

Areas of Difficulties in English Grammar among Senior Secondary Schools Students in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State

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Abstract

This study examined the difficult areas in English grammar among students in Senior Secondary schools in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State. The study adopted the survey design. A total of 300 senior secondary school students were randomly selected from 10 public secondary schools in Ondo West Local Government Area, Ondo State. The instrument used was Questionnaire on Knotty Areas in English Grammar ($r=0.87$). The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The results indicated that students' identified irregular verbs, concord, question and answer tags as knotty areas in English grammar. Based on the findings, it was recommended that teachers should adopt effective teaching strategies that could demystify these grammatical concepts for students.

Keywords: English grammar, Knotty concepts, Concord rules, Students in Ondo West.

Introduction

Grammar is an important aspect of the English language curriculum because it is concerned with the rules and principles that enable users of a language to relate linguistic form to meaning. Grammar is both the name of a study (that is, a branch of linguistics) and an object of study (that is, a part of language). It refers to how words (morphology) and sentences (syntax) are made up. It is what turns words into language, which is essentially a means of meaningful communication.

English grammar deals with the rules and principles that determine what is right or acceptable as far as the use of a language is concerned. Grammar is the central component of language learning and teaching. It mediates between the system of sounds or of written symbols, on the one hand, and the system of meaning on the other. Adedigba (2015) explains grammar as the railway through which one's messages will be transported. Without it, in the same way as a train cannot move without railways, one would not be able to convey one's ideas to their full extension without a good command of the underlying grammar patterns and structures of the language.

Teaching grammar should be done

through varied strategies and meaningful activities so that students could figure out the patterns of a target language in which it leads them to apply it in effective ways. The main function of grammar teaching is to empower the learners to comprehend these sets of rules and so to provide them with the skill of interpretation in the target language. To sum up, students can apply the grammar knowledge to figure out, understand and create purposeful meaning of using the target language in their daily context life and it is believed by the grammar experts that mastering the grammar knowledge and rules is the grindstone for achieving language proficiency.

It has been observed that many public secondary school students in Ondo West, Nigeria find English grammar as being abstract. Also, from previous reports from WAEC 2022-2023, paper 2, on the performance of students in English Language, it has been observed that students' performance in the various aspects of English, such as poor expression as a result of wrong concord, poor punctuation marks, wrong use of tenses, poor use of prepositions and articles, inability to construct simple and correct sentences and wrong use of the first person pronoun I, is due to poor knowledge of the basic rules of English grammar, has been alarming and

consistent. This may be due to the abstract nature of English grammar showing that there would be some knotty concepts in English grammar for students. Previous studies focused largely on interventions to improve students' performance in English grammar with little consideration for empirical identification of knotty aspects of English grammar for students to comprehend.

Statement of the Problem

The teaching of English grammar concepts is to empower the learners to comprehend these sets of rules and to provide them with the skill of interpretation in the target language. This will enable them to engage in meaningful communication in the society. However, students have not been doing well in English grammar according to the recent report of WAEC chief examiner. Previous studies have focused on various strategies of teaching English grammar. Although, the studies came up with laudable contributions to the teaching and learning of English grammar, the students' poor knowledge of English grammar concepts continued. This may be due to the abstract nature of English grammar showing that there would be some knotty concepts in English grammar for students and probably teachers. However, the difficult English grammar topics are yet to be known empirically from the perspectives of the students. Therefore, this study examined the perception of teachers and students about the difficult concepts in English grammar.

Research Questions

This study answers the following research questions

1. Which concepts are perceived by students as difficult in English grammar?
2. What is the difference between male and female students in their perceived difficult concepts in English grammar?

Scope of the Study

The study covered senior secondary school students in Ondo West Local Government. The study determined the

perceived difficult concepts in English grammar by students. Grammar topics covered were Mood, Voice, Direct and Indirect speech, Question tags, Tenses, and Sentence combining devices which are considered vital to effective learning.

Significance of the Study

The study revealed the perceived difficult concepts in English grammar to students and English Language teachers in Ondo West Local Government on the perceived difficult concepts in English Grammar and how students can be helped in understanding the various concepts in English Grammar. Finally, it would be useful to curriculum planners who are in constant search for the difficult concepts in English Grammar in secondary schools.

Literature Review

Some studies in the teaching and learning of English grammar are hereby reviewed. Chang (2011) investigated a contrastive study of grammar translation method and communicative approach in teaching English grammar. He explored a comparison between the controllability and feasibility of these two approaches to find out which one is more suitable for grammar teaching in Taiwan by selecting two classes that were taught the Grammar Translation Method and the Communicative Approach respectively. It was observed that grammar teaching in the framework of the Grammar Translation Method is better than the Communicative Approach. Nevertheless, the Communicative Approach emphasizes fluency while the Grammar Translation Method is concerned with accuracy. Since fluency and accuracy are the target for English learning. It was recommended that the best way to improve the situation is to combine both methods in teaching English Grammar.

Mabekoje (2012) investigated the effects of cooperative learning strategies (Jigsaw, Numbered-Heads-Together and Group Investigation) on secondary school students' learning outcomes in English grammar in Ogun

State, she has also explored the interaction effects of gender and parental educational support on the dependent variables. It has been observed that Cooperative learning instructional strategies have positive effect on students' learning outcomes in English grammar. Students' poor achievement and unfavourable attitude to grammar could be improved using cooperative learning strategy. It is, therefore, recommended that teachers should be encouraged to use the Group Investigation Cooperative Learning Strategy to improve students' performance in English grammar.

Althagafi (2018) investigated A critical review of Grammar Teaching Methodologies in the Saudi context. It was observed that all the method of teaching English grammar except the Grammar-Translation tended to place more weight on being intelligible than on being correct. So, they tended to present fluency-to-accuracy. Moreover, it should be noted that grammatical analysis in English is extremely complex. There are always exceptions to rules, therefore, it will be unfruitful to focus on rules only or separate them from meaning and context.

Matkasimova and Makhmudov investigated (2020) investigated on the importance of interactive methods in English Language Grammar Teaching. It was observed by them that there have been some challenges in foreign language teaching and learning and that it brings some problematic situations especially in English grammar. It was further observed that interactive approaches and methods play a crucial role in order to deal with this issue. Their study purposed to explore Realia or authenticity and Multimedia method to teach English grammar easily and more effectively. It is therefore recommended that teaching English and grammar require knowledge of different learning styles and methodologies successfully with the combination of other skills and innovative methods to reach every student in the classroom.

Ossai, Eze, Obayi (2020) investigated on Promoting Classroom Interactivity through CALL in the teaching and learning of English

grammar in Nigerian federal universities, explored the possible ways of promoting classroom interactivity through the use of computer assisted language teaching to help students avert the difficulties they encounter in learning of English grammar. It was observed that the use of online exploration, social networking sites and multimedia computer among others are ways of promoting classroom interactivity through CALL to help the learners avert the challenges they encounter in learning of grammar. It was concluded that classroom interactivity which is enhanced by the use of computer assisted language teaching provides solutions to difficulties encountered by students in learning of grammar. Moreover, it helps learners practice and experience the use of grammar in context.

Khasawneh (2021) investigated the effectiveness of using multimedia in developing the concepts of the English language grammar concepts for people with learning difficulties. It was observed that the superiority of the student group that studied using computer multimedia as cognitive tools accompanied by discussion in understanding English language grammar excelled over the other groups. It was therefore recommended that the importance of discussion accompanies the use of computer multimedia in teaching to achieve a better participation from the student during their learning of the English language. Also, employing multimedia as cognitive tools helps the learner develop their mental abilities.

Arikn (2019) investigated the challenges associated with teaching and learning of English grammar in Nigerian Secondary Schools. It explored the challenges which are associated with the teaching and learning of English Grammar in Nigeria secondary schools as well as the factors which make teaching and learning of English Grammar a serious challenge. It was recommended that problems in the English grammar can be minimized through teachers' and learners' commitment to the task of teaching and learning. The art of spelling can be perfected through constant practice and reading. Learners

should be encouraged to cultivate the habit of constant use of the dictionary when in doubt about spelling of any word.

Oribabor (2018) investigated the challenges in the teaching and learning of Concord in the Use of the English language. The study analyzed the concord errors in the written composition of J.S.S.III pupils in some selected secondary schools in Abeokuta Central Local Government, Ogun State. It specifically presents the descriptive analysis of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents; investigated the types of concord errors made by J.S.S III pupils in selected secondary schools in Abeokuta Central Local Government, Ogun State; found out the common errors the students make in their essays; and identified the various problems the pupils often encounter in the use of concord. The study revealed that majority in JSS III Pupils in Abeokuta Central Local Government, Ogun State has problems in applying the rules of concord. Most of the errors committed were under subject verb concord of number and person. The study concluded that teachers should attempt in-service training so that students can write error free essays and students should be given an eloquent and essential English teaching curriculum.

Udu (2017) conducted a research study which determined which topics in the English language curriculum for senior secondary school are perceived by students and teachers as difficult. It also examined difficult topics vis-à-vis English language achievement. The results of the analysis showed that out of the 35 topics selected from the SSCE syllabus and prescribed textbooks for English at that level, teachers perceived 14 as difficult topics, while students perceived 22 as difficult topics.

In support of the fact that students encounter difficulties in grammar, Nujaree, Sathaporn, and Pennee (2021) carried out a study on the grammatical errors made by English students of the Matthayom Suksa four students in KhonKaen and found out that students make very many errors in English grammar.

In a similar study, Muh, Umi, Uchti, Aulia and Dati (2019) examined the teaching of on

grammar at an English Education Department in an EFL context in Asia. The study found out that due to the difficulties the learners encounter in learning of grammar, they have not mastered the English grammar. Moreover, Bakuuro (2017) investigated the difficulties senior high school two students of Islamic and Wa senior High Schools encounter in the use of English grammatical concord. The researcher found out that most of the students have serious problems with subject-verb agreement. The difficulties which learners encounter in the use of grammar were attributed to inconsistencies in the rules of grammar, and to lack of interactive activities which enable the learners apply the rules of grammar in actual communication during instruction. These loopholes lead to acquisition of the theoretical knowledge of grammar without an opportunity to practice it in context.

Also, another study by Aman (2020) explores the complex relationship between the beliefs and practices of teachers from primary schools in Singapore, specifically looking at how instructional strategies are reflections of teacher beliefs on grammar instruction. Overall, the teachers who participated in this survey unanimously agree that grammar is important and has to be taught in primary school. They believe that grammar consists of rules of sentence formation, and the use of accurate tenses, and that grammar should focus on both form and meaning. Explicit discussion of grammatical rules in the classroom is thought to be extremely important in helping students acquire the English language and develop their writing skills.

Umar and Umar (2021) investigated the English language tenses error usage and its effect on academic performance among selected secondary school students in the Sokoto metropolis. The study explored the usage of present tense comprising spoken and writing among the secondary school students in, to determine the usage of past tense comprising spoken and writing among the secondary school students, to find out the usage of future tense comprising spoken and writing among the secondary school students all in Sokoto

metropolises. The study revealed that there is positive usage of English tense form among the student. The study recommends that teachers should try to emphasize the teaching of English tenses and their forms to the students and the importance of the tenses on both spoken and written which can improve the student accuracy in the language.

Methodology

The researcher adopted survey design. This was so because the aim of the study was to obtain information from a representative selection of the population. Also, this was considered appropriate because it afforded the researcher to objectively describe students' perceived difficult concepts in English grammar and the description of events was given as they were without any manipulation of the variable. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 10 public senior secondary schools in Ondo West Local Government Area. Thirty (30) students from each school making a total of students three hundred (300) students were

randomly selected. The instrument used was Questionnaire on Perceived Knotty Concepts in English grammar by Students ($r=0.87$). The researcher. The researcher sought the permission of the principals of the schools and was given an approval to administer the questionnaires with the assistance of the teachers in charge of teaching English language in SSII. The teachers who served as research assistants were briefed on how to go about the administration of the questionnaires. The teachers and the students were informed of the purpose of the research and what it entailed. The questionnaires were administered on English language teachers and students in their various schools. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation to answer research questions.

Results

Research Question 1: Which concepts are perceived by students as difficult in English grammar?

Table 4.3: Students' Perception of Difficult Concepts in English grammar

S/N	Items	VD	QD	A	VE	QE	Mean	St. D.
1	How do you find the learning of verbs in English grammar?	5 (1.7%)	-	38 (12.7%)	231 (77%)	26 (8.7%)	1.40	.83
2	What is your assessment of your understanding of question tags?	8 (2.7%)	7 (2.3%)	14 (4.7%)	135 (45%)	136 (45.3%)	1.66	.91
3	How would you rate the learning of tense and aspect?	4 (1.3%)	7 (2.3%)	27 (9%)	166 (55.3%)	96 (32%)	1.62	.84
4	What would you say about the learning of subject-verb agreement in your English grammar class?	4 (1.3%)	12 (4%)	68 (22.7%)	148 (49.3%)	68 (22.7%)	1.85	.99
5	How do you consider the learning of the topic pronoun-antecedent agreement?	4 (1.3%)	30 (10%)	45 (15%)	123 (41%)	98 (32.7%)	1.96	1.06
6	What do you think of gerunds as an aspect of English grammar?	27 (9%)	8 (2.7%)	46 (15.3%)	93 (31%)	126 (42%)	2.16	1.16

7	How do you perceive the topic "passive and active voice"?	2 (0.7%)	10 (3.3%)	26 (8.7%)	170 (56.7%)	92 (30.7%)	1.59	.84
8	How would you classify your understanding of phrases in the English grammar?	-	6 (2%)	23 (7.7%)	174 (58%)	97 (32.3%)	1.53	.72
9	How will you find your understanding of clauses in English grammar?	2 (0.7%)	9 (3%)	40 (13.3%)	148 (49.3%)	101 (33.7%)	1.75	1.00
10	What is your perception of sentences?	26 (8.7%)	10 (3.3%)	45 (15%)	131 (43.7%)	88 (29.3%)	2.04	1.22
11	How would you perceive the learning of direct and indirect speeches?	33 (11%)	26 (8.7%)	66 (22%)	87 (29%)	88 (29.3%)	2.42	1.30
12	How do you find the learning of mood?	14 (4.7%)	12 (4%)	29 (9.7%)	153 (51%)	92 (30.7%)	1.80	1.07
Weighted Mean = 1.82; Threshold = 3.00								

Table 1 shows the perception of students about difficult English grammar concepts. The result indicates a weighted mean of 1.82 which is lower than the threshold set at 3.00. This implies that the students perceived the knotty concepts as verb tenses, concord, clauses, mood and aspect.

Research Question 2: What is the difference between the male and female students in their perceived difficult concepts in English grammar?

Table 2: The difference between the male and female students in the perceived difficult concepts in English grammar

Variables	Mean	N	St. Dev.	Mean Diff	t	df	p-value	Remarks
Male	26.20	10	3.58	4.30	2.32	9	.045	Sig.
Female	21.90	10	6.21					

Table 4.4 shows that there is a significant difference in the perception of male and female students about difficult concepts in English grammar ($t=2.32$; $df=9$; $p<0.05$). This result indicates that male students had a higher mean score (26.20) than the mean score of female students (21.90). This implies that students' perception of difficult English grammar concepts was higher than that of their teachers.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study, as revealed from the foregoing presentation of results, are hereby discussed follows:

Students Perception of Difficult Concept in English Grammar

The findings of this study further revealed the students' perception of difficult concepts in Grammar. The study found that students perceived English Grammar as quite easy and not difficult. This can be seen in table 1 where weighted mean is lower that the threshold set at 3.00. The findings of the present study corroborates the study of Umar and Umar (2021). The findings shows that students have positive attitudes and clear aims towards English grammar learning; although they rely more on teachers' in class than autonomous learning like text-based study and lack in the integrated study

of extensive materials and online study; they require context based, systematic lecturing and interesting ways of grammar practice.

The study of Ossai et al (2020) also is in support of the present study. The results of the study revealed that a majority of the participants perceived grammar is important in their study of English. In addition, they seemed to prefer both explicit and implicit grammar teaching in structure classes. However, the study of Bakuro (2017) is slightly in support of this study due to the fact that the respondents perception varies from each other. The findings revealed that although they all came from the same cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds, they had different perceptions regarding the form focused instruction of grammar.

The study of Muh, Umi, Uchti, Aulia and Dati (2017) also negates the present study. The result of their study shows that students face difficulties in learning grammar, problems related to natural difficulties, mother tongue, students' aspects, lecturers' aspects, and the method and timing aspects. The study of Aman (2020) shows there is no significant differences in pretest and there was significant differences in post test result of the study which is not in support of the present study. Although, the study was an experimental research

Difference Between male and female Students Perceived Difficult Concepts in English Grammar

The findings of this study revealed the differences between male and female students perceived difficult concept in English grammar. The result in table 2 shows that there is a significant difference in the perception of teachers and students about difficult concepts in English grammar. This result indicates that students had a higher mean score than the mean score of the teachers. This implies that male students' perception of difficult English grammar concepts was higher than that of their female counterparts. The study of Muh, Umi, Uchti, Aulia and Dati (2019) corroborates the findings of this study. The result of their study

shows that student face difficult in learning grammar, problems related to natural difficulties, mother tongue, students' aspects, lecturers' aspects, and the method and timing aspects. However, this study corroborated Oribabor (2018) that the respondents perception varies from each other on the basis of gender.

The study of Amen (2020) shows no significant differences in pretest and there was significant differences in post test result of the study which is slightly in support of the present study. Although, the study was an experimental research.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that students face difficulties with regard to English grammar, however, it is important to note that female students face difficulty in English grammar concept to a greater extent than boys, although these difficulties might be through the method of teaching adopted by teachers which suggest that serious attention needs to be paid to them. There may be generally recommended ways of teaching English grammar but it would not be proper to adopt them universally without looking at the possible difficulties that might go with those methods suggested. The difficulties may also be influenced by the context in which a particular method is used.

Recommendations

1. Students need to be taught grammar through various methodologies and approaches to cater to their individual styles of learning, and educators should consider students' attitudes and perceptions when making decisions about how to teach grammar.
2. Teachers should do well to understand and address their learners concerns in planning their lessons and classroom activities, and use supplementary materials, if necessary, to help learners cope with the difficulties.

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