

Cooperative Learning Strategy and Learners' Academic Performance in Social Studies in Public Primary Schools in Moyo District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Social Studies is a key subject taught in primary schools in Uganda, aimed at equipping learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary for responsible citizenship. However, learners' performance in the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) has remained consistently low over the past five years as evidenced by Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB). The study investigated the effect of Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS) on primary school learners' academic performance in Social Studies in Moyo District, Uganda. The study was guided by Cognitive Constructivist Theory, and social constructivist Theory. A quasi-experimental Pre-test and Post-test design was employed, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study involved 108 Primary six learners chosen using purposive sampling. Data was collected using Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT), and was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, with t-test conducted at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a statistically significant difference in performance between learners taught using CLS and those taught using the conventional methods, with experimental group performing better. Learners exposed to CLS demonstrated increased participation, confidence, and improved interaction. Notably, learners with speech difficulties were more able to participate actively, respond to questions and perform the given tasks without fear, particularly during group discussions. The study concludes that CLS is an effective instructional strategy for enhancing learners' academic performance in Social Studies, and provides an inclusive environment that supports learners with speech difficulties. It recommends its adoption in primary schools, alongside continuous teacher training and support. This study contributes to educational discourse on learner-centered pedagogies and effective instructional practices.

Keywords: Cooperative Learning Strategy, academic performance, Social Studies, Primary school, Uganda.

INTRODUCTION

Improving learners' academic performance in Social Studies is a key goal of primary education. Social Studies subject provides a foundation for learners' knowledge, skill, and values that prepares them for responsible citizenship. Consequently, learner-centered approaches such as the Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS) have gained increasing attention because they promote active participation, collaborative learning and improved academic achievement.

Background of the Study

Social Studies is central to the development of individuals and societies because it lays foundation for lifelong learning that promote empathy, cultural understanding, and essential qualities for living in a diverse and interconnected world (Crisolo, Composano, & Rogayan, 2021). The subject also promotes cooperation, and problem-solving abilities that enable learners to respond effectively to social and environmental challenges (Adam et al., 2025). Furthermore, it equips learners with the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required for responsible citizenship, critical thinking, and active participation in society (UNESCO, 2021; NCSS, 2022).

Despite its importance, the subject is often perceived as difficult because many concepts are abstract and require active learner engagement for meaningful understanding. (Rogayan, Gallardo, Lacaste, & Roque, 2021).

Scholars argue that meaningful learning in Social Studies requires learner-centered instructional strategies that actively engage learners in discussion, inquiry, collaboration, and problem-solving rather than passive reception of knowledge (Puitera, Baiti, & Meilina, 2024; Asmall, 2019). One such approach is Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS), an instructional strategy in which learners work collaboratively in small groups to achieve common learning goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2021). For the strategy to be achieved in instruction and better understanding of concepts, the five key elements of CLS must be present, individual accountability, positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, social skills, and group reflection (Johnson & Johnson, 2018,). The teacher assumes the role of facilitator, creating opportunities for learners to construct knowledge through interaction and shared experiences (Listrup, 2023).

Globally, studies from Turkey, the United States, Sweden, China, Australia, and Iran have demonstrated the effectiveness of CLS in improving learners' participation, motivation, academic performance, and collaborative skills when Cooperative Learning Strategy is effectively implemented (Erbil & Kocabas, 2020; Allison, 2022; Kate, 2020; Ben et al., 2021; Mohamed, 2021). Similar findings have been reported in Africa, where Cooperative Learning Strategy has improved learners' understanding of subject content, social skills, and academic achievement in Ghana, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Kenya by encouraging active participation, teamwork, and peer support (Mak-Mensah, Sam, & Hanson, 2018; Venuste & Andala, 2023; Paschal, Nyoni, & Mukulu, 2020; Aline & Evariste, 2022). Consequently, many education systems have increasingly embraced learner-centered pedagogies to improve teaching effectiveness and learner achievement.

In Uganda, curriculum reforms, including the Thematic Curriculum, Transitional Curriculum, and Competency-Based Curriculum, have emphasized learner-centered teaching approaches that promote collaboration and active learning, critical thinking, communication and problem-solving skills (NCDC, 2024; MoES, 2024; Onen & Ayiorwoth, 2025). Despite these reforms, classroom instruction in many primary schools remains predominately teacher-centered, with teachers relying heavily on lecture methods that limit learners' opportunities to interact, construct knowledge collaboratively, and develop higher-order thinking skills (Kanyesigye, Uwamahoro, & Kemeza, 2023; Kidega et al., 2024).

Despite the emphasis on learner-centered strategy, learners' performance in Social Studies in Uganda has remained unsatisfactory, as reflected in the National Examinations Board (UNEB) reports from 2020 to 2025. UNEB attributes this persistent challenge partly to continued use of teacher-centered instructional methods. Although studies from other countries have demonstrated the effectiveness of Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS) in improving learners' engagement and academic achievement, limited empirical evidence exists regarding its effectiveness in Ugandan primary schools, particularly in Social Studies. This knowledge gap justified the present study, which investigated the effect of CLS on primary school learners' academic performance in Social Studies in Moyo District, Uganda. The findings are expected to contribute to the evidence based on learner-centered strategy and inform instructional practices aimed at improving learners' academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Social Studies is a vital subject in Uganda's primary education curriculum because it equips learners with the social, civic, and analytical competencies required for responsible citizenship. However, despite its importance, learners' performance in the Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) has remained consistently low over the past five years at national, district, and sub-county levels. The persisted low performance has been partly attributed to the continued use of teacher-centered instructional approaches that limit learner participation, and collaboration. Although Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS) has been widely recognized for improving learner engagement, and academic achievement, there is limited empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness in enhancing Social Studies performance among primary school learners in Uganda. Therefore, this study investigated the effect of Cooperative Learning Strategy on academic performance in Social Studies in public primary schools in Moyo District, Uganda.

Study Objective

The study sort to investigate the effect of CLS on academic performance of learners in Social Studies in public primary schools in Moyo District, Uganda. The key inquiry question was;

How does CLS affect the academic performance of learners in Social Studies in public primary schools in Moyo District, Uganda?

Research Hypotheses

The major objective of the study was to determine the effect of CLS on academic performance of learners in Social Studies in public primary schools in Moyo District, Uganda. In considering the fact that this objective demanded an experiment, the null and alternative hypothesis were formulated to guide the study and was tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the performance of learners taught social studies using CLS, and those taught using conventional instructional methods.

H_{a1}: There is a significant difference in academic performance of learners taught using cooperative learning strategy and those taught using conventional methods.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on **Cognitive Constructivism Theory** proposed by **Jean Piaget (1968)** and supported by **Social Constructivism Theory** developed by **Lev Vygotsky (1978)**.

Cognitive Constructivism Theory posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and by connecting new experiences to prior knowledge. The theory emphasizes that learning occurs when learners engage in meaningful activities that challenge their existing understanding, allowing them to construct new knowledge through cognitive conflict and collaboration. In this study, peer teaching, peer reporting, discussions, interviewing, and reflection enabled learners to compare ideas, resolve misconceptions, and develop deeper understanding of Social Studies contents.

Social Constructivism Theory complements this perspective by emphasizing that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction, collaboration, and communication with others within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). where learners acquire new knowledge with support from more knowledgeable peers or teachers who provide guidance and support. Cooperative Learning Strategy activities such as peer reporting, interviewing, peer teaching, and collaborative group tasks provided opportunities for scaffolding and shared problem-solving, enabling learners to improve their understanding and academic performance. The theory's relevance to this study lies in the collaborative nature of Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS), where learners work together, share ideas, support one another, and collectively construct knowledge.

Therefore. The principles of both Piagetian and Vygotskian theories provide a strong foundation for this study because they support the principles of Cooperative Learning Strategy. Cognitive Constructivism explains how learners actively construct understanding, while Social Constructivism emphasizes the role of peer interaction and collaboration in knowledge acquisition. Together, they justify the use of CLS as a learner-centered instructional strategy for enhancing learners' participation, engagement, and academic performance in Social Studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cooperative Learning Strategy and Learners' Academic Performance in Social Studies

Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS) has been widely recognized as an effective learner-centered instructional approach that enhances academic performance, motivation, and social interaction among learners. Globally, empirical studies consistently demonstrates that CLS improves learners' engagement, critical thinking,

communication skills, and academic achievement across different educational levels and subjects. Hortiguuela et al. (2019) in Spain found that CLS significantly increased learners' motivation, participation, and academic performance in physical education, while also improving academic performance through joint thinking and peer responsibility. Similarly, Erbil and Kocabas (2020) in Turkey established that CLS, when integrated into Social Studies through flipped classroom approaches, enhanced learner interaction, immediate feedback, motivation, and active participation. However, their study was limited to Grade Four learners in Turkey, creating a contextual gap regarding its applicability in Ugandan primary schools and Social Studies at upper primary levels.

In the United States, Santiago, Maria, and Victor (2022) reported that CLS improves learners' engagement and goal-oriented learning, while Aporbo (2023) observed that it enhances academic progress compared to lecture-based instruction. Larson (2022) further emphasized that CLS promotes social skill development through collaboration and shared learning experiences. However, these studies largely focused on higher education or social development outcomes rather than academic performance in primary school Social Studies, limiting their direct relevance to the present study.

Evidence from Africa also supports the effectiveness of CLS in improving academic outcomes. Edekor and Agbornu (2020) found that CLS improved learners' performance in mathematics by encouraging peer support among mixed-ability groups. Similarly, Kaymal et al. (2021) and Venuste and Andala (2023) reported improved academic achievement and social skills development in mathematics due to cooperative learning. Nevertheless, these studies focused on secondary school mathematics, leaving a subject-specific gap in Social Studies at the primary level.

In Nigeria, Collins and Adolphus (2021) demonstrated that CLS significantly improved students' achievement in Biology using a quasi-experimental design. Likewise, Mbarute et al. (2022) established that CLS enhanced participation and performance in Physics. In Tanzania, Faustino and Muneja (2020) found that CLS increased learner interest and performance in Literature, while Ahsan et al. (2019) reported improved language skills and motivation in English. In Kenya, Kabanga et al. (2023) confirmed that CLS significantly improved learners' performance in Chemistry compared to conventional methods. However, all these studies were conducted in science and language subjects at the secondary level, indicating a clear gap in Social Studies instruction at the primary school level.

In Uganda, Edith and Aloysius (2022) found a significant positive relationship between CLS and improved performance in English language among primary school learners. Despite this evidence, the study focused on English and primary seven learners in Kashari District, limiting its relevance to Social Studies and lower upper-primary classes. This suggests insufficient empirical evidence regarding the impact of CLS on Social Studies performance in Ugandan primary schools.

A critical synthesis of the literature reveals that CLS consistently enhances academic achievement, motivation, and social interaction across contexts. However, most studies have been conducted outside Uganda, in secondary schools or higher education institutions, and in subjects such as Mathematics, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, English, and Physical Education. This limits the generalizability of findings to Social Studies in Ugandan primary schools. A clear research gap exists in its application in Uganda, particularly in Moyo District. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining the influence of CLS on learners' academic performance in Social Studies, in primary schools in Moyo District, Uganda.

Conceptual Framework

The framework shows how the variables related in the study. It also provides a graphical representation of the relationship between the independent variable, intervening variables, and dependent variable.

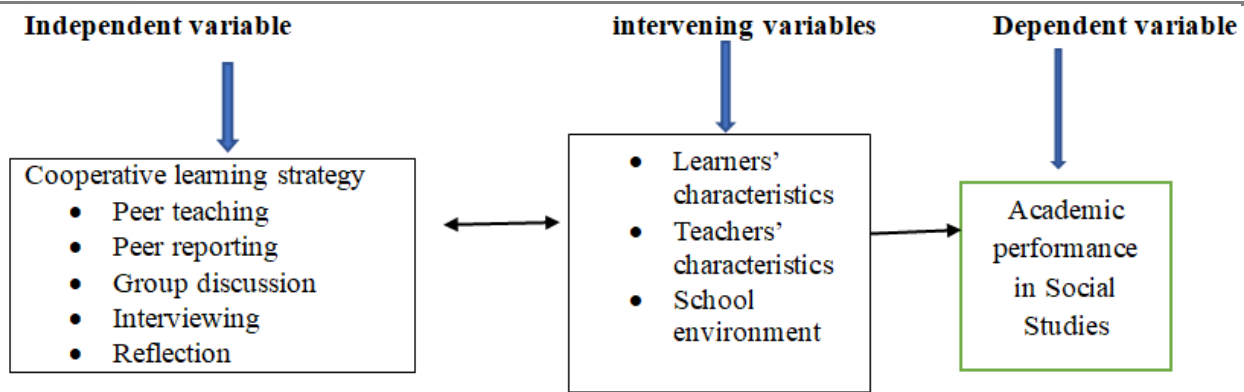


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework Showing the relationship Between CLS and academic performance in Social Studies

Source: Researcher

In this study, Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS) was the independent variable. It was measured through peer teaching, peer reporting, group discussion, interviewing, and reflection. CLS and academic performance are influenced by intervening variables such as, learners' characteristics, teachers' characteristics, and the school environment. Learners' characteristics such as interest, motivation and prior knowledge in Social Studies may influence their level of engagement in CLS activities. Teachers' characteristics including their perceptions, classroom management skills and teaching experience, may determine how effectively CLS is implemented. Similarly, school environmental factors such as class size, availability of instructional materials and support may either promote or limit the effective use of CLS. In this framework, implementation of CLS is expected to actively engage learners in the learning process through interaction, idea sharing, collaboration and mutual support. When effectively implemented and supported by intervening variables, CLS is expected to improve learners' academic performance in Social Studies (dependent variable).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design, incorporating both pre-test and post-test measures to examine the effect of Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS) on learners' academic performance in Social Studies. quasi-experimental design is appropriate because it allowed the researcher to examine relationships between variables and compare outcomes between the two groups (Horgan et al., 2024). Thomas (2024) emphasized that quasi-experimental studies rely on existing or uses intact classes in order to maintain natural learning environment, particularly in educational research settings. It lacks random assignment of participants to conditions that enables the study to form the control and experimental groups which are similar in the same way. (Thomas,2024; Bhattacharjee, 2024). Further, Capili and Anastasi (2024) mention that a quasi-experimental design gives the researcher an opportunity to manipulate the variables under investigation and observe their influence on study outcomes, that makes it suitable for studies that aim to establish cause-and-effect relationship.

Quantitative approach was used to determine the effect of the cooperative learning strategy on learners' academic performance and provided measurable outcomes, while qualitative data from classroom observation provide evidence on the implementation of the strategy during instruction and enriched the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Table 3.1: Research Design

Groups	Pre-test	Intervention	Post-test
Experimental Group	Measure	Treatment	Measure

	1	X	2
Control Group	Measure	No treatment	Measure
	1	X ₁	2

Source: Adapted and modified from Ronald Fisher, the Design of Experiments (1935)

Key:

X Treatment

X₁ No treatment

This design was suitable because the scores from both tests were analyzed to determine any statistically differences in academic performance of learners, before and after the intervention. This was intended to examine how the use of CLS affects learners' academic performance in Social Studies.

Location of the Study

Moyo Sub-County, Moyo District was the location of the study. This was because data obtained from Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) in Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) reveals that, Moyo sub-county was among the low-performing sub-counties in Social Studies, with an average overall mean of 42.23 % over the past five years.

Target Population

The research focused on a target population 1080 primary six learners in the 10 schools in Moyo Sub-County.

Sampling Techniques

In quasi-experimental design, selection of both control and experimental groups should ensure that they are homogeneous before the intervention. The study context must also be conducive for the purpose of accurate experiment and hence precise results. In consideration of this, a baseline survey was conducted before the intervention. In this sense, two sampling techniques were used namely; stratified and purposive sampling technique to select experimental schools.

Sample Size

The Sample size for the study is presented in Table 3.2

Table 3.2: Shows the Sample Size for the study

Category	Target population (f)	Sample (%)	Sample Size
Learners	1080	10	108

Source: District Education Office (2024)

Table 3.2 indicates the sample size of learners from the target population. 10% of the primary six learners were selected, giving sample size of 108 learner respondents in the study. These learners were evenly picked in the two schools, with 54 learners each. Sample size was determined based on current sampling guidelines suggesting that approximately 10% of a large population and 20 – 30% of a small population may be considered adequate, depending on study design and population characteristics (Geopoll, 2021; Bujang, 2021; Thomas, 2023).

Research Instrument

One research instrument, also known as data collection tool was employed to gather information from learners. Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT) was the instrument used.

Social Studies Achievement Test (SSAT)

The instrument (SSAT) collected quantitative data from both experimental and control groups before and after the intervention in order to address research objective Creswell and Creswell (2023) mentioned that pre-tests and post-tests are appropriate instruments for quantitative data collection because they enable the study to measure changes in participants' performance. A pre- intervention test was given in both groups to assess learners' academic baseline before embarking on the intervention. After, a post-test was administered to the two groups to compare the results of the two tests and evaluate the influence of Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS) on learners' academic performance. The two tests were developed by the researcher and questions were drawn from the same topic (Physical Features of East Africa) as guided by the primary six Social Studies syllabus. The two sets of Social Studies test, each contains 25 questions with total marks of 40. The test took one hour and was scored using marking guide. The outcomes of baseline and final assessment scores statistically prove the effect of CLS in the instruction of social studies. In other word, how well the two groups performed in both tests before and after the intervention of CLS.

Although, classroom observation was conducted to monitor the implementation of the intervention and support the interpretation of the quantitative findings, only the quantitative results related to academic performance are reported in this article.

Validity of the Instrument

To establish the validity of the instrument, the tool was revised consistently in relation to the objective to ensure that it accurately measure what the study is expected to measure. the study considered content, construct, and internal validity to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Content validity of the research instrument was ensured through experts' review.

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability of a study is determined by the consistency and stability of its findings and measurement procedures (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Piloting the instrument before the actual study enables the researchers to assess the reliability and readiness of the tool for use. Kalkbrenner (2023) observed that the more reliable the test is, the more the accuracy and confidence that the scores obtained will be reliable when it is administered. Reliability of the research instrument was tested by employing test and retest method. Social Studies Achievement Test was tested and the questions were adjusted and repeated after three weeks to examine and remove unclear questions that could cause errors in these research instrument. The scores correlation coefficient was determined as a reliability coefficient using Cronbach's Alpha (α). According to Taber (2018), the suitable technique for measuring internal consistency of research instruments is Cronbach's Alpha (α). A co-efficient of reliability value 0.7 and close to 1 is acceptable, it shows how consistent the responses of the respondents are. The results of the reliability estimated was acquired as 0.73 and the instrument passed the minimum reliability coefficient of 0.7 and close to 1.

Cooperative Learning Procedures

Before the intervention, the researcher trained the experimental group teacher through the guidelines and principles of cooperative learning strategy using training model for three days, to ensure consistency and effective implementation during the teaching process. The training covered introduction of CLS and its key elements, formation of CLS groups, design of CLS activities and instructional methods, lesson planning, facilitation of CLS, and assessment of group work. Lesson notes for both experimental and control groups were the same in terms of contents, instructional objectives, length of time for teaching and mode of evaluation. The intervention was implemented for three weeks, covering over 12 Social Studies lessons, each lasting for 40

minutes. In the experimental group, learners were organized in to random groups of five to six members and engage in CLS activities including peer teaching, peer reporting, discussion, interviewing, and reflection under the teacher's guidance. To ensure the implementation fidelity, the researcher conducted classroom observation of six lessons (two lessons per week) using the observation guide to verify that the prescribe CLS procedures were constantly followed throughout the intervention. Meanwhile, the control group continued to receive instruction using the conventional teaching approach.

Logistical and Ethical Considerations

According to Drolet et al (2022), logistical issues are important to modern research as any other aspect. They may arise from practical and organizational factors involved in conducting research, accessibility and coordination of research activities. Saunders and Thomhill (2019) assert that research ethics is the standards of appropriate behavior that guide researchers throughout the research process, ensuring the protection of participation' rights, dignity, privacy, and well-being.

Logical Consideration

The researcher ensured that various levels of authorization for this study were put into consideration, research approval letter from the University, and permission from Moyo District Education office.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher ensures that ethical concerns were considered by obtained informed consent of the respondents after explaining the purpose and procedures of the study to them, confidentiality of the respondents was ensured by not to identify the respondents by their names or any other form of identification and the information obtained from the participants were only used for the purpose of the study.

Data Presentation, Interpretations, And Discussion Of The Findings

Response Rate

The study obtained responses from 108 learners drawn from the two selected primary schools in Moyo Sub-County, Moyo District. All the learners participated in both the pre-test and the post-test using the Social Studies Achievement Tests (SSAT). The pre-test was administered before the implementation of the cooperative learning strategy intervention, while the post-test was administered after the intervention to assess its effect on learners' academic performance. All of the 108 papers were also collected from the learners, marked, marks were recorded for analysis. Table 4.1 shows the response rate.

Table 4.1: Response Rate of the Research Instrument used in the Study

Group	Instrument	(f)	(%)
Learners	Pre-Social Studies achievement Test	108	100
Learners	Post-Social Studies Achievement Test	108	100

Source: researcher

All the 108 learners who participated in the study completed both the pre-test and post-test, giving a full response rate of 100%. The pre-test scripts were collected before, while the final assessment-test scripts were obtained after the intervention, with no missing cases recorded. This complete return rate indicates that there was no loss of participants, allowing for accurate comparison of results across the two testing stages. Overall, the instruments (Social Studies Achievement Tests) administered in the study were successfully collected and used for analysis and interpretation of the findings.

Learners Demographic Characteristics

Results relating to learners' demographic characteristics are presented in the table below;

Table 4.2: Learners Demographic Characteristics (N = 108)

Items	Description	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Distribution by Sex	Male	51	47.22
	Female	57	52.78
	Total	108	100.00
Distribution by Age	12 years	6	5.56
	13years	30	27.78
	14years	43	39.81
	15years	22	20.37
	16years	7	6.48
	Total	108	100.00

Source: Office of the headteachers in the two selected schools

The study captured 51 male respondents (47.22%) and 57 females (52.78%). The results indicate that the number of female learners slightly exceeded that of male, although the difference is minimal. This indicates a fairly balanced representation of both sexes in the study. The research policy demand that in modern society sex and gender issues must be considered. It was therefore imperative for this study to adhere to the policy by considering the issue of sex among the respondents.

Proportions of Groups of the Learners

Two groups involved in the study, one of which was experimental and another one was control group. One hundred eight primary six learners were used for the study, 54 were participants in experimental and another 54 in control group. Frequency and percentage of the respondents in each group were calculated and the results were represented in form of a pie-chart as shown

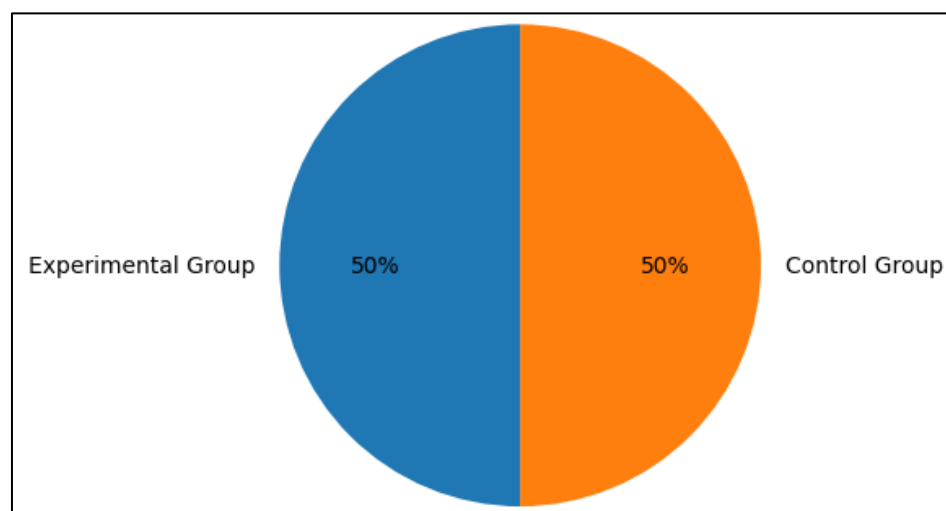
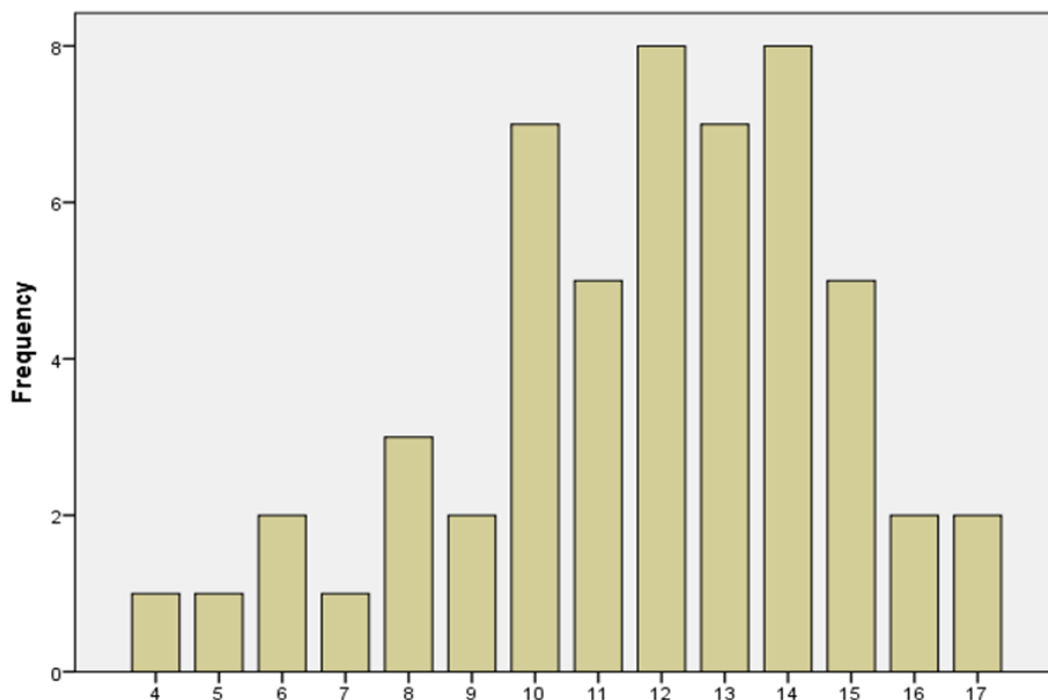


Figure 4. 1: proportion of Learners Assigned to Experimental and Control Groups

Figure 4.1 reveals an equal distribution between experimental (50%) and control (50%). This balanced proportion enhances comparability between groups. This therefore, showed that the intact groups which were involved in the study were proportionally represented which makes it possible to make unbiased statistical tests comparison between the groups.

Effect of CLS on Academic Performance of Learners in Social Studies

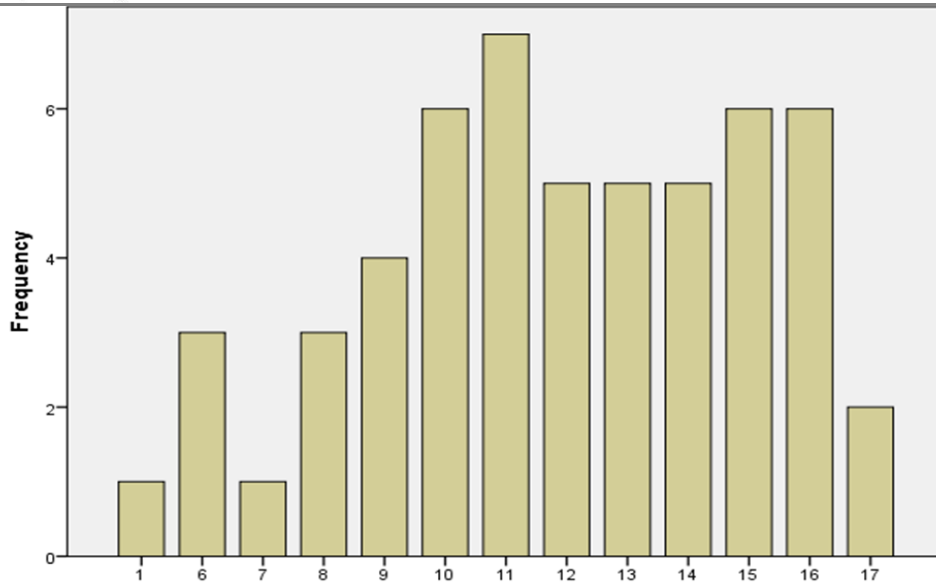
Cooperative Learning Strategy (CLS) effect on learners' performance in Social Studies was demonstrated by carrying out an experiment involving two groups, Control and Experimental groups. The research ensured that the groups were similar prior to the intervention for an accurate assessment of the experiment effect. Pre-intervention hence was given to both groups and results analyzed to establish the entry behavior of the learners. CLS was used in the instruction of the topic Physical Features of East Africa which was found hard to understand by the learners (Uganda National Examination Board, 2023 and 2024) in experimental group while learners in the non-CLS group were taught the same topic using the traditional methods such as; lecture, question and answer and demonstration method. Participants in both groups covered the same content in Social Studies, same duration of 12 periods lessons, four lessons per week, lasted for three weeks, and using the same assessment tool. Post-test data were collected, and subsequent involved comparing them with the pre-test results. The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, as well as paired and independent t-tests (inferential statistics) to examine whether significant differences existed in academic performance between the two groups. A histogram was used to display the distribution of both experimental and control groups pre-test and post-test scores. The frequency distribution of scores for pre-test for the experimental group as presented herein.



Mark scores

Figure 4.2: Distribution of Pre-test Scores for Learners in the Experimental Group Before the CLS Intervention

Figure 4.2 presents the baseline test frequency distribution of marks among learners who received the cooperative learning strategy. From the graph, the scores range from 4 to 17 marks, the highest frequency of the learners scored 12 and 14 marks, most learners scored between 10 and 15 marks. Further, the lowest number scored 4, 5 and 7 marks. A low-level of academic performance of learners were indicated in experimental group, as most scores fell below the average mark. Even though the majority of learners scored between 10 and 15 out of 40, this shows limited mastery of content. Similarly, pre-test marks frequency distribution for control group were as presented in figure 4. 3.

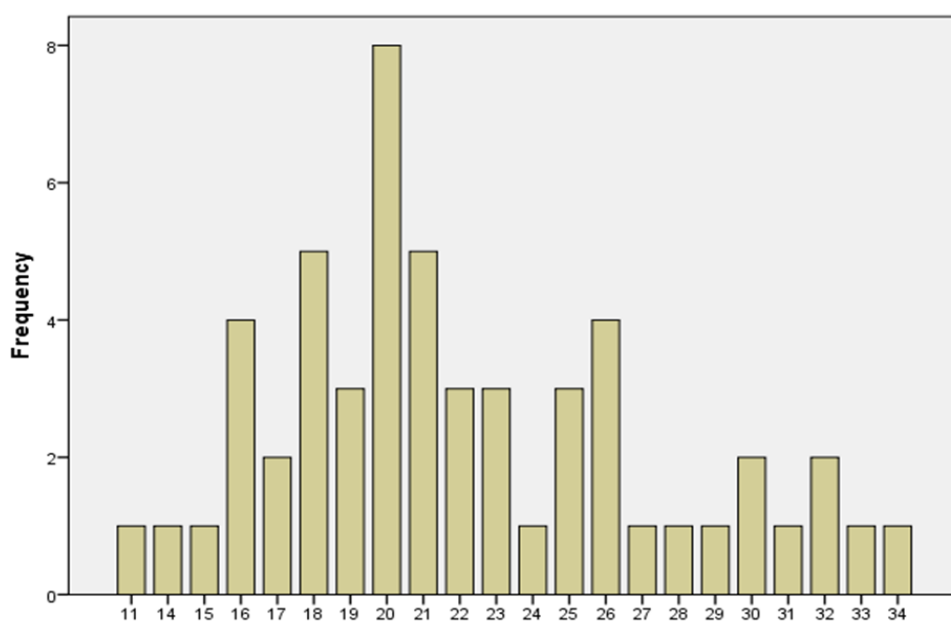


Mark scores

Figure 4.3: Distribution of Pre-test Scores for Learners in the Control Group Before the CLS Intervention

Figure 4.3. shows control group pre-test marks frequency distribution. The findings revealed that learners scores range from 1 to 17 marks, where majority of the learners scored 11 out of 40 marks. This group of learners was followed by those who scored 10, 14 ,15 and 16 marks. The lowest number of the learners scored in the group 1 and 7 marks. This results also indicate a low level of academic performance of learners in control group, since most scores are below the average mark. Though majority of learners scored between 10 and 16, this range still reflect limited mastery of the content.

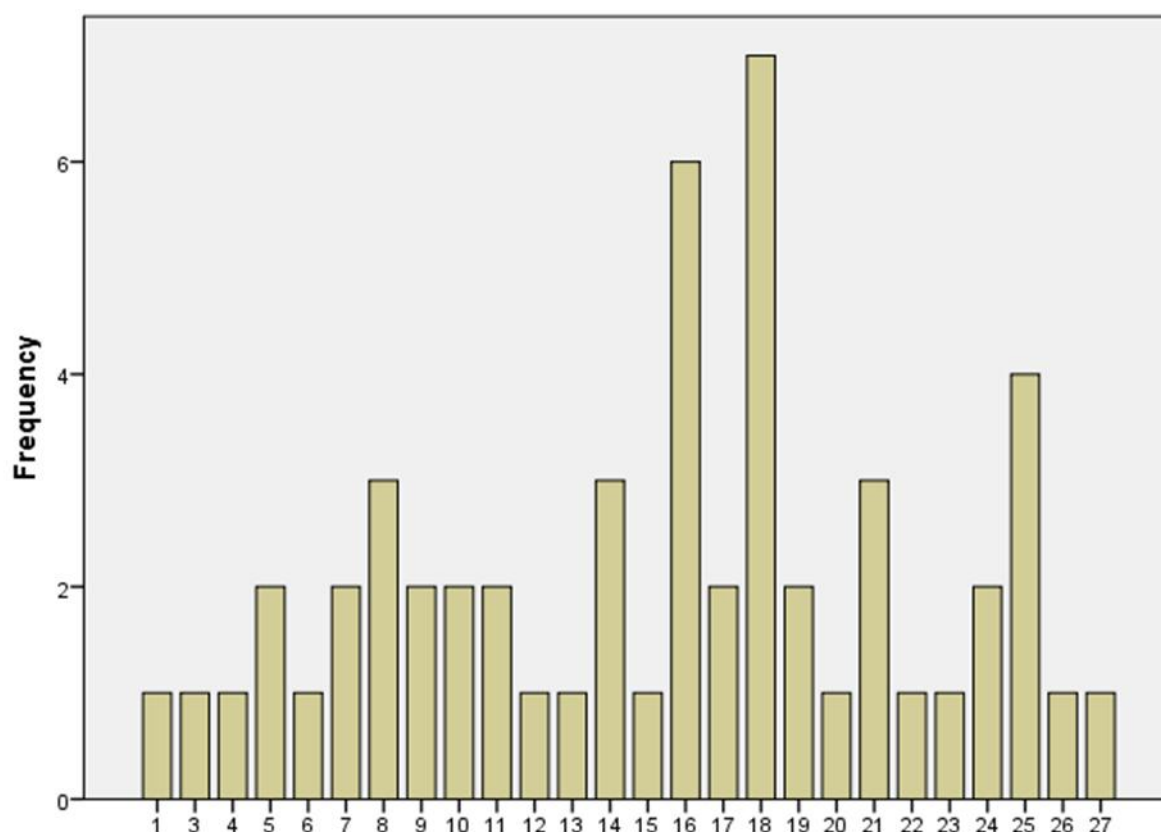
The analysis of the results indicates that the two groups had comparable levels of academic performance prior to the intervention. The distribution scores in the control group closely resembled that of CLS group. This means that both groups were equal in ability before the treatment. Following the intervention, learners from both groups sat for the same post-test. The frequency distribution of the scores for the experimental group is presented in Figure 4. 4



Mark Scores

Figure 4.4: Distribution of Post-test Scores for Learners in the Experimental Group after the CLS Intervention

From this Figure, the experimental group scores range from 11 to 34 marks, showing a relatively wide spread score. The large number of learners scored between 18 and 21 out of 40 marks. This was where highest frequencies are observed. This shows that most learners performed at an average to above level after the intervention. There are few learners who scored low scores 11,14 and 15 out of 40 marks, showing that poor performance was minimal among the learners. Similarly, a number of learners scored highest mark above 25, indicating that some learners achieved high performance though with a low frequency distribution. The histogram showed that learners attained moderate level of scores, revealing good performance after the intervention, as most learners scored around the average mark (18 – 21). However, the presence of a few low scores and some high scores suggests variations in learners' understanding. The post-test frequency distribution from the control group was distributed as presented in Figure 4. 4.



Mark scores

Figure 4.5: Distribution of Post-test Scores for Learners in the Control group After the Intervention

From the Figure 4.5, the control group scores range from 1 to 27 marks which is a narrower range than the experimental group. The result showed a large number of learners between 16 and 18 marks, where the highest frequencies are seen. This shows that most learners performed below average after being taught with conventional methods. In addition, majority of the learners scored below 14 marks which is far below the midpoint (20), showing that poor performance was high among the learners. Similarly, fewer number of learners scored higher marks above 20, showing that moderate performance was limited. It also indicates a low level of academic performance of learners in control group, as majority of the learners fell below the average mark. Further, considering the marks distribution in the test presented herein, one could also interpret that there was generally poor performance among learners in the control group.

The post-test marks distribution indicates that learners in the CLS group outperformed non-CLS. This suggests that the use of CLS is more effective in enhancing learners' academic performance in Social Studies. Therefore, it was imperative to go beyond the marks distribution and statistically calculate and compare means score of the tests between the groups. This would perhaps give a clearer picture of the effect of treatment in the experiment. The comparison of the means is as indicated in Table 4.8.

Table 4.3: Comparison of Pre-test Mean Scores Between the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	95%CI
Experimental	54	11.76	2.984	10.95 -12.54
Control	54	11.81	3.343	10.90 -12.72

Source: researcher's computation from field data

Table 4.3 shows data for pre-test mean scores for experimental group 11.76 and SD 2.984, while control group mean score was 11.81, SD 3.343 respectively. The results revealed that the two groups were comparable, indicating same level in their pre-test performance. This then means that the entry behavior of the learners was similar before treatment. It was imperative to measure in-depth and accurate precision of the dataset and therefore, the research went further to conduct t-test for independent groups for the pre-test on the dataset to make more sense of the data variation. The result is as presented in Table 4.4

Table 4.4: Independent Samples t-test Comparison of Pre-test Scores Between the Experimental and Control groups

Test	F Statist	T	Df	p-value(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std Error Difference	95% CI
Pre-test scores (Equal Variances Assumed)	1.26	-0.082	106	0.935	-0.05	0.61	-1.26 – 1.16

Statistical significance at p-value ($p < 0.05$)

baseline Social Studies Achievement scores between the two groups, as presented in Table 4.3 were compared using an independent samples t-test. The results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances indicates that the assumption of equal variances was met ($F = 1.26$, $p = 0.935$). Further analysis produced value of $t -0.82$, 106 degrees of freedom and obtained p-value (0.935) exceeded the 0.05 level of significance at a 95% confidence interval. This indicates there was no statistically significant difference between the groups at baseline. Therefore, implies that both groups were considered the same in the entry behavior before the intervention. This similarity may be explained by the fact that both groups were exposed to similar conventional approaches before the baseline assessment.

The finding agrees with studies of Edekor and Agbornu (2020), which reported no significant difference in pre-intervention performance between the groups. This implies that using conventional teaching approaches to social studies may have limited impact on improving learners' performance, as they tend to produce similar outcomes among learners or making them to perform the same way.

Table 4.5: Comparison of Post-test Mean Scores Between the Experimental and Control Groups

Groups	N	Mean	SD	95%CI
Experimental	54	22.11	5.237	20.68 -23.54
Control	54	15.31	6.678	13.49 -17.13

Source: researcher's computation from field data

Table 4.5 presents the group statistics for the test scores administered after the intervention, which indicate a difference in performance in the two groups. The CLS group obtained a higher mean score of 22.11, $SD = 5.237$

compared to the control group 15.13 and SD of 6.678. This reveals learners in the experimental group performed better than those in the comparison group. However, means differences alone are not sufficient to determine whether the observed variation is significant. Therefore, an independent t-test was used to further examine the difference in post-test performance between a group exposed to CLS and not. The t-test was appropriate in this case as it compares the means scores of unrelated groups to assess whether performance differences between the CLS group and non-CLS group were statistically significant. Thus, while Table 4.5 provides general comparison of group performance, it does not conclusively establish the effect of the treatment. So, for this case, the research went a step higher to calculate the independent sample test as Table 4.6 indicated in.

Table 4.6: Independent Samples T-test Comparison of Post-test Scores Between Experimental and Control Groups

Test	f statist	T	Df	p-value(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std Error Difference	95% CI
Post-test scores (Equal Variances Not Assumed)	14.681	12.622	84.134	.000	-10.352	.820	11.983 – 8.721

Statistical significance at p-value ($p < 0.05$)

From the Table 4.6, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare Social Studies Achievement test scores administered after the intervention between learners exposed to CLS and those who were not. The violation of the homogeneity of variance assumption was assessed using Levene's Test. The post-test analysis indicated unequal variance between the experimental and control groups (Levene's test $F = 14.681$ and $p = .000$). Therefore, the independent sample t-test results were interpreted using the Welch's t-test adjustment (the row labelled 'Equal Variance Not Assumed' in SPSS), which does not require equal variance between groups. The Welch's test produced statistically significant difference between experimental and control groups post-test scores confirming the robustness of the findings. Alternative analysis such as Mann-Whitney U test were considered, however, the independent sample t-test with Welch's correction was retained because the met other assumptions and the test was appropriate for comparing the means of two independent groups with unequal variance. Further analysis produced t-value of 12.622 with 84.134 degree of freedom and obtained p-value (0.000) below 0.05 level of significance at 95% confidence interval. This shows that there is statistically significant difference between the two groups. Consequently, to test the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant difference in performance between learners taught using cooperative learning strategy and those taught using conventional teaching methods was rejected. The alternative hypothesis was therefore accepted, suggesting that CLS significantly influences learners' academic performance in Social Studies. In addition to the statistically significant difference between the experimental and control group, the effect size was estimated using Cohen's d. The analysis showed a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.14$), indicating that CLS had strong effect on learners' academic performance in Social Studies. This was reflected in the higher post-intervention scores achieved by learners in the group taught using CLS on the topic Physical Features of East Africa, compared to those instructed through conventional methods.

The findings demonstrate practical educational significance beyond statistical significance. The large effect size indicates that the improvement in learners' academic performance was substantial and meaningful in classroom practice. This means that implementing the CLS can enhance learner engagement, promote active participation, strengthen peer learning, and improve achievement in Social Studies. Therefore, the strategy has value for teachers to improve academic outcomes in primary schools.

Now that the two groups of learners were similar before treatment tests, for the purpose of accurately comparing the test scores and for the purpose of making sense conceptually and address the major research question more effectively, it was imperative to conduct the paired tests. For the experimental group, the results were as indicated herein Table 4.7

Table 4.7: Paired Samples t-test Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores for the Experimental Group

Tests	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	T	Df	p-value(2-tailed)	Std. Error mean	95% CI.
Pre-test	54	11.76	2.984						
Post-test	54	22.11	5.237	-10.352	12.833	53	.000	.807	8.734 -11.970

Statistical significance at p-value ($p < 0.05$)

Table 4.7 presents paired-samples t-test results for comparison of pre-test and post- mean scores within learners who received CLS. The analysis indicated a statistically significant improvement in learners' academic performance following the use of CLS. Specifically, the mean score increased from 11.76 (SD = 2.984) in the pre-test to 22.11 (SD = 5.237) in the post-test. The results showed that, $t(53) = 12.833$, $p\text{-value} .000 < 0.05$, showing notable gain differences in the two sets of tests. Since the p-value is less than the level of significance 0.05, the null hypothesis is further rejected and alternative is accepted. Mean difference between the two tests scores was -10.352 at a 95% confidence interval ranging from, 8.734 to 11.970 marks, showing the range within which the true mean difference falls. These results demonstrate that learners performed considerably better in the final test, meaning that the use of CLS in the treatment group had significantly improved learner's academic performance. The outcomes for the Control group are summarized in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Paired Samples t-test Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores for the Control Group

Tests	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	T	df	p-value(2-tailed)	Std. Error mean	95% CI.
Pre-test	54	11.81	3.343						
Post-test	54	15.31	6.678	-3.500	4.054	53	.000	.863	1.768-15.232

Statistical significance at p-value ($p < 0.05$)

Table 4.8 presents result of paired samples t-test for comparison of pre-test and post-test within the control group. The results indicate that learners mean score increased from 11.81, SD = 3.343 in the pre-test to 15.31, SD = 6.678 in the post-test phase. The findings showed that, $t(53) = 4.054$, $p\text{-value} .000 < 0.05$, since the p-value is less than the level of significance, indicating statistically significant difference between the two tests even in the group not exposed to CLS. The mean difference between the two tests was -3.500 at 95% confidence interval ranging from 1.768 to 5.232. This interval represents the range within which the true mean difference falls. However, this improvement was minimal compared to the experimental group. This improvement is likely due to other factors such as teacher's regular instruction, learners' exposure to the pre-test items and interventions by the school administration could have helped in the improvement.

The findings are consistent with Edekor and Agbornu (2020) who affirmed that learners who were exposed to CLS outperformed those were not exposed in mathematics. Similarly, Kaymal, Kassymbek, and Saydenou (2021) ascertains that use of CLS makes learners to performed better since they work together with other learners to correct their mistakes and understand their weaknesses, that helps them improve their understanding knowledge of mathematics. In addition, Collens and Adolphus (2021) also reported that experimental group showed significantly level of improvement in learners' achievement test in biology compared to learners in control group. This shows that using CLS is important in improving academic performance.

Interestingly, in experimental group, the study found that learners who previously had difficulties in speaking were able to participate and perform the given tasks well during group discussions. When asked, these learners explained that their peers normally laughed at them when attempted to share ideas during whole-class

discussions. However, under the CLS, they felt more comfortable participating in small group interactions. One learner in the experimental group (learner 4) explained that:

“It is because we take time to speak out the words. The CLS provides us with safe environment to practice communication and working in small groups reduces pressure and fear, making it easier for us to speak and share ideas with each other.”

The response suggests that the cooperative learning strategy (CLS) creates a supportive learning environment that encourages participation among learners who may feel reluctant to contribute during whole-class discussions. The use of small group appears to reduce fear and promote confidence among learners and improving their classroom activities. This finding indicates that CLS not only enhance academic performance but also promotes inclusiveness by creating opportunities for learners with communication difficulties to actively participate in the learning process.

The finding is in agreement with Edekor and Agbornu (2020) who reported that CLS brings learners with different learning abilities together, making their performance better, since they have direct opportunity to interaction with the teachers and peers to get feedback immediately in their small groups.

The effectiveness of CLS observed may be explained by the constructive learning processes that occurred during classroom implementation. Although the article focuses on quantitative findings, classroom observations conducted alongside the intervention showed that learners actively engaged in group discussions, exchanged ideas, and provided peer support in completion of learning tasks. These interactions likely promoted deeper understanding of Social Studies concepts and enhanced academic performance. However, the study did not statistically test whether peer interaction mediated the relationship between CLS and academic performance. Future research should examine these mediating pathways to provide a more comprehensive explanation of how CLS improves learning outcome.

Limitations

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

A quasi-experimental design with intact classes was used, the possibility of threats to internal validity can not be entirely ruled out. One potential limitation is the Hawthorne effect, whereby learners may have improved their performance because they were aware that they were participating in a study and receiving special attention during the intervention. maturation may have influenced the findings as learners' academic performance could have improved naturally over the study period due to normal cognitive development and continued classroom teaching. However, the inclusion of a control group that received conventional instruction helped to reduces the influence of maturation by allowing comparisons between learners exposed to cooperative learning strategy and those who were not. The study was conducted in selected primary schools in Moyo District, Uganda, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other educational levels. although these threats could not be eliminated completely, their influence was likely minimized because both the experimental and control groups were studied over the same period and under similar school conditions with the primary difference being the instructional strategy used.

Although, the findings demonstrated that CLS significantly improved learners' academic performance, the study did not examine whether CLS effectiveness varied according to learners' characteristics such as gender, age and baseline performance. It is possible that individual learner characteristics may influence how learners engage with and benefit from CLS activities. Future studies should investigate these differences to determine whether CLS is equally effective across diverse learner groups.

The Findings

The findings from the pre-test indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean scores between the experimental group and the control group before intervention. This showed that the two groups were academically the same at the beginning of the study.

However, the post-test results showed a significant difference in the mean scores between the two groups after the implementation of cooperative learning strategy. Learners' academic achievement was higher among intervention group than among those in the control group. In addition, paired sample test showed a significant difference within the groups from pre-test to post-test, indicating improvement in learners' academic performance after the intervention. These findings revealed that cooperative learning strategy positively influenced learners' academic performance in Social Studies.

The results from the classroom observations further showed that there was change in learners' behavior during the implementation of CLS. They demonstrated joy in learning, performed tasks given accurately, good teacher-learner interaction and learner- learner interaction. This made them performed better in the Post Social Studies Achievement Test unlike learners in the control group. Additionally, the research found out that learners with speech difficulties were able to actively participate and perform the given tasks well in their small group discussions.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that cooperative learning strategy had positive effect on learners' academic performance in Social Studies. the participants in the two groups performed at the same level before the treatment was introduced, the experimental group demonstrated significant improvement after being taught using CLS. Further, classroom observation concluded that CLS promotes learner-learner interaction, learner-teacher interaction, creativity, problem-solving skill, active participation and deeper understanding of content. Therefore, CLS strategy was more effective in enhancing learners' academic performance in Social Studies than convectional teaching methods. As it also provides an inclusive environment that supports learners with speech difficulties, indicating CLS has positive effect in improving communication and creating confidence among learners in primary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study proposes the following recommendations.

Recommendation for Policy Makers

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), Education Service Commission (ESC), and teacher training institutions should strengthen the integration and implementation of Cooperative Learning Strategies (CLS) in Social Studies by embedding them within the curriculum, teacher training, and assessment frameworks; providing continuous professional development for teachers; ensuring adequate teaching and learning resources; and enforcing clear guidelines that promote learner-centered pedagogies, given their proven effectiveness in enhancing learner participation and improving academic performance.

Recommendation for Practice

Teachers should adopt and be encouraged to regularly use Cooperative Learning Strategy in the teaching of Social Studies in the public primary schools, since it has positive effect in improving academic performance.

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