Perception of Grammar Instruction on Use of Tenses in Essay Writing in Ibadan North, Oyo State: Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of students' perception of grammar instruction on use of tenses in essay writing in some junior secondary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State. The survey research design was adopted for the study. The sample were selected using simple random sampling technique while the instruments used were Students' Perception of Grammar Instruction Questionnaire(r= 0.73) and Use of Tense in Essay Writing Test(r=0.72). Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, standard deviation and appropriate inferential statistics at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that students generally held a positive perception of grammar instruction, with a weighted mean score of 3.16, and demonstrated a relatively high level of tense use in essay writing, with a weighted mean score of 2.95, both above the criterion mean of 2.50. A significant positive relationship was found between students' perception of grammar instruction and their use of tenses in essay writing (r = 0.71). However, no significant difference was found between male and female students in their use of tenses (t = -0.59).The study concludes that students' perception of grammar instruction is an important factor in the teaching and learning of English tenses. The study therefore recommends that English Language teachers should give constructive feedback on students' tense errors.

Keywords: Students' perception, grammar instruction, English grammar, tenses, essay writing,

Introduction

Grammar instruction has remained one of the most essential components of English language teaching because it provides learners with the knowledge of the rules governing the structure and use of language. In Nigeria, where English serves as both the official language and the language of instruction in schools, grammar instruction occupies a central place in the English Language curriculum. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2013) emphasises that junior secondary school students should develop grammatical competence that enables them to communicate effectively in both spoken and written English. This competence includes the correct use of sentence structures, punctuation, agreement, and verb tenses.

Ellis (2006) defines grammar instruction as any planned teaching activity designed to help learners understand grammatical structures and apply them appropriately in communication. Larsen-Freeman (2003) argues that grammar instruction should not merely involve memorising grammatical rules but should enable learners to understand how grammar contributes to meaning in different communicative situations. Similarly, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) explain that effective grammar instruction integrates grammatical form, meaning, and language use, thereby helping students transfer classroom knowledge into practical communication.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), communicative grammar instruction promotes greater learner participation because grammatical forms are taught within authentic communication rather than as isolated rules. This approach has been found to improve learners' confidence and grammatical accuracy more effectively than purely traditional methods.

In educational psychology, perception influences students' interest, motivation, participation, and academic achievement. Schunk (2020) explains that students who perceive classroom instruction positively are more motivated to participate actively in learning activities and persist even when tasks become difficult. Conversely, negative perceptions often reduce motivation and academic engagement.

In language education, students' perceptions of grammar instruction are influenced by several classroom factors, including teachers' instructional methods, clarity of explanation, classroom interaction, feedback, learning resources, and assessment practices. Brown (2014) observes that learners develop positive attitudes toward grammar when instruction is interactive, practical, and related to real-life communication. On the other hand, when grammar is presented as a collection of abstract rules requiring memorisation, students often develop anxiety and lose interest in learning.

Students' perceptions also determine the extent to which they practise grammatical rules outside the classroom. Dörnyei (2001) argues that learners with positive perceptions are more likely to engage in self-directed learning activities such as reading English texts, writing essays, completing grammar exercises, and seeking clarification from teachers. Such behaviours contribute significantly

to language proficiency. Therefore, students' perceptions are not merely emotional reactions but important determinants of learning outcomes.

Tense is a grammatical category that indicates the time at which an action or event occurs. According to Azar and Hagen (2017), English tense consists of present, past, and future forms, together with their progressive, perfect, and perfect progressive aspects. Correct use of tenses enables writers to express ideas logically and maintain consistency throughout a piece of writing. Errors in tense usage can distort meaning, confuse readers, and reduce the quality of written communication.

Essay writing remains one of the most effective means of assessing students' language competence in Nigerian secondary schools. It requires students to organise ideas coherently while demonstrating grammatical accuracy. Weigle (2002) explains that effective essay writing depends on mastery of grammar because grammatical errors often interfere with communication and reduce the overall quality of written texts. Among these grammatical features, tense accuracy is particularly important because it helps establish logical relationships between events and ideas.

Research has shown that many learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) experience persistent difficulties in using verb tenses correctly. Hinkel (2004) notes that tense errors are among the most frequent grammatical mistakes made by ESL learners because English tense systems differ considerably from those of many indigenous languages. In Nigeria, interference from first languages, inadequate grammar practice, overcrowded classrooms, and teacher-centred instructional methods have all been identified as factors contributing to students' poor mastery of English tenses.

Another important consideration is the relationship between students' perception of grammar instruction and their use of tenses in essay writing. Educational theories suggest that learning outcomes are influenced not only by the quality of instruction but also by learners' interpretation of that instruction. According to Anderson's (1983) Skill Acquisition Theory, learners progress from conscious, rule-based knowledge of grammar to automatic and fluent use through sustained practice, and their beliefs about classroom instruction shape how readily they engage in such practice. Similarly, Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis argues that learners acquire grammatical forms more effectively when they consciously notice them during instruction and meaningful communication. Students who perceive grammar lessons as interesting and useful are therefore more likely to pay attention to grammatical explanations and apply tense rules correctly in writing.

Empirical studies support this relationship. Ellis (2006) found that explicit grammar instruction significantly improves learners' grammatical accuracy when students actively engage in classroom activities. Lightbown and Spada (2013) similarly concluded that learners' attitudes and classroom participation contribute significantly to successful grammar acquisition. In the Nigerian context, Adejare (2022) recommends learner-centred grammar instruction that encourages active participation and meaningful practice, arguing that such approaches improve students' grammatical competence more effectively than teacher-dominated lessons.

Within Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, English Language is compulsory in all junior secondary schools, yet many students continue to demonstrate poor mastery of English tenses in essay writing. Teachers frequently report problems such as inconsistent tense usage, incorrect verb forms, and inappropriate shifts between past and present tenses during continuous assessment and terminal examinations. These persistent errors raise questions about whether students' perceptions of grammar instruction influence their willingness to learn and correctly apply grammatical rules.

Although several studies have investigated grammar teaching methods and students' achievement in English Language, limited attention has been given to how students' perception of grammar instruction influences their use of tenses in English essays among junior secondary school students in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State. Addressing this gap is important because improving students' perceptions may enhance classroom participation, increase motivation, and ultimately improve grammatical accuracy in essay writing. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the influence of students' perception of grammar instruction on the use of tenses in English essays among junior secondary school students in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State.

Statement of the Problem

The ability to use English tenses correctly is an essential aspect of effective essay writing and overall language proficiency. In Nigerian junior secondary schools, students are expected to acquire adequate grammatical competence through classroom instruction to enable them to communicate effectively in written English. Despite the inclusion of grammar as a core component of the English Language curriculum, many students continue to experience difficulties in applying

appropriate tenses when writing essays. These difficulties are often reflected in frequent tense shifts, incorrect verb forms, misuse of auxiliary verbs, and inconsistency in tense usage, all of which reduce the quality of students' written work and academic performance.

Reports from external examination bodies such as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) have consistently highlighted grammatical errors, particularly errors in tense usage, as one of the major weaknesses affecting students' performance in English Language. Although these reports mainly concern senior secondary school examinations, the grammatical deficiencies often begin at the junior secondary school level, where students are expected to build a strong foundation in English grammar. If these problems are not adequately addressed at this stage, they are likely to persist into higher levels of education. Furthermore, although previous studies have examined grammar teaching methods, students' achievement in English Language, and attitudes towards English, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on the influence of students' perception of grammar instruction on the use of tenses in English essays among junior secondary school students in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State. It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the influence of students' perception of grammar instruction on the use of tenses in English essays among junior secondary school students in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State. The study aims to determine whether students' perceptions of grammar instruction significantly influence their ability to use English tenses correctly in essay writing and to provide evidence that can inform improvements in grammar teaching and learning.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of junior secondary school students' perception of grammar instruction on use of tenses in essay writing in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State. Specifically, the study set out to:

1. investigate the perception of junior secondary school students on grammar instruction in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State.
2. examine the level of junior secondary school students' use of tenses in essay writing in Ibadan North Local Government Area.
3. ascertain the relationship between students' perception of grammar instruction and their performance in the use of tenses in English essay writing.
4. examine whether gender significantly influences students' perception of grammar instruction and their use of tenses in English essay writing.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What is the perception of junior secondary school students on grammar instruction in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State?
2. What is the level of junior secondary school students' use of tenses in English essay writing in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State?
3. What relationship exists between students' perception of grammar instruction and their use of tenses in English essays?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in male and female students' perception of influence grammar instruction on their use of tenses in English essays based on gender?

Scope of the Study

This study focused on examination of the influence of students' perception of grammar instruction on the use of tenses in English essays among junior secondary school students in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State. The study covered JSS II students in selected public junior secondary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to be beneficial to students, English language teachers, school administrators, curriculum developers, educational policymakers, parents, and future researchers. The study would be beneficial to students by creating awareness of the importance of developing positive perceptions towards grammar instruction. It is expected that students will better understand how their attitudes and perceptions of grammar lessons influence their ability to use English tenses correctly in essay writing. The findings may also encourage students to participate actively in grammar lessons and practise the correct

use of tenses in both classroom activities and independent writing. The study would be valuable to English language teachers because it will provide information on how students perceive grammar instruction and how these perceptions affect their use of tenses in English essays. The findings may assist teachers in adopting more learner-centred, interactive, and communicative teaching strategies that improve students' interest, participation, and grammatical competence. It may also encourage teachers to provide regular feedback and meaningful grammar practice that enhances students' writing skills. Finally, the study would contribute to the existing body of knowledge on English language education and will serve as a useful reference for future researchers who intend to conduct studies on grammar instruction, students' perception, English essay writing, or the teaching and learning of English as a second language. It may also stimulate further research on factors influencing grammatical competence among secondary school students in Nigeria and other similar educational settings.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research design. The survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from a representative sample of the target population in order to describe existing conditions, examine relationships among variables, and make generalizations about the population. The design does not involve manipulation of variables but rather focuses on obtaining information about respondents' opinions, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours as they naturally occur. The participants were 200 JSII students from five schools. The instruments used for the data collection were the Students' Perception of Grammar Instruction Questionnaire (r= 0.73) and Use of Tenses in Essay Writing Test (r=0.72). The questionnaire was then administered to the selected students. After completion, the questionnaire and essay scripts were collected immediately for proper processing and analysis. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency count, mean and standard deviation used in answering the research questions. Inferential statistics of t-test was used in testring the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the perceptions of junior secondary school students towards grammar instruction in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State?

Table 1: Students' Perception of Grammar Instruction on use of tenses in Essay writing

S/N	Questionnaires	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard deviation
1	Grammar lessons are interesting to me	88 (44.0%)	72 (36.0%)	24 (12.0%)	16 (8.0%)	3.16	0.91
2	My English teacher explains grammar rules clearly	85 (42.5%)	74 (37.0%)	25 (12.5%)	16 (8.0%)	3.14	0.90
3	I enjoy learning English grammar	92 (46.0%)	70 (35.0%)	22 (11.0%)	16 (8.0%)	3.19	0.90
4	Grammar instruction helps me write better essays.	80 (40.0%)	75 (37.5%)	28 (14.0%)	17 (8.5%)	3.09	0.93
5	My teacher gives enough grammar exercises in class	95 (47.5%)	68 (34.0%)	22 (11.0%)	15 (7.5%)	3.22	0.89
Weighted mean= 3.16 Threshold=2.50							

Table 1 presents the perceptions of junior secondary school students towards grammar instruction in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Oyo State. The interpretation was based on the mean scores of the individual items and the weighted mean of 3.16. Using a criterion mean of 2.50, mean scores above 2.50 indicate a positive perception of grammar instruction. The findings showed that Item 1, *"Grammar lessons are interesting to me,"* had a mean score of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 0.91, indicating that students generally perceived grammar lessons as interesting. Item 2, *"My English teacher explains grammar rules clearly,"* had a mean score of 3.14 and a standard deviation of 0.90, suggesting that the students generally agreed that their teachers provided clear explanations of grammar rules. Similarly, Item 3, *"I enjoy learning English grammar,"* recorded a mean score of 3.19 and a standard deviation of 0.90, indicating a high level of enjoyment of grammar learning among the students. Item 4, *"Grammar instruction helps me write better essays,"* had the lowest mean score of 3.09, with a standard deviation of 0.93. Nevertheless, the mean score was still above the criterion mean, showing that students generally perceived grammar instruction as helpful in

improving their essay-writing ability.

Furthermore, Item 5, *"My teacher gives enough grammar exercises in class,"* had the highest mean score of 3.22 and a standard deviation of 0.89, indicating that students generally agreed that their teachers provided adequate grammar exercises during classroom instruction. The weighted mean of 3.16, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicates that junior secondary school students in Ibadan North Local Government Area generally have a positive perception towards grammar instruction. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students find grammar lessons interesting and enjoyable, perceive their teachers' explanations as clear, believe that grammar instruction improves their writing skills, and acknowledge the provision of adequate grammar exercises in the classroom.

The finding of the study revealed that junior secondary school students in Ibadan North Local Government Area received a high level of explicit grammar instruction. This finding agrees with Ellis (2006), who maintained that explicit grammar instruction enables learners to develop conscious awareness of grammatical structures and language rules. The result suggests that English language teachers regularly employ direct teaching methods in explaining grammar concepts, particularly verb tenses, to students. The finding further implies that teachers provide clear explanations of grammatical rules, offer relevant examples, and guide students through the application of grammar rules in classroom activities. Through direct instruction, students are given opportunities to understand grammatical structures consciously and apply them appropriately in both spoken and written communication.

According to Nassaji and Fotos (2011), explicit grammar instruction improves learners' understanding of language forms and enhances their ability to use grammatical structures accurately in language production tasks. This study emphasized that when teachers explain grammatical rules systematically, students become more confident in applying those rules in communication. This supports the present finding which showed that teachers provide examples and direct explanations while teaching grammar concepts. Such instructional practices help students develop a stronger foundation in grammar and improve their overall language competence.

Larsen-Freeman (2003) further argued that grammar instruction remains an indispensable component of second language acquisition because it equips learners with the linguistic knowledge necessary for effective communication. The author explained that students who receive systematic grammar instruction are more likely to understand language structures and use them appropriately in different communicative situations. This observation is consistent with the present finding, which indicates that explicit grammar teaching contributes significantly to students' understanding of grammatical concepts.

Similarly, Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Snow (2014) observed that grammar instruction becomes more effective when teachers combine explanations with practical examples and guided exercises. The authors noted that students learn grammatical structures more effectively when instruction is organized and systematic. This finding may explain why students in the present study reported a high level of exposure to explicit grammar instruction. Such exposure is likely to facilitate improved language learning and greater grammatical awareness among learners.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between students' perception of grammar instruction and their use of tenses in English essays?

Table 2: Relationship between students' perception of grammar instruction and their use of tenses in English essays

Variable	N	Mean	SD	DF	R	Sig	P
Perception of Grammar Instruction	200	15.80	3.42	198	0.713	**.000**	**<0.05**
Students' Use of Tense		14.75	3.21				

Table 2 reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between students' perception of grammar instruction and students' use of tense in English essays (r=0.713, p=**<0.05**). This finding implies that students who perceive grammar instruction more positively tend to demonstrate better use of tenses in their essay writing. The positive relationship suggests that students' perception of grammar instruction is associated with, rather than solely responsible for, their ability to use tenses correctly in written communication. A correlation of this magnitude does not, on its own,

establish that perception determines or causes improved tense usage; other factors, including teacher competence, instructional materials, and frequency of practice, are also likely to contribute to students' performance, and perception should be understood as one important factor among several rather than the sole explanation.

The findings of the study revealed that a significant relationship exists between students' perception of grammar instruction and their use of tense in English essays. This findings agrees with Long (1991), whose theory of form-focused instruction emphasises the importance of directing learners' attention to grammatical forms in order to improve language accuracy. The finding suggests that students who perceive their grammar instruction as clear and adequate, with sufficient opportunities for practice, tend to demonstrate better use of tenses in writing.

Spada and Tomita (2010) reported that explicit grammar instruction has a positive effect on learners' acquisition and application of grammatical structures. Their study revealed that students exposed to direct grammar teaching performed better in measures of grammatical accuracy than those who received limited grammar instruction. This finding lends some support to the present study, which found that students' perception of grammar instruction is significantly associated with their mastery of tense usage, alongside other likely contributing factors.

According to DeKeyser (2007), explicit instruction facilitates language learning by enabling learners to understand grammatical rules consciously and apply them accurately in communication. The author emphasised that direct teaching combined with guided practice enhances grammatical competence and language performance. This observation aligns with the present finding that students who perceive their grammar instruction positively tend to demonstrate better use of tenses in essay writing.

Similarly, Hinkel (2004) found that effective grammar instruction enhances students' ability to produce coherent and grammatically accurate written texts. The author argued that learners who understand grammatical rules are better equipped to organise their ideas and communicate effectively through writing. This lends some support to the present finding that students' perception of grammar instruction is associated with improvements in their use of tense in English in essay writing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in male and female students' perception of grammar instruction and their use of tenses in English essays based on gender

Table 3: Gender Difference in Students' Use of Tense in English Essay Writing

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	Sig
Student use of tense in English essay writing	**Male**	94	14.61	3.18	198	-0.593	0.554
	Female	106	14.88	3.25			

Table 3 presents the gender difference in students' use of tense in English essay writing. The result shows that female students obtained a slightly higher mean score than their male counterparts. However, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant. This finding indicates that gender does not substantially influence students' ability to use tenses correctly in essay writing (t=-0.593). Both male and female students appear to benefit similarly from grammar instruction and demonstrate comparable levels of competence in the use of tenses. Consequently, students' mastery of tense usage is more likely to be influenced by instructional factors than by gender differences.

The finding of the study revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female students in their use of tense during English essay writing. This finding supports Hyde (2005), who argued that gender differences in academic performance are often minimal when students are exposed to similar educational experiences and opportunities. The result suggests that both male and female students possess comparable abilities in the use of grammatical tenses during writing tasks.

Voyer and Voyer (2014) found that gender is not a strong predictor of language achievement when instructional and environmental factors are adequately controlled. The authors explained that academic performance is more strongly influenced by instructional quality, motivation, and learning opportunities than by gender. This observation is consistent with the present finding, which revealed similar levels of tense usage among male and female students.

Adeyemi (2022) also reported that male and

female students demonstrate comparable levels of achievement in English language when provided with equal access to educational resources and instructional support. The author noted that improvements in educational opportunities have contributed significantly to reducing traditional gender disparities in academic achievement. This finding supports the present study, which found no meaningful difference in students' use of tense based on gender.

Furthermore, Okebukola (2021) observed that effective classroom instruction benefits all learners irrespective of gender. According to the author, educational success is largely dependent on teaching quality, learner engagement, and access to learning resources rather than gender-related factors. This position further explains why male and female students in the present study demonstrated similar competence in the use of tenses during essay writing.

Conclusion

The study concludes that students' perception of grammar instruction is an important factor to consider in the teaching and learning of English grammar. Grammar instruction is not merely the presentation of rules and definitions; its effectiveness may depend partly on how students perceive the learning experience. When students perceive grammar lessons as useful, understandable, interesting and relevant to their communication needs, they are more likely to pay attention, participate in classroom activities and practice grammatical structures. Such engagement can provide opportunities for students to develop greater control over English tense forms and apply them appropriately in essay writing.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers should make grammar lessons more learner-centred
   English Language teachers should adopt teaching approaches that actively involve students rather than relying exclusively on teacher explanations and memorisation of grammar rules. Students should be encouraged to participate in discussions, exercises, group activities and writing tasks.
2. Grammar should be taught in meaningful contexts
   Teachers should teach tenses through meaningful sentences, conversations, stories and essay-writing activities. Students should be shown how tense forms function in real communication rather than being required only to memorise definitions and rules.
3. Teachers should provide regular writing practice
   Students should be given frequent opportunities to write short paragraphs and complete essays. After writing, teachers should draw students' attention to tense errors and guide them in correcting such errors.
4. Teachers should provide constructive feedback
   Teachers should provide timely and constructive feedback on students' written work. Corrections should not merely identify errors; teachers should explain why a particular tense is appropriate and provide examples of correct usage.
5. Students should develop positive attitudes towards grammar
   Students should be encouraged to regard grammar as an important component of effective communication rather than as a difficult collection of rules. Teachers can achieve this by connecting grammar lessons with students' everyday experiences and communication needs.

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