

Comparing Student Learning Behavior and Motivation At The Indonesian School of Makkah: Slavin's Educational Psychology Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the learning behavior and motivation of class I. A and I.C students at the Indonesian School of Makkah (SIM) from the perspective of Robert E. Slavin's educational psychology. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through direct observation of the learning process and semi-structured interviews with class teachers and students. The data were analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña interactive model combined with Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. The results showed striking differences in learning behavior between the two classes. Class I. A student showed a more conducive learning behavior characterized by good discipline and active involvement, while class I.C students were more easily distracted due to a crowded class environment. Learning motivation in both classes is still dominated by extrinsic motivation, responding well to rewards and praise. Factors causing these differences include the physical learning environment, family support, and the dual influence of peer interactions. Viewed from Slavin's perspective, positive reinforcement and effective classroom management play a central role in maintaining a productive learning environment, which ultimately dictates the students' behavior and motivation.

Keywords: *learning behavior, learning motivation, educational psychology, robert e. slavin*

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INTRODUCTION

Learning behavior and motivation are the primary driving forces that sustain student focus and engagement in the educational process (Agustiah et al., 2020; Astuti et al., 2023; Naylah et al., 2023). Robert E. Slavin (2011b) defines motivation as the force that gets students going, keeps them going, and determines their learning trajectory. Given that not all academic materials are intrinsically engaging, extrinsic motivation plays an essential role in maintaining learning concentration (Husain et al., 2025; Swari et al., 2026). While these psychological dynamics are universally studied, the context of the Indonesian School of Makkah (SIM) presents a highly unique and compelling academic rationale compared to typical domestic elementary schools in Indonesia. As an Indonesian School Abroad (SILN), SIM students navigate a complex psychosocial landscape: they live at the cross-cultural intersection of Saudi Arabian and Indonesian societies (Aryani, 2021), face continuous language adaptation challenges, and predominantly originate from migrant worker families. Furthermore, the school operates under a dual mandate to deliver standard education while actively preserving national identity within a foreign environment (Rosyidin et al., 2026). This intricate socio-cultural and demographic composition creates a distinctly different learning ecosystem, making it a critical and novel site for educational research (Vivin et al., 2026).

Within this unique ecosystem, initial field observations indicated preliminary differences in learning behavior between the two first-grade classes. Class I.C. visibly demonstrated a more disciplined and conducive learning atmosphere, whereas Class I.A tended to be a restless and easily distracted environment. It must be strictly emphasized that these initial portrayals are purely preliminary observational findings that serve as the empirical rationale for this study, rather than established scientific conclusions. Consequently, a rigorous and

in-depth investigation is strictly required to evaluate these dynamics objectively and mitigate any potential confirmation bias.

To objectively investigate this phenomenon, Robert E. Slavin's behaviorist theoretical framework is highly pertinent. Slavin (2011a) asserts that individual behavior adapts to immediate consequences, wherein positive reinforcement shapes desirable behavior, while an undermanaged environment can diminish student focus. When classroom physical and social dynamics are unideal, extrinsic motivation and reinforcement management by teachers become the primary anchors for maintaining student engagement (Bandura, 1989; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Although previous studies have extensively examined general learning motivation (Lestari & Sumartiningsih, 2025; Perdana & Valentina, 2022) and Slavin's models (Isnaini & Kurniawan, 2020; Novianto, 2019), research specifically comparing the behavior of SILN students through Slavin's educational psychology framework remains severely limited (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Handayani et al., 2021). Addressing this gap, this study aims to describe and compare the learning behavior and motivation of Class I. A and I.C students at SIM identify the underlying causative factors, and objectively analyze them through the perspective of Robert E. Slavin's educational psychology.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design. Qualitative research is a method based on the philosophy of postpositivism, which emphasizes inductive reasoning and produces descriptive data focusing on the participants' perspectives (Wijaya, 2018). This specific case study design was chosen because the research focuses on an in-depth analysis of specific bounded cases—namely, the comparison of student learning behavior and motivation between Class I. A and Class I.C at the Indonesian School of Makkah. This approach aims to describe phenomena according to their natural and actual conditions systematically. The research was conducted at the Indonesian School of Makkah (SIM) in Saudi Arabia from March 20 to April 8, 2026, coinciding with the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research subjects included the homeroom teachers of Class I. A and Class I.C, alongside a representative sample of students from both classes.

The primary data sources in this study were collected directly from informants through observations and interviews (Sulung & Muspawi, 2024). Observations were conducted using a non-participant approach to record the conditions, interactions, facility conditions, and behaviors of the target subjects during the learning process in the classroom (Hasibuan et al., 2023; Zanariyah, 2024). Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a primary guide, yet they provided flexibility for the researcher to develop in-depth questions for both teachers and students. This allowed the researcher to capture psychological realities and underlying motivations that are invisible through pure observation (Abrar, 2024).

The data analysis technique integrates two approaches to obtain robust results. First, the interactive analysis model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) was utilized, which includes: data condensation (selecting and summarizing relevant data), data display (organizing data in narrative and matrix forms), and conclusion drawing. Second, thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) was specifically applied to the interview transcripts through six stages: data familiarization, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, verification was conducted through source triangulation (comparing data from teachers and students) and technique triangulation (confronting observation results with interview data).

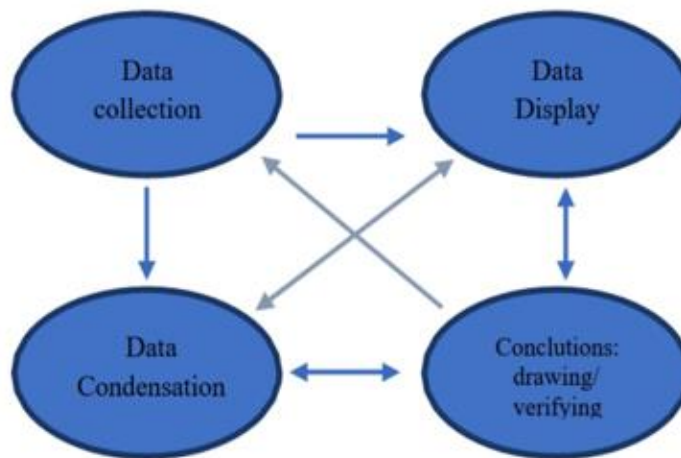


Figure 1. Interactive Data Analysis Model (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña)

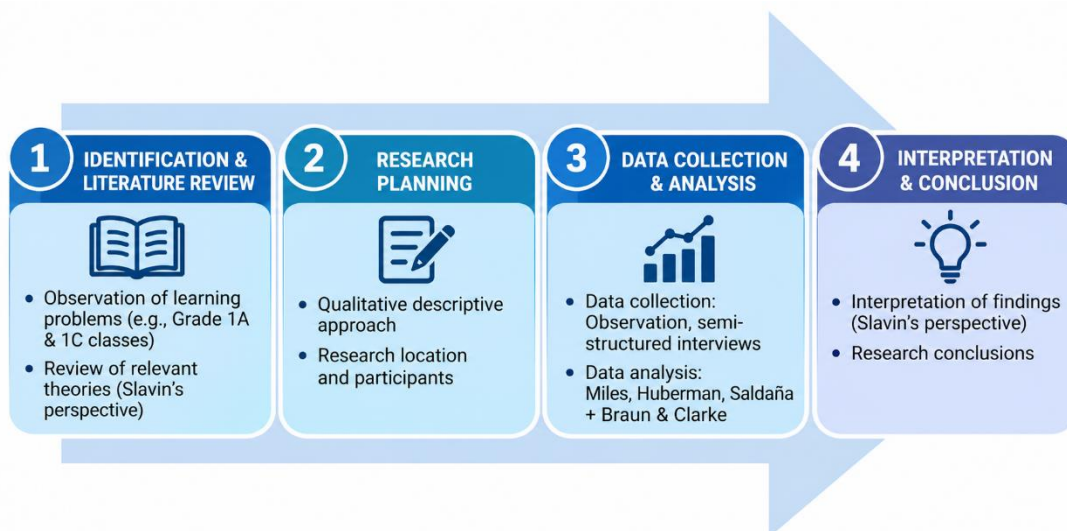


Figure 2. Research Flowchart

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on data collection at the Indonesian School of Makkah (SIM), the dynamics of Classes I. A and I.C displayed striking differences, both in terms of physical infrastructure and the psychological behavior of the students. Class I. A had a highly proportional student-to-classroom capacity ratio. Empirically, this ideal proportion facilitated a conducive learning process, enabling the homeroom teacher to implement classroom management optimally. Various interactive media, such as televisions and pictures, were utilized efficiently because all students had adequate viewing angles and movement space. Conversely, Class I.C faced the challenge of student overcapacity relative to the room size. The researchers interpret that this dense physical environment triggered high physical interaction among students, resulting in a noisier classroom that tended to be poorly organized without continuous direction from the teacher.

Systematic observations were conducted to map the indicators of learning behavior and motivation,

which are comprehensively summarized in Table 1. In Class I.A, students consistently demonstrated attention to instructional explanations. Engagement was evident through their initiative in asking questions, answering, and completing assignments. In Class I.C, the students' attention spans were notably short. The teacher had to repeatedly pause the material to enforce discipline, manage the classroom noise level, or break up peer distractions. Empirically, regarding the motivation aspect, observation and interview instruments recorded no indications of behavior driven by independent internal awareness (pure intrinsic motivation) in either class. All student learning activities were recorded as responses to external factors (extrinsic motivation), such as the expectation of receiving physical rewards, stickers, affection, or verbal praise from the teacher.

Table 1. Observation Results of Student Learning Behavior, Motivation, and Learning Environment

Observation Focus	Indicator	Class I.A	Class I.C	Perbandingan Hasil Observasi
Learning Behavior	Paying attention to the teacher's explanation	Observed	Not Observed	Class I. A student focused on the teacher. In Class I.C, the teacher had to shout and show anger to gain the students' attention.
Learning Behavior	Following the teacher's instructions	Observed	Observed	Both classes were fundamentally willing to follow instructions, but with varying levels of response.
Learning Behavior	Completing assignments	Observed	Observed	Class I. A student diligently completed assignments, whereas in Class I.C, several students neglected them.
Learning Behavior	Actively asking/answering questions	Observed	Observed	Many students were active in Class I.A. In Class I.C, only a few specific students were active.
Learning Behavior	Easily distracted	Observed	Observed	Students in both classes still easily lost focus (normal for the developmental age of 6-7 years).
Learning Behavior	Showing enthusiasm for learning	Observed	Observed	Both classes showed enthusiasm when the lesson began.
Learning Motivation	Intrinsic Motivation	Not Observed	Not Observed	Autonomous self-awareness in learning had not yet matured in either class.
Learning Motivation	Extrinsic Motivation	Observed	Observed	Both classes relied heavily on rewards, grades, or appreciative

Learning Environment	Learning media support	Observed	Not Observed	praise from the teacher. The Class I. A teacher frequently used diverse learning media (e.g., TV); the Class I.C teacher rarely used them.
Learning Environment	Completeness of classroom facilities	Observed	Not Observed	Class I. The facilities were complete and adequate; Class I.C lacked basic amenities relative to its number of students.
Learning Environment	Class size and comfort	Observed	Not Observed	The number of students in Class I.A fit the room size. Class I.C was too crowded (cramped and overcapacity).
Learning Environment	Calm classroom atmosphere	Observed	Not Observed	Class I. A was calm and orderly. Class I.C was highly noisy and chaotic due to overcrowding.
Learning Environment	Teacher-student interaction	Observed	Observed	Interaction in Class I. A was two-way. In Class I.C, interaction centered only on specific students.

Interview data from 7 students in Class I. A and 11 students in Class I.C confirmed the observation findings. Table 2 presents a summary of response patterns reflecting the students' learning motives. Essentially, Class I. A student demonstrated a high appreciation for the facilities (a spacious classroom, the presence of a TV) and positive peer interactions ("helping each other").

Meanwhile, the responses of Class I.C students were dominated by complaints regarding noise ("the classroom is very noisy," "disturbing"), yet simultaneously, they viewed the school as an arena for play socialization ("wanting many playmates"). Compliance in Class I. A was motivated by respect ("the teacher is kind"), whereas in Class I.C, it tended to be driven by strict external control ("afraid of being scolded").

Table 2. Summary of Student Interview Results

Question Topic	Responses of Class I.A Students (7 Students)	Responses of Class I.C Students (11 Students)
Motivation to Learn	Because classmates are diligent (4 students), and genuinely like learning (3 students).	Because they want many playmates (7 students); Because they like specific subjects (4 students).
Reason for Obeying the Teacher	"The teacher is kind" (4 students); Feeling pity for the teacher (1 student); Aware of obligations (2 students).	"Afraid of being scolded" (5 students); "The teacher is kind" (4 students); Wanting to be smart (2 students).

Response to Rewards	All (7) were very happy, feeling that rewards made them work faster.	All (11) were very happy, feeling that praise from the teacher boosted their enthusiasm.
Influence of Classmates	Positive: "Helping each other learn" (5); Negative: "Like to invite to play" (2).	Made them happy because they were not alone (6); Disturbing due to noise (5).
Parental Assistance at Home	Assisted by mother/family at home (5); Independent because parents work (2).	Often independent because parents are busy with migrant work/housework (5); Assisted (6).
Classroom Comfort	All (7 students) felt very comfortable and described the classroom as spacious.	The chairs were comfortable, but the majority (6 students) complained that the classroom was very noisy and cramped.
Preferred Learning Media	Picture books (7 students); Educational television broadcasts (4 students).	Picture books (11 students); Television to assist with mathematics (7 students).

Data Condensation and Thematic Analysis

An advanced analytical stage was conducted by condensing lengthy interview transcripts into meaningful codes based on the method by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher extracted original quotes (verbatim) from informants, assigned conceptual labels, and subsequently conducted searching and reviewing of themes. Several examples of the initial code extraction are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Examples of Condensation and Initial Coding of Interview Data

Informant's Original Quote (Verbatim)	Initial Analytical Code
"If the teacher gives me a pencil as a present, I become enthusiastic."	Reward increases motivation
"I am happiest when the teacher praises me for being smart."	Verbal praise as positive reinforcement
"In my class, my friends are always noisy, so I cannot focus."	Concentration disruption from peers
"I like school and am enthusiastic about learning because I have many friends."	Friends as social motivation agents
"Mom and Dad are always working, so at home, I study by myself."	Limited parental assistance time
"If the class is noisy, the teacher gets angry; I am afraid of being scolded."	Fear/punishment-based compliance
"Learning mathematics using TV broadcasts is more fun and easier."	Positive impact of visual/learning media
"The classroom is cramped, there are too many desks, so it feels suffocating."	Unconducive physical environment

From the grouping of these initial codes, four fundamental themes were identified that serve as the pillars of discussion in this study: (1) The dominance of extrinsic motivation in elementary school students; (2) The central role of the physical classroom environment in determining learning behavior; (3) The significance of family assistance on students' cognitive readiness; and (4) The dual influence (bifurcation) of peer interaction as both a motivation catalyst and a distractor.

Discussion: The Perspective of Robert E. Slavin's Educational Psychology

An analysis of the application of Robert E. Slavin's educational psychology perspective in Class I. A and I.C, both quantitatively and qualitatively, can be seen in Table 4 below. This table summarizes the real conditions in the field along with the achievement percentages of indicators for motivation, the provision of reinforcement, classroom management, time effectiveness (QAIT), and family support (Success for All).

Table 4. Achievement Percentages and Real Conditions of Applying Robert E. Slavin's Educational Psychology Perspective in Classes I.A and I.C

Educational Psychology Perspective (Robert E. Slavin)	Real Conditions & Achievement (Class I.A)	Real Conditions & Achievement (Class I.C)
Motivation: The factor that drives and directs student learning behavior. Extrinsic motivation (from external sources) still plays a highly significant role in elementary school students..	Achievement: 100%. All students (7 out of 7) demonstrated enthusiasm for learning. Interest, peers, and self-will influenced motivation.	Achievement: 100%. All students (11 out of 11) demonstrated enthusiasm for learning. Peer invitations and a liking for specific subjects heavily influenced motivation.
Reinforcement: The provision of praise, recognition, or rewards encourages students to continually repeat good learning behaviors.	Achievement: 100%. All students (7 out of 7) agreed that praise and rewards made them more enthusiastic, active, and faster in completing assignments.	Achievement: 100%. All students (11 out of 11) felt that praise and rewards increased their enthusiasm for learning, although occasionally disrupted by the noisy classroom atmosphere.
Classroom Management: The primary requirement for effective learning is achieved by creating a comfortable and orderly classroom atmosphere.	achievement: 100%. All students (7 out of 7) felt the classroom was spacious and comfortable. The orderly atmosphere allowed students to be more focused and active in learning.	Achievement: 45.5%. Only 5 students felt comfortable. The remaining students (6 out of 11) felt distracted and found it difficult to focus because the classroom was too crowded and noisy.
QAIT Model (Time Aspect): Proper time management so that materials are delivered maximally without wasting much time calming the class.	Achievement: 83.3%. 5 out of 6 indicators were achieved. The teacher was able to deliver the material fully because not much time was wasted reprimanding students.	Achievement: 66.7%. Only 4 out of 6 indicators were achieved. Learning time was frequently interrupted because the teacher had to restore order in the noisy classroom.
Success for All (Parental Involvement): Cooperation between the family and the school in assisting children's learning at home.	Achievement: 71.4%. The majority of students (5 out of 7) were accompanied by their parents while studying, making them more prepared to learn at school. Two students studied independently..	Achievement: 54.5%. Only 6 out of 11 students were assisted by their families. The remaining 5 students studied independently due to their parents' busy schedules.

Based on the data in Table 4, it is evident that student learning motivation in both Class I. A and Class I.C reached 100%. However, this motivation was still highly dependent on external drives (extrinsic motivation). The students' enthusiasm in answering questions or completing assignments was strongly

influenced by rewards (such as stationery) and praise from the teacher. Theoretically, according to Slavin (2011b), the researchers interpret this dominance of extrinsic motivation as a logical reflection of the cognitive development stage of early childhood (6–7 years). At this age bracket, a child's cognitive structure has not yet facilitated autonomous (intrinsic) learning awareness, so their learning schemas heavily require external reinforcement. In Class I.A, the teacher successfully provided targeted praise, which led to the continuous recurrence of the students' positive behaviors. This finding aligns with the studies by Aljena et al. (2020) and Andriana et al. (2023), which demonstrated that appreciation is highly effective in increasing the active participation of elementary school students. This is also in line with the findings of Citra and Syahrilfuddin (2019), who stated that providing reinforcement has a significant and high-impact effect on student learning motivation. Conversely, when the teacher in Class I.C rarely provided praise, students tended to become passive or seek attention by disrupting their peers. Furthermore, Yunita and Ain (2022) revealed that teacher strategies for motivating students, such as showing appreciation for success and giving additional points during the learning process, are highly necessary to maintain student enthusiasm in achieving learning goals. This indicates that children at this age still learn primarily to obtain rewards or avoid punishment, rather than out of pure personal awareness (Boncquet et al., 2024).

Besides motivation, the physical environment and classroom management are also highly crucial determining factors. Table 1 indicates a sharp disparity in achievement between Class I.A (100%) and Class I.C (45.5%) regarding classroom comfort. Slavin asserts that good classroom management is an absolute prerequisite for an effective teaching and learning process. The overcapacity condition of Class I.C made it difficult for the majority of students to concentrate. Based on Slavin's QAIT (Quality, Appropriateness, Incentive, Time) theory, the teaching time effectiveness in Class I.C consequently decreased (66.7% compared to Class I.A, which reached 83.3%). The researchers interpret this decline as an impact of the loss of Time on Task (effective learning time), where the crowded physical capacity of the classroom forced academic instruction to be distracted by disciplinary management instruction. Instead of focusing on delivering the material, the teacher in Class I.C spent a significant amount of time calming the students down.

Furthermore, a spacious and well-organized classroom has been proven to enhance students' learning focus (Wallangara, 2025; Daulay et al., 2022). A meta-analysis study by Nafisa et al. (2020) also confirmed that proper classroom management has a positive and significant impact on elementary school students' learning outcomes. Another difference was observed in the use of learning media. The Class I.A teacher more frequently utilized videos or pictures, which proved effective in reducing boredom and increasing student enthusiasm (Purnami & Utami, 2024; Febrita & Ulfah, 2019).

Another equally crucial factor is family support at home, which in Slavin's approach is known as the *Success for All* program. Regarding this indicator, the level of learning assistance by parents in Class I. A (71.4%) was higher than in Class I.C (54.5%). Given that the majority of the students' parents work as migrant workers, the time available to assist their children with studying at home was highly limited. According to Slavin (2011b), schools cannot bear the burden of a child's education alone; parental involvement—even if it entails merely 20 minutes of reading with the child—is of paramount importance. Class I.C students, who rarely received assistance at home, frequently arrived at school less prepared to engage with the lessons compared to Class I. A student. This lack of preparation ultimately made them more susceptible to distractions in the classroom. Furthermore, numerous studies concur that parents are a child's first teachers (Salsabila et al., 2024; Hakim et al., 2024), and a lack of parental assistance at home can diminish a child's foundational motivation to achieve (Hasanah et al., 2023).

The final factor influencing the learning process is peer interaction. Qualitative data regarding motivation revealed that peers exerted a very strong influence, although the impact differed between the two classes. In Class I.A, characterized by a spacious classroom and a firm teacher, peers provided a positive influence (acting as good role models). Students were motivated to study diligently by observing their hardworking classmates. This aligns with the perspectives of Nurazizah and Nurfirdaus (2025) as well as

Fitriyah and Indawati (2024), who stated that healthy friendships can stimulate learning enthusiasm. Conversely, in the crowded and frequently uncondusive conditions of Class I.C, peers actually acted as triggers for commotion and a loss of learning focus. As explained by Hairunnisa (2018), peers can exert a negative influence if the classroom environment is disorderly. Andriani et al. (2022) also found that external factors such as a monotonous learning atmosphere, teacher-centered learning, and an unsupportive peer environment can cause low student interest and attention toward learning.

To address the problem of distraction tendencies in a crowded classroom like Class I.C, Robert E. Slavin's educational psychology perspective offers concrete mechanisms through which teachers can intervene and transform destructive peer dynamics into a source of positive learning. First, teachers can implement Cooperative Learning structures, such as the STAD (Student Teams-Achievement Divisions) model. Through this mechanism, students are not left to interact freely without direction in a crowded space; rather, they are grouped into small, heterogeneous teams. Slavin (2011a) emphasizes that by providing group rewards based on individual accountability, the social urge of students to chat or play can be converted into an urge to teach one another (peer tutoring) for the sake of team success. Second, teachers can apply sociometric engineering and strategic seating arrangements. The teacher actively separates student pairs identified as triggering mutual distraction (disruptive pairs) and pairs students with high concentration or IQ with those who are easily distracted. Third, teachers can utilize Peer-Mediated Reinforcement techniques, where the drive to attain group praise serves as a mechanism for social control. When the group norm is shifted from "being proud of causing a commotion" to "being proud of helping the team achieve learning targets," peer influence mechanically shifts from a trigger for noise into a catalyst for positive motivation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis and discussion, this study concludes with three main findings that concisely and directly address the research objectives:

1. First, regarding the comparison of learning behavior and motivation, Class I.A exhibited a conducive and focused learning behavior, whereas Class I.C was highly prone to distraction due to overcrowding. However, motivation in both classes remained uniformly dominated by extrinsic drives—relying heavily on rewards, praise, or fear of punishment—which reflects the normative cognitive developmental stage of 6-7-year-olds.
2. Second, these behavioral disparities were driven by three primary causative factors: (a) the physical capacity of the classroom, where Class I.C suffered from severe overcapacity; (b) limited parental assistance at home, particularly prevalent among the migrant worker families in Class I.C; and (c) the dual impact of peer interaction, which acted as a motivational catalyst in Class I. A, but as a major distractor in Class I.C.
3. Third, viewed through Robert E. Slavin's educational psychology perspective, the decreased learning effectiveness in Class I.C resulted from the loss of *Time on Task* (the QAIT model) due to physical capacity disruptions. To mitigate this, Slavin's framework offers concrete solutions: transforming peer distractions into positive learning sources via Cooperative Learning (specifically the STAD model, utilizing group rewards and individual accountability), strategic seating arrangements, and peer-mediated reinforcement.

In light of these empirical findings, it is highly recommended that the school management redistribute the number of students per class to restore a comfortable and effective learning atmosphere. Furthermore, teachers must enhance their classroom management skills to minimize peer-related disruptions, while the school should establish closer communication with parents to encourage active learning assistance at home as a tangible manifestation of the 'Success for All' collaborative principle.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study has limitations, as the subjects were exclusively focused on two classes at the foundational elementary school level (Phase A, Grade 1) over a single semester. Additionally, this research was unable to observe long-term developmental changes regarding the transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies employ quasi-experimental methods at higher grade levels to allow for a more comprehensive evaluation of the application of Slavin's model.

Author Contributions

Yahya Hafidza Ramadhani: Conceptualization of the theoretical framework, Methodology, Field observational investigation, Data collection and processing, Formal thematic analysis, Writing – original draft. Arif Humaini: Research supervision, Data validation, Structural and methodological review, Writing – review and editing.

Maghfiroh and Siti Sulihah: Served as key informants and primary data providers through face-to-face interviews. They provided the contextual information and field data that served as the essential foundational material for the thematic analysis conducted by the first author.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest, either financial or personal, that could influence the objectivity of this research.

Ethics Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study. Specifically for the first-grade students at Sekolah Indonesia Mekkah, consent was provided by proxy through their legal parents or guardians. All participants were fully informed regarding the research objectives, the procedures to be conducted, the guarantee of data confidentiality, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

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