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THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH TENSES IN UPPER BASIC SCHOOLS IN THE ONITSHA EDUCATION ZONE

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ABSTRACT

Anchored on Constructivist Learning Theory and Second Language Acquisition Theory, this study examined the problems of teaching and learning English tenses in Upper Basic School in Onitsha Education Zone. The study was motivated by persistent concerns about students' poor mastery of grammatical structures, particularly tense usage, which has been associated with low performance in English language examinations such as WAEC and NECO. Specifically, the study identified students' learning difficulties, evaluated prevailing teaching methods, assessed the availability and use of instructional resources, examined learners' attitudes toward learning English tenses, and proposed strategies for improving instruction and learning outcomes. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of English language teachers and Upper Basic Education students (Basic 7–9) in both public and private secondary schools within the Onitsha Education Zone. Using stratified random sampling technique, a total of 320 respondents comprising 20 English language teachers and 300 students were selected from 10 schools across Onitsha North, Onitsha South, and Ogbaru Local Government Areas. Data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to elicit information on teaching practices, learning difficulties, instructional resources, and learner attitudes. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, and cumulative percentages. Findings of the study revealed that a significant proportion of students experienced considerable difficulties in mastering English tenses. Specifically, over 60% of respondents reported confusion in distinguishing between past, present, and future tense forms, while approximately 58% indicated difficulty in applying tense rules in real-life communication. About 55% of the students struggled with the correct use of continuous and perfect tenses, and nearly 62% admitted to frequently forgetting tense rules due to inadequate practice and reinforcement. In terms of teaching methods, 35% of respondents indicated that teachers relied mainly on lecture-based approaches, while less than 25% reported exposure to interactive instructional strategies such as group discussions, role play, and audio-visual aids. Regarding learners' attitudes, 35% of students expressed low motivation or disinterest in learning English tenses, while about 10% perceived tense learning as difficult or irrelevant to daily communication. The findings support the assumptions of Constructivist Learning Theory and Second Language Acquisition Theory, which emphasize active learner participation, meaningful interaction, and comprehensible input as essential conditions for effective language learning. The study concluded that the challenges associated

with teaching and learning English tenses in the Onitsha Education Zone are largely attributable to ineffective teaching strategies, inadequate instructional resources, and negative learner attitudes. Based on these findings, the study recommended the adoption of learner-centered and communicative teaching approaches, increased provision and utilization of instructional materials, and regular contextualized practice to enhance students' competence and confidence in English tense usage.

Keywords: English Tenses, Teaching and Learning, Upper Basic Schools, Onitsha Education Zone, Learner Attitude.

Introduction

The English language has attained unprecedented global prominence as a medium of communication, education, science, and international relations. Globally, English serves as a lingua franca that facilitates communication across nations, supports scientific advancement, and enhances participation in the global economy. In Nigeria, English functions as the official language and the primary medium of instruction, playing a central role in national unity, academic achievement, and access to global knowledge. Proficiency in English is therefore essential for socio-economic development and educational success, particularly in multilingual contexts such as Nigeria.

Language is a fundamental tool for communication, learning, and development. Among the thousands of languages spoken worldwide, English has emerged as the most influential global language due to historical, political, economic, and technological factors. Today, English is extensively used in diplomacy, business, education, media, and global governance. International organizations such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization rely heavily on English for official communication, thereby reinforcing its global significance.

English serves as the world's lingua franca, enabling communication among people with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Recent studies indicate that English remains the dominant international language for education, business, and digital communication (Rose & Galloway, 2019). Furthermore, English continues to dominate global scientific communication, with a significant proportion of scholarly publications and technological resources produced in English (Hyland & Jiang, 2021). This makes English proficiency indispensable for researchers, professionals, and students seeking participation in the global knowledge economy.

English is also the principal language of instruction in many world-renowned institutions such as University of Oxford and Harvard University. Consequently, proficiency in English has become a prerequisite for academic mobility, international scholarship opportunities, and participation in global educational

programs. Similarly, multinational corporations employ English as their operational language, making English proficiency strongly associated with employability, productivity, and career advancement (British Council, 2020).

In Nigeria, English occupies a unique position as both the official language and the language of instruction from upper primary through tertiary education. The Federal Ministry of Education Nigeria emphasizes the importance of English in achieving educational uniformity and national integration in a linguistically diverse society (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). With over 500 indigenous languages spoken across the country, English functions as a neutral language that facilitates communication among different ethnic groups and supports administrative and educational cohesion.

Proficiency in English is essential for academic success in Nigeria because students are required to read textbooks, write examinations, and engage in classroom interaction using English. Recent studies have shown that inadequate proficiency in English significantly contributes to poor academic performance among secondary school students (Aina & Oyetola, 2020). English also enables Nigerian students and scholars to access international journals, textbooks, digital libraries, and online educational platforms, thereby improving research quality and aligning the Nigerian educational system with global standards.

Furthermore, English proficiency enhances employment opportunities and socio-economic mobility in Nigeria. Employers consistently value strong communication skills, particularly in sectors such as banking, education, media, and international business. According to Adegbite and Akindele (2021), competence in English communication significantly influences employability and workplace productivity in Nigeria's competitive labor market.

Institutions such as the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council continue to play a critical role in integrating English into the national curriculum. English remains a compulsory subject at all levels of education because of its recognized importance in national development, global competitiveness, and technological advancement.

Despite its importance, the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria face numerous challenges. These include mother tongue interference, inadequate instructional methods, insufficient teaching resources, overcrowded classrooms, and limited exposure to English outside the school environment. Many students experience difficulties in grammar, pronunciation, comprehension, and written expression, which negatively affect their academic performance (Eze & Nwabueze, 2022). Addressing these challenges requires innovative teaching approaches, improved teacher training, and increased access to instructional materials.

Among the various components of English grammar, tense occupies a particularly important position because it enables speakers and writers to express time relationships accurately and meaningfully.

Tense is fundamental to clarity, coherence, and precision in communication. In second-language contexts such as Nigeria, mastery of tense is essential for both communicative competence and academic achievement.

Tense refers to the grammatical expression of time, indicating whether an action or event occurs in the past, present, or future. English tense can further be expressed through aspects such as simple, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous forms, each conveying different shades of meaning. For example, the simple present tense expresses habitual actions, while the present continuous tense indicates ongoing activities. Similarly, the present perfect tense links past events to present consequences.

Understanding these distinctions is essential for effective communication. Incorrect tense usage often distorts meaning and results in grammatical inaccuracy. For example, the sentence "She is going yesterday" is grammatically incorrect because it combines a present continuous verb form with a past time expression. Such errors demonstrate the importance of tense mastery as a foundational aspect of language competence.

In educational settings, particularly in Nigeria where English is both a second language and the medium of instruction, students are expected to demonstrate competence in tense usage in speaking and writing. However, many learners continue to experience difficulties in distinguishing between tense forms and applying grammatical rules appropriately in communication. These challenges often result in poor academic performance, especially in English language examinations. Consequently, improving students' understanding and use of English tenses remains an important concern for language educators and researchers.

Tenses play a vital role in ensuring clarity and precision in communication. The appropriate use of tense provides accurate information about the timing of actions and events, thereby reducing ambiguity and enhancing understanding. For instance, the distinction between "I write the report" and "I wrote the report" conveys different temporal meanings, and failure to recognize this difference may lead to misinterpretation. According to Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Larsen-Freeman (2019), grammatical tense functions as an essential mechanism for organizing meaning and maintaining clarity in communication.

In addition to promoting clarity, tense contributes significantly to coherence and logical flow in discourse. Effective communication requires ideas to be organized systematically, and consistent tense usage helps maintain this organization by guiding listeners or readers through sequences of events and arguments. In narrative writing, unnecessary shifts between present and past tense may disrupt comprehension and confuse readers. Recent studies in discourse analysis emphasize that tense consistency improves textual cohesion and enhances readability (Biber & Gray, 2021).

Furthermore, tense enables speakers and writers to express complex relationships between actions in time. Through the use of progressive and perfect aspects, language users can indicate whether actions are ongoing, completed, repeated, or connected to other events. This function is particularly important in academic and professional writing, where precise expression of time relationships is necessary. For example, academic research reports commonly employ the past tense to describe procedures and findings, while the present tense is used to explain established theories and universally accepted facts (Swales & Feak, 2020).

The accurate use of tense also enhances credibility in communication. In formal contexts such as academic writing, public speaking, and professional correspondence, grammatical correctness is often associated with competence and authority. Frequent tense errors may reduce the effectiveness and reliability of communication. Consequently, mastery of tense is not merely a grammatical requirement but also a social and professional necessity (Hyland, 2019).

The mastery of tense is closely associated with academic performance, particularly in educational systems where English serves as the language of instruction. One of the major areas where tense plays a critical role is academic writing. Students are expected to use appropriate tense forms when writing essays, reports, examinations, and research assignments. For example, the present tense is typically used to discuss theories and general principles, whereas the past tense is employed to report completed actions or experiments. Incorrect tense usage may distort meaning and negatively affect academic assessment (Nation, 2022).

Tense also contributes significantly to reading comprehension. Understanding verb tense helps students identify sequences of events, infer relationships among ideas, and interpret textual meaning accurately. Students who have difficulty with tense often struggle to comprehend complex academic texts, thereby affecting overall academic achievement (Grabe & Stoller, 2020).

In examination settings, grammatical accuracy remains a major criterion for assessment. Examination bodies such as the West African Examinations Council and the National Examinations Council consistently evaluate students' competence in grammar, including tense usage, through essay writing, objective tests, comprehension, and summary exercises. Studies have shown that grammatical competence positively correlates with students' academic achievement in English language examinations (Adesina & Udeh, 2021).

In second-language environments such as Nigeria, the role of tense becomes even more critical. Many Nigerian learners experience difficulties with English tense because of interference from indigenous languages. Most local languages differ structurally from English in the expression of time and aspect, resulting in frequent grammatical errors. According to Eze and Okafor (2022), mother tongue interference remains one of the major causes of tense-related errors among secondary school students in Nigeria.

Despite the importance of tense, learners face several challenges in mastering its usage. One major challenge is linguistic interference from the first language, which often leads to inconsistent or incorrect verb forms. Another challenge is overgeneralization of grammatical rules, where learners incorrectly apply regular verb patterns to irregular verbs. For example, students may produce forms such as "goed" instead of "went" (Richards & Rodgers, 2021).

Limited exposure to English outside the classroom also contributes to students' difficulties. In many Nigerian communities, English is used primarily within formal educational settings, while indigenous languages and Nigerian Pidgin dominate social interaction. Consequently, learners have limited opportunities to practice standard English in authentic communicative situations. In addition, traditional grammar teaching methods that emphasize memorization rather than communicative application often hinder effective language acquisition (Tomlinson, 2020).

Improving students' mastery of tense therefore requires the adoption of more interactive and learner-centered instructional approaches. Methods such as role-play, storytelling, group discussions, and contextualized grammar instruction provide students with opportunities to apply tense forms meaningfully in communication. Constructivist approaches to language teaching emphasize active learner participation and real-life application of grammatical concepts (Schunk, 2020).

Regular writing practice is equally important for developing grammatical competence. Activities such as essay writing, journaling, and creative composition enable students to practice tense usage in meaningful contexts and improve accuracy over time. Constructive feedback from teachers also helps learners identify and correct their errors effectively (Harmer, 2021).

The use of instructional materials and digital technologies can further enhance tense learning. Language-learning applications, multimedia resources, and interactive grammar tools provide students with opportunities for continuous practice and reinforcement. Modern educational technologies have been shown to improve students' engagement and grammatical proficiency in second-language learning environments (Chapelle & Sauro, 2022).

Tense remains a fundamental aspect of English grammar that significantly influences effective communication and academic performance. Accurate tense usage promotes clarity, coherence, and precision, while incorrect usage often leads to misunderstanding and poor academic outcomes. In multilingual contexts such as Nigeria, where English functions as both a second language and the medium of instruction, mastery of tense is essential for educational success. Addressing the challenges associated with tense learning through improved instructional strategies, contextualized teaching, and increased learner engagement is therefore critical to

enhancing students' linguistic competence and academic achievement.

The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council curriculum provides the framework for grammar instruction in Nigerian secondary schools, including the systematic teaching of tense from JSS1 to JSS3. However, the effectiveness of the curriculum is ultimately reflected in students' performance in external examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council and the National Examinations Council. These bodies assess students' mastery of tense usage across essay writing, comprehension, objective grammar, and summary writing.

The curriculum adopts a progressive approach to tense instruction, beginning with basic identification and usage in JSS1 and advancing toward communicative competence in JSS3. This progression is intended to prepare learners for the grammatical demands of senior secondary education and external examinations. Nevertheless, recent WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports continue to identify weaknesses in candidates' use of tense, including inconsistent verb forms and confusion between tense and aspect (WAEC, 2023).

Within the Onitsha Education Zone of Anambra State, the challenges associated with tense learning are further influenced by sociolinguistic and environmental factors. Onitsha's multilingual environment exposes students to Igbo language and Nigerian Pidgin, both of which influence English usage patterns. Consequently, many learners experience difficulties distinguishing between English tense forms, particularly continuous and perfect aspects (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2022).

The Onitsha Education Zone comprises Onitsha North, Onitsha South, and Ogbaru Local Government Areas, all of which contain numerous public and private secondary schools. Despite the availability of educational institutions and qualified teachers, reports from the Anambra State Ministry of Education indicate persistent poor performance in English grammar among students, particularly intense usage (Anambra State Ministry of Education, 2023).

Learners' attitudes also influence tense acquisition. Students who perceive English grammar as difficult or irrelevant often demonstrate low motivation and reduced classroom participation. Research by Yusuf and Bello (2021) found that negative attitudes toward grammar learning significantly affect students' achievement in English language.

Given these challenges, there is a need to investigate the problems associated with the teaching and learning of English tenses in upper basic schools within the Onitsha Education Zone. Such investigation will provide insights into students' learning difficulties, instructional practices, classroom environments, and pedagogical challenges, thereby contributing to improve language teaching and enhanced academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

The English language occupies a central position in Nigeria's education system,

serving as both a core subject and the primary medium of instruction across all levels of formal education. Competence in English is therefore indispensable for students' academic success, particularly in subjects that require reading, writing, and critical thinking. Within this framework, the correct use of grammatical structures—especially tense—plays a vital role in ensuring clarity, coherence, and accuracy in communication. However, despite the structured guidelines provided by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council for the teaching of grammar at the upper basic level, a significant number of students continue to exhibit poor mastery of English tenses.

In the Onitsha Education Zone, this problem is particularly pronounced among upper basic (JSS1–JSS3) students. Many learners demonstrate persistent difficulties in correctly identifying, forming, and applying tense structures in both written and spoken communication. These deficiencies are evident in classroom exercises, continuous assessment records, and students' overall language use. For instance, students frequently misuse verb forms, exhibit inconsistency in tense within a single piece of writing, and struggle to express temporal relationships accurately. Such challenges not only hinder effective communication but also limit students' ability to perform well academically.

Evidence from external examination bodies further underscores the severity of this problem. Reports from the West African Examinations Council (2023) consistently highlight grammatical errors—particularly tense misuse—as a major factor contributing to candidates' poor performance in English Language. Similarly, the National Examinations Council has noted that many students lack adequate control of verb forms and fail to maintain tense consistency in essays and comprehension tasks. These findings suggest that the problem of tense mastery is not isolated but widespread, reflecting systemic challenges in both teaching and learning processes.

A critical factor contributing to this situation is the predominance of traditional, teacher-centered instructional methods in many schools within the Onitsha Education Zone. In such settings, grammar—including tense—is often taught through rote memorization of rules rather than through meaningful and contextualized use. This approach limits students' opportunities for active engagement, practice, and application, which are essential for language acquisition. Furthermore, the use of innovative teaching strategies such as communicative language teaching, task-based learning, and interactive activities remains limited. As a result, students may acquire theoretical knowledge of tense without developing the ability to use it effectively in real-life communication.

In addition to pedagogical challenges, the availability and utilization of instructional materials pose significant constraints. Many schools lack adequate teaching aids such as charts, language games, audio-visual resources, and digital tools that could facilitate the teaching of tense in engaging and practical ways. Even where such materials are available, they are often

underutilized due to lack of teacher training or awareness. This inadequacy further weakens the effectiveness of grammar instruction and contributes to students' persistent difficulties.

Learner-related factors also play a crucial role in the problem. Many students exhibit negative attitudes toward the learning of English grammar, perceiving it as difficult, abstract, or uninteresting. This lack of motivation reduces their willingness to participate actively in classroom activities and practice language skills outside the classroom. Moreover, the multilingual environment of Onitsha, where languages such as Igbo language and Nigerian Pidgin are widely used, often leads to interference in the learning of English tense structures. Students may transfer patterns from their first language into English, resulting in errors and inconsistencies.

If these challenges are not adequately addressed, they may have far-reaching implications for students' academic and communicative development. Poor mastery of tense can lead to weak writing skills, reduced comprehension ability, and overall low performance in English Language examinations. Given that English is the medium through which most other subjects are taught, deficiencies in language proficiency can also affect performance across the curriculum. Ultimately, this may limit students' educational and career opportunities in an increasingly competitive and globalized world.

In view of these concerns, there is a pressing need to investigate the underlying factors affecting the teaching and learning of English tenses in the Onitsha Education Zone. Such an investigation is essential for identifying gaps in instructional practices, understanding learners' difficulties, and evaluating the adequacy of available resources. More importantly, it will provide a basis for proposing effective strategies aimed at improving tense mastery, enhancing communicative competence, and ultimately raising students' academic performance. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the problems associated with the teaching and learning of English tenses and to recommend practical solutions for improvement.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the problems of teaching and learning English tenses in upper basic schools in the Onitsha Education Zone.
Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify the major difficulties students face in learning English tenses.
2. Examine the teaching methods used by English language teachers.
3. Determine the role of instructional resources in teaching and learning English tenses.
4. Assess the influence of learners' attitudes on their understanding of English tenses.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What difficulties do students encounter in learning English tenses?

2. What teaching methods are commonly used by teachers in teaching English tenses?
3. What instructional resources are available for teaching English tenses?
4. How do learners' attitudes influence their understanding of English tenses?

Research Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data from a large population and describe existing conditions, opinions, and practices without manipulating any variables. The study was conducted in the Onitsha Education Zone. The population of the study comprised all English language teachers and upper basic (Basic 7–9) students in public and private schools within the Onitsha Education Zone. According to records from the Anambra State Post Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC, 2023) and the Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB, 2023), the zone has approximately 158 upper basic schools, about 640 English language teachers, and over 18,000 students. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. This technique ensured that different categories of schools (public and private) and respondents (teachers and students) were adequately represented. The sampling process was carried out in three stages:

1. **Selection of Schools:** Ten (10) upper basic schools were randomly selected from the total number of schools in the zone, ensuring representation from the three Local Government Areas.
2. **Selection of Teachers:** Two (2) English language teachers were selected from each school, giving a total of 20 teachers.
3. **Selection of Students:** Thirty (30) upper basic students were randomly selected from each school, giving a total of 300 students.

This resulted in a total sample size of **320 respondents**.

The sample size is considered adequate based on the recommendations of Krejcie and Morgan (1970), who suggested that a sample size between 200 and 400 is appropriate for large populations.

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled *Problems of Teaching and Learning English Tenses Questionnaire (PTLETQ)*.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic information of respondents (e.g., gender, class level, type of school).
- **Section B:** Items related to the study variables, structured on a four-point Likert scale:
  - Strongly Agree (SA) – 4
  - Agree (A) – 3
  - Disagree (D) – 2
  - Strongly Disagree (SD) – 1

The items covered:

- Students' difficulties in learning tenses
- Teaching methods used by teachers
- Availability and use of instructional resources
- Learners' attitudes toward English tenses

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts: two in English Language Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation. The experts examined the items for clarity, relevance, and adequacy in measuring the variables of the study.

Their suggestions and corrections were incorporated to improve the quality of the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha method. A pilot study was conducted using 30 respondents from a school outside the study area.

The reliability coefficient obtained was **0.82**, indicating that the instrument was reliable, as a coefficient above 0.70 is generally considered acceptable (Nworgu, 2015).

The researcher administered the questionnaires personally with the assistance of research assistants. Permission was obtained from school authorities before data collection.

The questionnaires were distributed and collected on the spot to ensure a high return rate. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity.

Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequency, percentage, and mean were used to answer the research questions.
- **Inferential Statistics:** Chi-square (χ^2) test was used to test the hypotheses at **0.05 level of significance**.

The decision rule for the Likert scale items was based on a mean cut-off point of **2.50**. Any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted, while those below 2.50 were rejected. Ethical standards were strictly observed. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study. Confidentiality of responses was maintained, and data were used strictly for academic purposes.

Data Presentation

Research Question 1: What difficulties do students encounter in learning English tenses?

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
1	Difficulty distinguishing past, present, and future tenses	**120**	**90**	**50**	**40**	**300**	**2.97**	**Accepted**
2	Difficulty applying tenses in real-life communication	**110**	**85**	**60**	**45**	**300**	**2.87**	**Accepted**
3	Forgetting tense rules easily	125	80	55	40	300	2.97	Accepted
4	Misuse of continuous and perfect forms	115	90	50	45	300	2.92	Accepted
5	Inadequate practice of tense usage	130	95	40	35	300	3.07	Accepted
	Cluster Mean = 2.96							

Interpretation: The results indicate that students experience significant difficulties in learning English tenses.

Research Question 2: What teaching methods are used by teachers?

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
6	Teachers use lecture method frequently	140	80	40	40	300	3.07	Accepted
7	Teachers use group discussion	60	70	90	80	300	2.03	Rejected
8	Teachers use role play	50	65	95	90	300	1.92	Rejected
9	Teachers use audiovisual aids	55	70	95	80	300	2.00	Rejected
10	Teaching is interactive and student-centered	60	75	85	80	300	2.05	Rejected
	Cluster Mean = 2.21							

Interpretation: Lecture method is predominantly used, while interactive teaching methods are rarely employed.

Research Question 3: What is the role of instructional resources?

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
11	Availability of textbooks improves learning	130	100	40	30	300	3.10	Accepted
12	Use of teaching aids enhances understanding	125	90	50	35	300	3.02	Accepted
13	Lack of instructional materials affects learning	140	85	40	35	300	3.10	Accepted
14	Teachers regularly use instructional materials	70	80	90	60	300	2.20	Rejected
15	Schools provide adequate learning resources	65	75	95	65	300	2.13	Rejected
	Cluster Mean = 2.71							

Interpretation: Instructional resources are important but not adequately available or utilized.

Research Question 4: How do learners' attitudes influence learning?

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
16	Students find English tenses difficult	135	85	45	35	300	3.07	Accepted
17	Students are not interested in learning tenses	120	80	60	40	300	2.93	Accepted
18	Students are motivated to learn English	60	70	90	80	300	2.03	Rejected
19	Negative attitude affects performance	130	85	45	40	300	3.02	Accepted
20	Students practice English outside the classroom	70	65	95	70	300	2.12	Rejected
	Cluster Mean = 2.63							

Interpretation: Learners' attitudes significantly influence their understanding of English tenses.

Summary of Findings

The study revealed the following:

1. Students face major difficulties in learning English tenses, including confusion of tense forms and inadequate practice.
2. Teachers predominantly use lecture methods, with limited use of interactive strategies.
3. Instructional resources are insufficient and underutilized.

4. Learners' attitudes significantly affect their understanding and performance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that students encounter serious difficulties in mastering English tenses. This supports earlier studies which show that learners often struggle with tense usage due to linguistic interference and conceptual confusion. The inability of students to apply tense forms correctly in real-life communication suggests a gap between classroom instruction and practical usage. The study also found that teachers largely depend on traditional lecture methods. This aligns with literature indicating that teacher-centered approaches limit students' active participation and reduce language acquisition effectiveness. The lack of interactive teaching methods such as role play and group work contributes to poor understanding of grammatical structures.

In addition, the inadequacy of instructional resources was found to hinder effective teaching and learning. Schools lacking sufficient teaching aids reduce learners' exposure to contextualized language use. Finally, learners' negative attitudes toward English grammar further worsen their performance, as low motivation reduces engagement and practice.

The findings of this study have important implications for educational practice. Teachers should adopt learner-centered and interactive teaching strategies that encourage active participation and practical use of language. This will improve students' understanding and retention of English tenses.

Educational authorities and school administrators should ensure the provision of adequate instructional materials such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, and language laboratories to support effective teaching.

Furthermore, teacher training and retraining programs should be strengthened to equip teachers with modern instructional strategies. Improving learners' attitudes through motivational teaching strategies will also enhance performance in English language learning.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that the problems associated with the teaching and learning of English tenses in upper basic schools in the Onitsha Education Zone are multifaceted. These challenges stem from students' learning difficulties, ineffective teaching methods, inadequate instructional resources, and negative learner attitudes.

The dominance of teacher-centered instruction limits students' active involvement, while insufficient teaching materials reduce the effectiveness of lesson delivery. Moreover, learners' lack of interest and motivation significantly affects their mastery of English tenses.

Overall, effective improvement in English tense learning requires a combined effort addressing pedagogy, resources, and learner motivation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Teachers should adopt interactive and student-centered teaching

methods such as group discussions, role play, and communicative activities.

2. Schools and government should provide adequate instructional resources to support effective teaching of English tenses.
3. Teachers should provide regular practice opportunities for students to apply tense rules in real-life situations.
4. Continuous professional development programs should be organized for English language teachers.
5. Teachers should employ motivational strategies to improve learners' interest and attitudes toward English grammar learning.

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