaching methods, especially in junior high school.

Further studies are encouraged to investigate the application of this technique in broader grammar topics or different language skills, such as speaking or writing. Future researchers may also explore variations in musical integration or examine long-term retention effects to strengthen the pedagogical implications of this method.

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