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Psychological Dynamics and Polarization of Students' Attitudes towards Cooperative Learning: A Qualitative Review Study

Tania Jannah[1], Syafril[2*], Liawati[3], Boby Saputra[4], Rae Shita[5]
[1,3,4,5] STIE Muara Teweh
[2] STIMI Banjarmasin
Corresponding Author: Syafril syafril.5t1m1@gmail.com

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to qualitatively describe the Psychological Dynamics and Polarization of Students' Attitudes towards Cooperative Learning: A Literature Study and Passive Field Observation. This study uses literature study methods, passive field observations and in-depth interviews and documentation of classroom learning activities using cooperative learning methods for students. The results of the study indicate that cooperative learning has highly polarized characteristics and is manifested in three main psychological dimensions, namely cognitive, affective, and conative. The theoretical implications of these findings strengthen the understanding in instructional psychology that the success of cooperative learning does not occur automatically simply by dividing students into random groups. This study is expected to increase the insight and knowledge of cooperative learning for lecturers and students

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INTRODUCTION

The world of education is currently experiencing a crucial disruption where technology has changed human behavior in various fields, including education (syafril., et all., 2025). Currently, students are facilitated in learning and many other things, including the process of searching for learning materials sourced from the internet, the process of completing assignments is assisted by artificial intelligence (AI), even the exam process is also assisted by Google and AI. At the end of the study period, Google and AI also assist in the preparation of Final Assignments, Theses, and even Dissertations, all using sources from Google and AI. So now where is the role of a lecturer in this era of technological disruption based on Google and AI? Herein lies the crucial role of the cooperative learning system that is being intensively initiated by the world of education today. Where the role of a lecturer is currently experiencing a radical shift from teacher-centered to student-centered. During the lecture, the lecturer no longer dominates the stage as the sole source of information, but acts as a facilitator, consultant, and process evaluator. Lecturers actively move among student groups to spark in-depth discussions through probing questions, which is a direct reflection of the implementation of the Semester Learning Plan (RPS) which is oriented towards the active process of students.

21st-century education demands a transformation of the learning paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered. In the current era of digital disruption and globalization, students are not only required to master academic content individually, but also must possess 21st-century skills including communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity (Chien, et all., 2024). Fieldwork shows that the implementation of conventional learning methods or independent lectures is considered ineffective in facilitating the need for social interaction and collaboration among students. In response to this need, cooperative learning has emerged as a superior pedagogical strategy because it can encourage students to work together in small groups to achieve shared learning goals, while increasing their active involvement in the classroom (Inayati, N., 2023).

Although cooperative learning theoretically offers many advantages in improving cognitive and social learning outcomes, the effectiveness of its implementation in the classroom is greatly influenced by how students perceive and respond to the method. A research problem that often arises in the instructional realm is the resistance or negative attitudes of some students towards group work. Many students feel burdened by the unequal division of tasks within the group, interpersonal conflict, or the phenomenon of social loafing where some group members rely on the hard work of others (Wahyuni, 2022). This is similar to research (Mulyani, 2019) which found that most students in groups rely on one person to complete all assigned tasks. In response to this, research lecturers always emphasize that students who do not contribute to their groups should report it, but this seems ineffective because there is a feeling of discomfort if reported to the lecturer.

Many previous studies on cooperative learning have been conducted, but most of the literature remains trapped in evaluating final outcomes such as academic achievement, without examining students' internal psychological dynamics throughout the process. Previous empirical research tends to assume that all students will automatically respond positively to group work formats, thus ignoring the variability in attitudes influenced by individual background factors, self-efficacy, and learning style preferences (Sanjaya, M. R., 2025). Furthermore, there is a scarcity of studies that specifically map the affective, cognitive, and behavioral components in the formation of student attitudes towards various types of cooperative learning at the school and university levels. This gap leaves educators lacking empirical guidance on why a cooperative model is successful in one class but fails in another.

To bridge this gap, this study employs a holistic and contextual investigative approach to the dimensions of student attitudes. Unlike conventional research, this study does not simply measure student attitudes superficially but rather correlates them with elements of post-pandemic technological adaptation and the dynamics of modern classroom inclusivity (Ramadhan, A. F., & Utami, 2026). This study integrates the latest instructional psychology framework to identify micro-factors that shape student attitude polarization, such as group incentive structures and levels of positive interdependence. Thus, this study provides a new scientific contribution in the form of a conceptual model of pedagogical intervention that instructional designers can use to mitigate negative student attitudes before cooperative learning begins.

Overall, this scientific article aims to comprehensively analyze students' attitudes toward cooperative learning and identify the determinants that influence them. Theoretically, the results of this study enrich the literature on classroom management and educational psychology regarding student affective dynamics in collaborative learning. Practically, the strategic recommendations generated from this analysis can serve as concrete guidelines for lecturers on campus in designing, structuring, and evaluating cooperative learning groups that are more equitable, inclusive, and motivating, so that students' academic potential and social skills can be optimized simultaneously.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Cooperative Learning

Successful learning is learning that can make students motivated, fun and comfortable in the teaching and learning process. Cooperative learning is one way for lecturers so that students can enjoy learning (Fajri & Muflihan, 2021). According to (Magre & Joshi, 2013), (Scholar et al., 2012) Science is a self-renewing, self-correcting and self-generating process. Cooperative learning is an approach to group work that minimizes the occurrence of those unpleasant situations and maximizes the learning and satisfaction that results from working on a high-performance team. A large and rapidly growing body of research confirms the effectiveness of cooperatives in higher education. Opinion of the

teachers will help to understand the ideas about the cooperative learning strategy of the secondary school teachers.

(D.W. Johnson, 1999) identified two types of group work, namely those that contribute positively and negatively in cooperative learning groups. Therefore, Johnson proposed five basic elements of cooperation, namely: 1) positive interdependence; 2) individual accountability; 3) face-to-face promotional interaction; 4) social skills; 5) group processing. The application of these five principles can lead to academic and social benefits for students (Johnson, D, Johnson, R & Roseth, 2010) and the development of learning communities (Barton, D., & Tusting, 2005). In terms of academic benefits, students reported increased motivation to learn, better autonomy and responsibility for learning, improved thinking and problem-solving skills, higher levels of content understanding, and long-term retention (Almulla, 2016).

Cooperative learning is a structured instructional strategy in which students work together in small groups to complete academic assignments together and maximize each other's learning. Epistemologically, this model is rooted in Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, which states that an individual's cognitive development is strongly influenced by social interactions and their cultural environment (Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, 2016). Unlike conventional group work, which is often undirected, modern cooperative learning must fulfill five main pillars: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive face-to-face interaction, social skills, and group processing (Chien, et all., 2024). At the tertiary level, this model is applied through various specific types such as Jigsaw, Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD), Think-Pair-Share (TPS), and Project-Based Learning groups to demand higher-order thinking skills.

Psychological Dynamics

In the context of educational psychology, psychological dynamics is a complex, fluctuating, and interconnected process of interaction between an individual's various internal psychological functions (such as motivation, emotion, cognition, and self-efficacy) and the stimuli of their social environment (in this case, the instructor and group members).

This dynamic explains why and how a student's mental state can change throughout the learning process. It's not static; a student might begin a course with high motivation, but due to poor group dynamics, their psychological state can deteriorate into frustration.

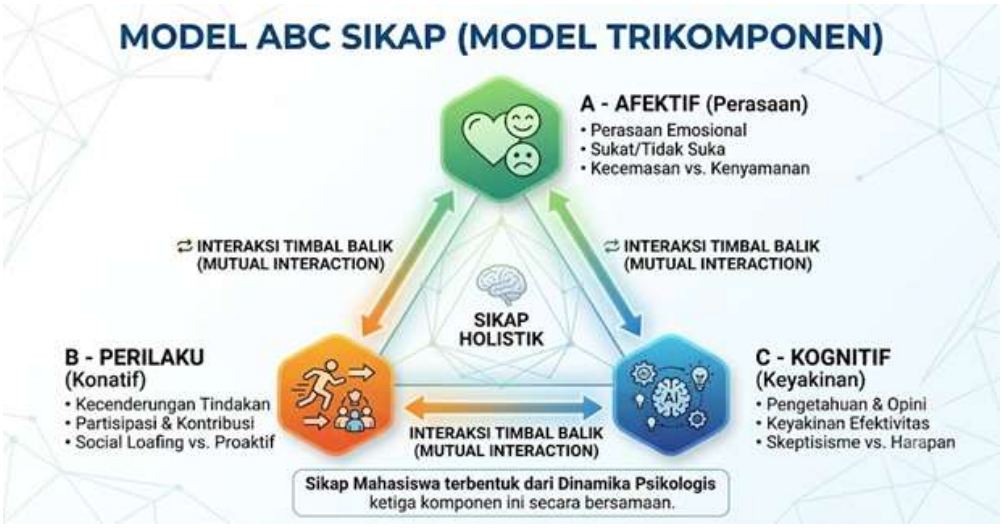

Figure 1. ABC Model
Source: Google (2026)

The ABC Model is a psychological framework used in cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to understand and change how we respond to situations. It illustrates the relationship between activating events, our beliefs about those events, and the resulting emotional consequences. This visualization presents the three core components of the model in a clear, sequential flow.
Developed by Albert Ellis, this framework helps you understand how your beliefs about an event trigger emotions and responses.

- A (Activating Event): The event or trigger that occurs in the real world.
- B (Beliefs): Your beliefs, thoughts, or interpretations of the event.
- C (Consequences): The consequences or responses in the form of emotions, behaviors, and physical sensations.

Attitude Polarization

Attitude is classically understood as an individual's overall evaluation of an object (in this case, the cooperative learning method). Attitude has three core components known as the Tricomponent Model of Attitude (ABC Model):

1. Affective (Feelings/Emotions)
2. Behavioral/Conative (Behavioral Tendencies)
3. Cognitive (Beliefs/Knowledge)

The word "polarization" refers to the splitting or sharpening of extremes into two opposing poles (positive vs. negative). Therefore, student attitude polarization is a phenomenon in which students' evaluative responses do not fall into a gray area (neutral), but rather are sharply divided: some students become strongly supportive (extreme acceptance), while others become strongly rejecting or resistant (extreme rejection).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically, in-depth, and naturally (naturalistic setting) related to the motives, feelings, and reasons behind the formation of their attitudes towards cooperative learning (Sugiyono, 2020) and (Sanjaya, M. R., 2025). A qualitative descriptive design is used to produce rich narrative descriptions in the form of written or spoken words of observed student behavior, so that researchers can reveal the internal psychological dynamics and social interactions of students during the group work process without any laboratory intervention (Sugiyono, 2016).

In qualitative research, the terms population and sample are replaced by research subjects or informants. The selection of informants in this study was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, namely selecting informants based on specific criteria set by the researcher in order to obtain the richest and most relevant information (Inayati, N., 2023). The informant criteria in this study were: (1) active students who had attended cooperative learning-based classes for at least one semester, and (2) showing extreme attitude polarization (very active/positive or tending to be passive/resistant based on the recommendation of the lecturer). Data collection from these informants will be stopped when the data has reached saturation point (data saturation), where no more new variations of information are found.

The primary instrument (human instrument) in qualitative research is the researcher themselves, whose function is to establish focus, select informants, collect data, assess data quality, and interpret data (Wahyuni, 2022). To support the primary instrument, data collection techniques were carried out through method triangulation, namely:

- In-depth Interviews: Conducted in a semi-structured manner, either in person or using internet technology (such as Zoom or Google Meet), to delve deeper into students' cognitive, affective, and conative components.
- Passive Field Observation: Researchers directly observe the dynamics of interactions, task distribution, and student engagement during cooperative group discussions in class.
- Documentation: Collecting students' reflective diaries, group reflections, or drafts of joint assignments.

The qualitative data analysis technique in this study adopted an interactive model from (Matthew B. Miles, et all., 2014) adapted to the context of modern educational research (Chien, et al., 2024). The data analysis process consisted of three simultaneous activity streams:

1. Data Condensation: The process of selecting, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data from field notes and interviews into conceptual codes.
2. Data Display: Arranging a collection of organized information into narrative text, matrices, or network diagrams to facilitate drawing conclusions.

3. Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Repeatedly reviewing data to search for patterns, explanations, and causal flows to formulate valid and credible scientific conclusions.

To ensure the objectivity and validity of qualitative data, this study applied the trustworthiness standards of Lincoln and Guba (Ramadhan, A. F., & Utami, 2026). The strategies used included credibility testing through Source Triangulation (comparing interview results between students with different characteristics) and Method Triangulation (matching interview data with direct observations in class). In addition, the researcher conducted member checks, which involved re-discussing draft transcripts or temporary conclusions with informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations aligned with what the students intended.

RESULT

Based on the data collection process through in-depth interviews, passive observations in class, and documentation of informants that have been reduced to the point of data saturation, a polarization of student attitudes towards cooperative learning was found. Qualitative analysis of the model (Matthew B. Miles, et all, 2014) succeeded in grouping student attitudes into three main themes that form attitudes, namely cognitive, affective, and conative (behavioral) dimensions.

Field findings indicate a cognitive dualism in the minds of students. The group of students who exhibited positive attitudes viewed cooperative learning as an important instrument for broadening intellectual perspectives and accelerating understanding of complex material through peer discussion. In contrast, the group of students who were resistant expressed cognitive skepticism. They considered cooperative learning often time-inefficient and risked decreased understanding due to distorted information conveyed by fellow group members who had not yet thoroughly mastered the material.

In reality, on the campus where the researcher teaches, many students don't utilize cooperative learning effectively and are apathetic, don't express opinions, and even tend to be lazy. This is due to their limited understanding of the learning material and lack of clear objectives. Few students understand how useful cooperative learning is when they enter the workforce, where they must communicate with each other.

Emotionally, collaborative comfort was successfully established in groups with strong positive interdependence. Students felt supported, had a safe space to express themselves, and experienced reduced academic stress. However, in groups experiencing internal dysfunction, the affective dimension was dominated by social anxiety and frustration. Informants reported mental stress due to interpersonal conflict, fear of negative evaluation from group members (peer-evaluation anxiety), and a sense of injustice due to unequal workload distribution.

The behavioral dimension is the source of students' cognitive and affective manifestations. Positive attitudes transform into constructive actions such as fair role-sharing, proactive communication, and commitment to task completion.

Conversely, negative attitudes manifest as withdrawal, passivity in discussions, and ultimately, social loafing. Students with overly high self-efficacy tend to take on entire tasks individually due to a lack of confidence in their group members' capabilities, which ultimately leads to total passivity among other group members.

The qualitative findings above confirm that students' attitudes toward cooperative learning are not a single, static entity, but rather a dynamic psychological construct negotiated throughout the group interaction process. The cognitive dualism found in this study confirms the argument of (Sanjaya, M.R., 2025) that the success of cooperative instruction is highly dependent on the clarity of task structuring by the lecturer. When students are not provided with rigid guidance or role boundaries in the initial phase, cognitive skepticism will immediately activate, triggering the assumption that group work is simply an unproductive waste of time.

From an affective perspective, the emergence of social anxiety and frustration resulting from unequal group work reinforces the current theory of collaborative dysfunction. This phenomenon aligns with a study (Wahyuni, 2022) which states that without promotive face-to-face interaction and regular group evaluations, the classroom's affective climate degrades into one of competitiveness and suspicion. This inequity of contribution triggers a vicious cycle: high-ability students become emotionally exhausted (academic burnout), while low-ability students become increasingly isolated and withdraw from active class participation.

Conceptually, the social loafing behavior identified in this study represents the greatest challenge in the modern classroom ecosystem. This proves that forming groups randomly or without considering the diversity of learning styles and levels of student self-efficacy will trigger polarization of dominance (Inayati, N., 2023). To mitigate this, the future direction of instructional design must integrate a dual accountability model, namely a combination of group product assessment with individual contribution assessment based on a digital work portfolio (Chien, et al., 2024). When students realize that every micro-action is recorded and objectively assessed by the system, extrinsic motivation will encourage a shift in attitude from passive-defensive to active-collaborative.

Ultimately, this analysis contributes to the novelty of student attitudes in the current digital era, demonstrating the flexibility of collaborative spaces. The integration of internet-based communication platforms has been shown to mitigate spatial barriers in the affective dimension, providing opportunities for students with oral communication anxiety to actively contribute through written ideas in digital spaces (Ramadhan, A. F., & Utami, 2026). Therefore, the effectiveness of future cooperative learning lies in the expertise of lecturers in orchestrating an inclusive and transparent blend of physical-digital collaboration.

DISCUSSION

The qualitative findings in this study confirm that students' attitudes toward cooperative learning are not static or linear psychological entities, but rather multidimensional constructs dynamically negotiated throughout the classroom social interaction process. The identified cognitive dualism, where expectations of effectiveness clash with academic skepticism, confirms that students' mental readiness at the tertiary level requires more rigid structural clarity compared to the elementary level. Positive expectations arise when students are able to link the relevance of group work to the development of 21st-century skills (collaboration and communication). However, when lecturers fail to formulate transparent role boundaries in the early stages of instruction, students' cognitive skepticism will automatically activate. This phenomenon is in line with the argument (Sanjaya, M. R., 2025) which states that without clear outcome indicators, students will tend to assume cooperative learning as a form of transfer of teaching responsibility from lecturers to students, which leads to a decrease in intrinsic motivation.

The emergence of negative affective manifestations in the form of academic anxiety and interpersonal frustration indicates a systemic collaborative dysfunction in the formation of study groups. Theoretical comparisons show that a comfortable affective climate can only be achieved if the five pillars of cooperative learning, particularly positive interdependence, are fully met (Chien et al., 2024). When the group structure allows for unilateral domination by students with high self-efficacy, the classroom affective climate will immediately degrade into an ecosystem full of suspicion. Students with high academic ability experience emotional burnout due to shouldering the majority of the workload, while students with medium to low abilities experience alienation and socio-pedagogical anxiety (Wahyuni, 2022). Therefore, these findings refute the classic assumption that randomly grouping students automatically trains social maturity; on the contrary, without interactive lecturer monitoring, this method actually widens the psychological gap between students.

Conative manifestations such as withdrawal and social loafing are the result of accumulated cognitive and affective frustration among students. An analysis of instructional sociology suggests that social loafing is not simply a matter of individual laziness, but rather a systemic failure in the design of individual accountability (Inayati, N., 2023). When a grading system focuses solely on the group product, incentives for microscopic individual contributions are lost.

To mitigate this, the future direction of contemporary classroom management must adopt a dual-accountability framework. Practical implications of this research recommend the integration of digital work portfolio assessment, anonymous peer assessment, and regular self-reflection. By recognizing that every personal contribution is objectively recorded, students' extrinsic motivation can be redirected to encourage behavioral change from passive-defensive to active-collaborative.

The scientific novelty presented in this discussion is the relationship between student attitudes and the use of digital internet infrastructure post-pandemic. Digital collaboration spaces have been shown to mitigate spatial barriers and psychological limitations in the affective dimension. Students with high levels of verbal communication anxiety (introversion) in physical classrooms showed a significant increase in positive attitudes when cooperative interactions were diverted or supported by asynchronous text-based platforms (Ramadhan, A. F., & Utami, 2026). Digital technology acts as a facilitator of inclusivity that reduces direct interpersonal tension. Therefore, the competitive advantage of implementing future cooperative learning will no longer lie in forced physical interactions, but rather in the expertise of instructional designers in orchestrating a blend of physical-digital collaboration that is transparent, adaptive, and centered on human psychological comfort.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion of this study shows that students' attitudes toward the implementation of cooperative learning in higher education are highly polarized and manifested in three main psychological dimensions: cognitive, affective, and conative. In the cognitive dimension, a dualism was found between expectations of group learning effectiveness and academic skepticism regarding the efficiency of task completion time. In the affective dimension, inclusive collaborative comfort clashes with the emergence of social anxiety (academic anxiety) due to interpersonal conflict. This polarization culminates in the conative (behavioral) dimension, where positive attitudes encourage healthy, proactive participation, while negative attitudes trigger withdrawal behavior, culminating in the validation of the phenomenon of social loafing (freeloading) within the group.

The theoretical implications of these findings reinforce the understanding in instructional psychology that successful cooperative learning does not occur automatically by simply assigning students to random groups. Contemporary classroom management design interventions are needed that can ensure the fulfillment of the pillars of positive interdependence and rigid individual accountability. Practically, this study recommends that lecturers and curriculum designers abandon assessment systems that solely focus on group products. Educators must adopt a dual-accountability framework through the use of digital work portfolios and anonymous peer assessment to create a fair, transparent, and inclusive collaboration ecosystem.

Although this study successfully describes the dynamics of student attitudes in depth, there are several limitations that need to be considered. This research is limited to the scope of a single university with a homogeneous instructional culture, so the variability of student attitudes in other institutions or regions has not been fully captured. Therefore, recommendations for future research include the use of multi-center, mixed-methods studies to test the generalizability of these findings to a broader population. Furthermore, future researchers are expected to further explore the effectiveness of integrating artificial intelligence (AI) and asynchronous collaboration platforms (phygital

collaboration) in mitigating negative attitudes and students' verbal communication anxiety during group work in the digital era.

FURTHER STUDY

This study still has limitations, so further research on the topic 'Psychological Dynamics and Polarization of Students' Attitudes towards Cooperative Learning: A Qualitative Review Study' is needed to improve this research and provide more insight for both the writer and the readers.

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