Effects of Cooperative Learning Strategy on Secondary School II Students' Performance in English Grammar in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of Cooperative Learning Strategy on Senior School II Students' Performance in English Grammar in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State. The objectives of the study were to find out the effects of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in subject-verb concord and performance in English tenses in Makurdi LGA. *The study employed quasi experimental research design in gathering data. Students' Performance Test on Grammar (SPTG) was used as instrument for data collection. The sample comprised 120 SS2 students drawn from 31 public and 50 private co-educational secondary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. The data collected were analyzed using statistical mean and standard deviation to answer research questions while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that cooperative learning strategy is a metacognitive strategy that enhances teaching and boosts students' performance in English grammar. It was therefore recommended among others that English Language educators should consider implementing metacognitive strategies such as cooperative learning to teach in order to enhance students' performance in English grammar.*

Keywords: *Cooperative Learning, Subject, Verb, Concord, English Grammar, Tenses, Performance.*

Introduction

The English language plays a pivotal role in Nigeria's socio-economic, educational, and political landscape as delineated in the National Language Policy and subsequent developments (Federal Republic

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of Nigeria, 2004). According to this policy, English language serves as the primary medium of instruction in Nigerian schools. It is utilized across all subjects, except for indigenous languages, which are taught as separate subjects. This ensures a standardized approach to education and facilitates access to knowledge for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In addition to its official status, English serves as the predominant language of business, commerce, and trade in Nigeria. Its widespread usage facilitates communication and transactions among individuals in businesses, and organizations across different regions and linguistic groups. Proficiency in English is often a prerequisite for employment in various sectors of the economy, such as finance, banking, tourism, and international trade (FRN, 2004).

Despite its colonial origins, English has become deeply entrenched in Nigeria's cultural and national identity. While efforts are made to preserve indigenous languages and promote linguistic diversity, English remains an indispensable tool for communication, education, governance, and socio-economic development in Nigeria (Danladi, 2013).

Effective communication and instructional practices are fundamental components of quality education, crucial for facilitating learning and fostering academic achievement in diverse educational settings. Clear and engaging communication between educators and students are essential for conveying information, clarifying concepts, and promoting active participation in the learning process (Klauer, Lauterbach, Kray & Frey, 2020). Through effective communication, educators can create a supportive and interactive learning environment conducive for students' engagement and success.

Furthermore, communication serves instructional purposes by facilitating the transmission of curriculum content, learning objectives, and assessment criteria (Akkerman & Bakker, 2021). Educators employ a variety of instructional strategies, including verbal explanations, visual aids, digital resources, and interactive discussions, to deliver lessons effectively so as to accommodate diverse learning needs (Harvey & Kaminske, 2019). Effective communication during instruction ensures that students understand the expectations, requirements, and goals of each lesson, empowering them to take ownership of their learning activities.

Instructional purposes encompass a wide range of activities and strategies aimed at promoting student learning and skill development (McCombs, Augustine, Schwartz, Bodily, McInnis, Lichter & Cross, 2020). Educators design instruction that is engaging, relevant, and differentiated to meet the diverse needs and interests of students (Harris & Hofer, 2011). Therefore, utilizing evidence-based instructional practices, such as cooperative learning, inquiry-based learning, and formative assessment, may enable educators create meaningful learning experiences that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity among students (Hattie, Fisher & Frey, 2017).

English language is of paramount importance as a subject due to its universality and significance in today's interconnected (global) world. Proficiency in English enables individuals to effectively communicate, collaborate, and participate in global discourse, facilitating cultural exchange and understanding. Moreover, it serves as a gateway to a vast array of knowledge, literature, and information, empowering learners to access a wealth of resources across various domains. Furthermore, English proficiency enhances opportunities for academic and professional advancement, as it is widely used in education, business, science, technology, and diplomacy. Studying English Language, evidently, equips students with essential skills for success in a diverse and rapidly evolving global society, fostering personal growth, intellectual development, and cross-cultural competence.

Students, who may know the rules of grammar most of the time, do not know how to make use of them while speaking and writing. It has been observed that secondary school students in Makurdi Local Government Area find it difficult to use some of the grammar rules. For example, some of them use sentences that are monotonous; sentences such as, "I can be able to cook the food", "Although he is poor but he is honest", "I cannot come and go to the market". These sentences are not grammatically correct.

These experiences were taken from students' conversations and writing. Other rules have also posed challenges to these learners when they speak and write. For example; "Kumaga <u>drive</u> that car everyday".

More challenges observed are the inconsistency of tenses. For instance; "Fanen went to the market but he will soon came back". This statement is ungrammatical because the word "came" as used in the past tense is supposed to be present- "come". These ungrammatical sentences were derived by listening to students during the lesson when they were asked to construct sentences.

The traditional method of teaching has faced criticism for its perceived rigidity and lack of adaptability to diverse learning styles and modern educational needs. Critics argue that the emphasis on rote memorization and standardized testing can stifle creativity and critical thinking skills, inhibiting students' ability to engage deeply with subject matter. Additionally, traditional teaching methods often prioritize the dissemination of information over fostering meaningful understanding and application of knowledge**.** Consequently, there has been a shift from teacher-centred approaches to teaching and learning to more student-centered approaches which prioritize collaboration, inquiry-based learning, and the development of essential skills for the 21st century.

Cooperative learning strategy has been shown to be effective in promoting equitable participation and fostering a supportive learning environment for diverse student population, including English language learners and students with special needs (O'Connor & Michaels, 2018; Kagan, 2019). By engaging in collaborative activities, students can benefit from peer interaction, peer support, and peer feedback, which can enhance their learning experiences and outcomes (Slavin, 2015; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2023).

Cooperative learning strategy enables students to share ideas concerning a learning task. Sarma, Baruah, and Das (2020) highlight the role of cooperative learning strategy, such as group discussions and peer tutoring in promoting grammar learning achievement. Through peer interaction and feedback, students can clarify misconceptions, share insights, and reinforce grammar concepts. Additionally, cooperative learning activities encourage active participation and communication, allowing students to practice grammar skills in authentic contexts and develop their language proficiency.

The importance of cooperative learning cannot be over emphasized. Selami and Çelik (2021) affirm the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategy as it enhances students' grammar performance and motivation. Similarly, Chen and Wang (2022) investigated the effects of cooperative learning activities on students' subject-verb concord learning skills and the results indicated that students who participated in cooperative learning activities demonstrated greater improvement in subject-verb concord compared to those in traditional (teacher-centered) instruction. This has shown that engaging in cooperative tasks and projects, students can apply grammar rules in real-world scenarios, improving their language comprehension and retention. Furthermore, cooperative learning fosters positive interdependence among students, encouraging teamwork and collaboration in grammar tasks. This collaborative strategy does not only enhance grammar instruction but also cultivates essential skills such as communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving. It also inculcates the spirit of collaboration in life generally.

It is against this backdrop that this study posits to work to investigate the effect of cooperative learning strategy on performance in English grammar among secondary school II students in Makurdi, Benue State.

Theoretical Framework

Lev Vygotsky's Social Development Theory (1978)
Vygotsky's social development theory proposes that cognitive development is a collaborative process shaped by social interaction and cultural influences. Central to this theory is the concept of Zone

of Proximal Development (ZPD), which delineates the space between what a learner can achieve independently and what s/he can achieve with the guidance of a more knowledgeable other. Within the ZPD, learners engage in activities that challenge their current abilities but are attainable with appropriate support. This underscores the critical role of social interaction, as interactions with peers, teachers, or parents provide the scaffolding necessary for learners to progress through their ZPD. Through collaborative efforts, learners not only accomplish tasks but also internalize new knowledge and skills, facilitating cognitive growth.

Vygotsky highlights the significance of cultural tools in cognitive development. Language, as a primary cultural tool, plays a pivotal role in mediating social interactions and shaping thought processes. Language enables individuals to communicate, share ideas, and engage in collaborative problem-solving activities, thereby facilitating the internalization of knowledge and the construction of higher-order thinking skills. Cultural artifacts and symbols also contribute to cognitive development by providing external representations of abstract concepts, aiding learners in understanding complex ideas within their cultural context.

Vygotsky's social development theory is relevant to cooperative learning strategy in grammar instruction. This is because the strategy encourages collaboration in the learning processes through guidance of individual learners by a more knowledgeable other usually the teacher. Cooperative learning just like social development theory promotes scaffolding principle in the teaching and learning process. Similarly, cooperative learning promotes collaboration in learning thereby enhancing independent problem-solving learning process.

Objectives

The study is aimed at investigating effects of cooperative learning strategy on senior secondary II students' performance in English grammar in Makurdi Local Government Area, Benue State. The study specifically sought to:

i.   find out the effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in subject-verb concord?
ii.   ascertain the effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in English language tenses?

Research Questions
i.   What is the effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in subject-verb concord?
ii.   What is the effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in English language tenses?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level significance

i.   There is no significant effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in subject- verb concord.
ii.   There is no significant effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in English language tenses.

Research Methods

This study adopted descriptive survey design. This design is considered appropriate because the study involves collection of data from a representative sample of the population within a short period of time. Nworgu (2006) opined that descriptive design aims at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. A sample of 249 teachers and 357 SS2 students was selected for the study. Cluster sampling technique was used to draw the sample for the study. During the process, each local government area of the state was treated as clusters, using simple random sampling. In the process five local government areas were drawn by balloting with replacement. Furthermore, 26 schools were selected across the five selected local government areas using simple random sampling. In all, 26 schools 249 teachers and 357 SS2 students were selected for the study. The study used questionnaire tagged Questionnaire on Teacher Motivation and Students' Academic Achievement (QOTMASAA). The data collected were analysed using Frequency count and simple percentages in answering the research questions while chi-square statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What is the effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in subject-verb concord?

Table 1 presents data on students' performance in subject-verb concord agreement of students taught using cooperative learning strategy.

Table 1.**Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis on Cooperative Learning Group and Control Group in Subject-Verb Concord**

Group	N	Pretest Mean	Std. Deviation	Posttest Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean gain
Cooperative Learning Group (EG1)	60	11.03	1.69	21.27	1.99	10.24
Control Group	60	10.48	2.12	9.70	1.26	5.22
Mean difference		**6.55**		**11.57**		**5.02**

Table 1 shows that the cooperative learning group had a mean of 11.03 with a standard deviation of 1.69 during pretest and a mean of 21.27 with a standard deviation of 1.99 in the posttest, which gave a mean gain of 10.24 for the experimental group 1. The control group had a mean of 10.48 with a standard deviation of 2.12 in the pretest and a mean of 9.70 with a standard deviation of 1.26 in the posttest, which gave a mean gain of 5.22 for the control group. The table further reveals that there was a mean difference of 6.55 and 11.57 in favour of the cooperative learning group in the pretest and posttest respectively. In addition, there was a mean gain difference of 5.02 in favour of the cooperative learning group.

Research Question 2: What is the effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in English language tenses?

Table 2 presents data on students' performance in grammar (tenses) after exposure to treatment.

Table 2. **Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis on Cooperative Learning Group and Control Group in English Language Tenses**

Group	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean gain
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation	
Cooperative Learning Group (EG2)	60	7.36	2.57	16.86	2.58	9.50
Control Group	60	6.48	2.119	9.70	1.26	5.22
Mean difference		**2.88**		**7.16**		**4.28**

Table 2 shows that the cooperative learning group had a mean of 7.36 with a standard deviation of 2.57 during pretest and a mean of 16.86 with a standard deviation of 2.58 in the posttest, which gave a mean gain of 9.50 for the experimental group 2. The control group had a mean of 6.48 with a standard deviation of 2.119 in the pretest and a mean of 9.70 with a standard deviation of 1.26 in the posttest, which gave a mean gain of 5.22 for the control group. The table further reveals that there was a mean difference of 2.88 and 7.16 in favour of the cooperative learning group in the pretest and posttest respectively. In addition, there was a mean gain difference of 4.28 in favour of the cooperative learning group.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in subject- verb concord.

Table 3. Pairwise Comparison between Cooperative Learning Strategy and Conventional Method

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
EG1	EG2	3.243[*]	.628	.000
	CG	9.484[*]	.832	.000

Table 3 indicates that there is a significant difference (0.00< 0.05) between the cooperative learning strategy group (experimental group) and the control group. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in subject- verb concord. This implies that students in the cooperative learning strategy group significantly outperformed those in the control group in subject-verb concord.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in English language tenses.

Table 4. Pairwise comparison between Cooperative Learning Strategy and Conventional Method

(I) Groups	(J) Groups	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
EG2	EG1	-3.243[*]	.628	.000

	CG	6.241[*]	.597	.000

Table 4 indicates that there is a significant difference (0.00< 0.05) between the cooperative learning strategy group and the control group. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, which implies that students in the cooperative learning strategy group significantly outperformed those in the control group taught English tenses using conventional strategy.

Discussion of Findings

Research question one and hypothesis one are targeted at finding out the effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in subject- verb concord in Makurdi LGA. The findings showed that cooperative learning strategy has a significant positive effect on SS2 students' performance in subject-verb concord. The finding showed that students who were taught English subject – concord using cooperative learning strategy performed better than those in the control group who were taught English grammar in the aspect of subject-verb concord using traditional strategy.

The finding of this study is in conformity with Chen and Wang (2022) who investigated the effects of cooperative learning activities on students' subject-verb concord learning skills. The researchers implemented group-based tasks where students collaborated to identify and correct subject-verb agreement errors in sentences. Results from the findings indicated that students who participated in cooperative learning activities demonstrated greater improvement in subject-verb concord compared to those in traditional (teacher-centered) instruction. This confirms that cooperative learning fosters a supportive environment where students actively engage with the material, receive peer feedback, and construct their understanding collaboratively. The finding of this study also agrees with Slain's (2015) study which indicated that by engaging in collaborative activities, students can benefit from peer interaction, peer support, and peer feedback, which can enhance their learning experiences and outcomes. Thus, students' learning that involves collaboration enhances understanding since students feel more comfortable when there is peer collaboration such as cooperative learning strategy.

Research question two and hypothesis two were targeted at finding out the effect of cooperative learning strategy on SS2 students' performance in English Language tenses in Makurdi LGA. The findings showed that cooperative learning strategy has a significant positive effect on SS2 students' performance in English language tenses. The finding showed that students who were taught English grammar using cooperative learning strategy performed better than those in control group who were taught English language tenses using conventional strategy. This study is in tandem with Selami and Çelik (2021) who affirmed the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategy as it enhances students' grammar performance. By engaging in cooperative tasks and projects, students can apply grammar rules in real-world scenarios, improving their language comprehension and retention. This further affirmed that cooperative learning fosters positive interdependence among students, encouraging teamwork and collaboration in grammar tasks.

Similar to this finding is Nguyen and Nguyen's (2023) whose investigation revealed that cooperative learning activities enable students attain mastery of English language tenses. This is possible in case students work together in a group-based tasks to identify, analyze, and practice different tense forms in authentic language contexts. Students who participated in cooperative learning activities demonstrated greater gains in their understanding and application of English tenses compared to those in traditional (teacher-centered) classrooms. This confirms that cooperative learning facilitates deeper learning experiences through peer interaction, discussion, and collaborative problem-solving, which are essential for mastering the complexities of tense usage in English language. The findings of this study is also in

agreement with Sarma, Baruah, and Das (2020) whose research highlighted the role of cooperative learning strategy, such as group discussions and peer tutoring in promoting grammar learning achievement. Through peer interaction and feedback, students can clarify misconceptions, share insights, and reinforce grammar concepts.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is pertinent to note that cooperative learning strategy is a metacognitive strategy that enhances teaching and boosts students' performance in English grammar. Based on this result, the study recommended that language educators should consider implementing metacognitive strategies such as cooperative learning to teach and enhance students' performance in English grammar. This strategy is crucial as it enhances cooperation among the learners who are vital for societal growth and development. The spirit of cooperation and team work not only broaden learners' intellectual horizon, but enlightens them to acknowledge the issue of working together to achieve a common goal.

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