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Exploring the Potency of Learning Together Strategy in Improving Secondary School Students Attitude towards Civic Education

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A B S T R A C T

Learning Together strategy structures instructional activities around principles such as positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive face-to-face interaction, social and collaborative skills, and group processing. This study examined the efficacy of learning together strategy on secondary school students' attitude towards civic education. Quasi-experimental design, pretest-post-test control group design was employed. A total of 102 SS II students in two intact classes, located in two senatorial districts in Lagos State, participated in the study. Civic Education Attitude Questionnaire (CEAQ) with a reliability coefficient of 0.80 was used for data collection. Data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation and ANCOVA. It was revealed that a statistically significant difference exists in the attitude of the students in the learning together and conventional lecture group, in favour of the earning together group [$F(1, 100) = 7.99$; $p < 0.05$].Also, there was no differential impact of gender on the attitude of students taught using learning together strategy. It was concluded that learning together is a potent strategy for enhancing students' attitude towards civic education.

1. Introduction

The concept of collaborative learning, initially proposed by Johnson and Johnson in 1989 (Ozsoy & Yildiz, 2004), is grounded in the social interdependence hypothesis, which posits that individual learning outcomes are influenced by the collective efforts of a group working towards a shared objective (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). This underscores the significance of group learning in offering support, motivation, and aid to each member's academic progression (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2000). Johnson and Johnson (1989) contend that collaborative

learning cultivates a sense of mutual investment in the happiness and success of fellow learners as they pursue collective aims. The strategy of learning together encompasses several key elements: the establishment of a group goal, sharing of perspectives and resources, division of tasks, and collective recognition for group achievements. A conducive learning environment, characterised by active student participation, empowers learners to take charge of their educational journey, fostering cognitive development and positive attitudes (Passi & Vahtivuori, 2009). This perspective resonates with the notion that addressing the challenges of a post-modern society necessitates collaborative efforts in knowledge construction (Passi & Vahtivuori, 2009, p. 2). The Scientific Education Resource Center (2010) suggests that group learning facilitates constructive debates, offering unparalleled learning opportunities as students exchange and engage with diverse viewpoints. Central to effective group learning are mechanisms such as group goal-setting, resource sharing, task allocation, and collective accountability (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). The process of group evaluation, typically involving smaller groups of five or six students, coupled with teacher observation, is integral to the learning together approach. This method assumes an environment where students actively seek information and understanding through mental exploration, with groups reflecting the diversity of the class in terms of ability, background, and gender (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

The Learning Together model structures instructional activities around principles such as positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive face-to-face interaction, social and collaborative skills, and group processing. Positive interdependence entails linking students' success to that of their peers through shared goals, joint rewards, communal resources, complementary roles, and a collective team identity. Individual accountability ensures that each member's performance is evaluated, with feedback provided to both the team and individual, discouraging free-riding behaviours. Nonetheless, members support each other through fostering interaction within their groups, nurturing interpersonal and small-group skills like leadership, decision-making, trust-building, and conflict management. Additionally, group processing allows members to reflect on team functioning and identify areas for improvement. The distinguishing feature of the Learning Together model from other Cooperative Learning (CL) models lies in its flexibility and conceptual orientation. Unlike the Structural and Student Team Learning models, which prescribe specific steps and prepackaged curricula, Learning Together offers a conceptual framework for educators to tailor cooperative learning to their specific contexts, student requirements, and school environments (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

Research conducted by Wati et al. (2023) demonstrated that the Learning Together model positively influences student learning outcomes. Ng and Newpher (2020) found that Learning Together yields significant benefits, with an effect size of 0.85, establishing its popularity among researchers studying student outcomes. Coelho (1994) refuted the idea of healthy competition, advocating instead for genuine interaction as the primary means for language acquisition in children. The study highlighted the importance of teachers explicitly teaching social skills within Learning Together, along with clear objectives and rationale for assignments. Passi

and Vahtivuori (2009) proposed that contemporary society could be transformed through cooperation and mutual learning. Learning Together operates on the premise that social interactions, including voicing viewpoints, knowledge exchange, and mutual acceptance, are vital for knowledge production. Therefore, Learning Together is poised to enhance student learning compared to traditional methods (Zhang et al., 2022).

It is imperative to recognise that fostering a positive student disposition towards instructional content stands as a paramount objective for educators, as evidenced by the significant correlation between student attitude and academic performance (Johnson & Johnson, 2001). The attitudes of students wield considerable influence over their scholastic accomplishments and overall educational attainment. Attitude encompasses an array of psychological elements including beliefs, values, emotions, and behaviours, all of which profoundly shape students' approach to learning tasks, interactions with peers and educators, and perseverance in the face of challenges. Extant research consistently underscores the positive relationship between favourable attitudes and enhanced academic outcomes across diverse academic domains (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

For instance, students who manifest a proactive and engaged attitude towards their studies typically exhibit greater motivation, persistence, and academic performance compared to peers demonstrating a more passive or disengaged demeanour (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Furthermore, attitudes serve as robust predictors of academic success, often eclipsing the influence of other factors such as intelligence or socio-economic status (Poropat, 2009). This underscores the importance of fostering positive attitudes towards learning within educational contexts. Students embracing a growth mindset, characterised by the belief that intelligence and abilities are malleable through effort and persistence, are more inclined to embrace challenges, seek feedback, and persevere in the face of setbacks, thus yielding higher levels of achievement (Dweck, 2006).

Conversely, negative attitudes such as fear of failure, low self-efficacy, or a fixed mindset can impede students' academic advancement and hinder their attainment of full potential (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). For instance, students perceiving themselves as deficient in requisite skills or holding the belief that their intelligence is fixed may be predisposed to premature disengagement in the face of academic challenges, resulting in diminished academic performance and self-assurance (Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007). Moreover, students' attitudes towards schooling and learning are significantly shaped by various environmental factors, including classroom climate, teacher-student rapport, and peer dynamics (Roeser et al., 1996). Positive and nurturing learning environments that cultivate a sense of belonging, autonomy, and competence can foster students' intrinsic motivation and enthusiasm for learning, thereby augmenting their academic engagement and achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

A significant challenge within the realm of civic education is the prevalence of poor attitudes exhibited by students towards civic education. Despite its importance in fostering active citizenship and democratic participation, many students show

disinterest or apathy towards civic learning. Several factors contribute to this issue. Firstly, civic education is often perceived as abstract or disconnected from students' daily lives, leading to a lack of relevance or intrinsic motivation (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). Additionally, limited exposure to real-world civic experiences and role models may hinder students' understanding of the practical significance of civic engagement (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Moreover, societal factors such as political polarization, social disengagement, and distrust in institutions can contribute to cynicism or skepticism among students regarding the efficacy of civic participation (Galston, 2001).

Addressing the problem of poor attitudes towards civic education requires multifaceted strategies. One approach is to enhance the relevance and authenticity of civic learning experiences by connecting classroom instruction to real-world issues and community contexts (Kahne & Westheimer, 2006). This can involve incorporating service-learning projects, community-based activities, and simulations of democratic processes to provide students with meaningful opportunities for civic engagement and active participation (Billig & Waterman, 2003). Furthermore, fostering positive relationships between students and civic role models, such as community leaders, activists, and volunteers, can help inspire and mentor students towards civic-mindedness (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2007).

Learning together, particularly through collaborative and cooperative learning approaches, offers a promising solution to addressing the issue of poor attitudes towards civic education. Collaborative learning promotes peer interaction, shared decision-making, and collective problem-solving, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual accountability among students (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). By working together on civic projects or debates, students can develop a deeper understanding of civic issues, perspectives, and responsibilities while honing essential teamwork and communication skills (Slavin, 2014). Moreover, collaborative learning environments provide opportunities for students to challenge assumptions, engage in critical dialogue, and build consensus, thereby promoting civic virtues such as tolerance, empathy, and democratic deliberation (Astin & Sax, 1998). From the foregoing, the study intends to investigate the effect learning together on students' attitude towards civic education.

Research question

1. Is there any significant difference in the attitude of students taught using learning together and conventional lecture method
2. Is there any significant difference in the attitude of male and female students taught with learning together strategy

Null Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the attitude of students taught using learning together and conventional lecture method

There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female students taught with learning together strategy

2. Methodology

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design, pretest-post-test control group design. The target group for the study consisted of all SSII Civic Education students in public coeducational secondary schools in two senatorial districts in Lagos State. The SS II students were targeted as research subjects because they would have been exposed to several key concepts in Civic Education as at the time of the study. Additionally, the target students would have enough time for the experiment because they were not preparing for any external examination at the time this study was conducted. A total of three hundred and two (102) SS II students in two 'intact' classes, located in two senatorial districts in Lagos State, participated in the study. The selection of the students involved a multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, a list of local government under each senatorial district was generated, then, one local government was randomly selected in each of the senatorial district through ballot system. The second stage was, in each of the local government that was selected one school was randomly chosen also through ballot. Within each selected school, an intact SS II class was chosen through ballot where there were multiple classes.

All the selected schools were co-educational to ensure the participation of both male and female students. Lastly, the selected two schools were then randomly allocated to a treatment groups (Learning-Together [LT] and the Control Group (Conventional Method) through a balloting process. Civic Education Attitude Questionnaire (CEAQ)was used for data collection. CEAQ is a 24-item test developed by the researcher. It was divided into two parts - A and B. While Section A asks students for personal information, Section B has 18 items. Six of these items are related to each of the three concepts studied: national consciousness, national integrity, and national unity. For each concept, three items are positively worded while the other three are negatively worded. The responses are scored on a four-point Likert scale - Strongly Agree (SA), Agreed (A), Disagree (D) to Strongly Disagree (SD) (See table 1).

Table 1. Civic Education Attitude Questionnaire items

S/N	Statements	SA	A	D	SD
1.	The content of civic education increases my knowledge of democracy				
2.	Civic education contents expose me to concept of unity in Nigeria				
3.	Patriotism and nationalism are what we need to achieve political tolerance in Nigeria.				
4.	Orderliness and lawful conduct are already achieved in the Nigerian society.				
5	Honesty is the most important requirement of good citizenship				
6.	Nigeria lacks good citizens because there are too many cultural, religious and linguistic groups				
7.	The fight against Boko Haram members, bandits, kidnappers and other criminal groups is needed to achieve national unity				
8.	Nigerians already enjoy unity in diversity.				

9.	Being truthful and straightforward are traits Nigerians need to achieve national integrity.
10.	Working together irrespective of one's tribe is not possible in Nigeria
11.	A full understanding of the meaning of Nigeria's national anthem and national pledge will make young Nigerians appreciate the need for a united and democratic nation.
12.	Our national symbols have nothingto do with good citizenship values
13.	Civic education helps in making Nigerian youth acquire appropriate knowledge, skills and values for becoming responsible citizens
14.	Teaching Nigerian youths about civic responsibilities is a waste of time
15.	Youths in this country believe in one united Nigeria
16.	Nigerian youths have lost hope in the country
17.	Teaching and learning of Civic Education can be used to restore national integrity.
18.	Civic Education is a useless school subject

To ensure the validity of the CEAQ, a team of five experts in Social Studies and educational evaluation reviewed the initial draft of the instrument, which consisted of the 50 selected items. The experts made suggestions and recommendations for improvement, which were incorporated by the researcher through editing. Test-retest method was used to evaluate the test's dependability. In a school that was not a part of the study, 103 SSII Civic Education students were given the test. Two weeks passed between each administration of the pilot test, which was done twice. A correlation coefficient of $r = 0.82$ was found the correlation between the first and second applications of the test, confirming the test's high reliability. The collected data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics of the mean and standard deviation were used to address the research questions. The hypotheses were tested using the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) statistic at 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results and Discussion

The schools employed in this study are government owned secondary schools and the teachers are known for using conventional lecture method which has had negative impact on students' attitude towards civic education. Hence, this study intends to explore the efficacy of learning together to improve learners' attitude towards civic education. Research question 1 examined if there is any significant difference in the attitude of students taught using learning together and conventional lecture method.

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitude Scores of the Learning together and conventional lecture group

Group	N	Mean	Std
Learning together Group	91	51.07	4.66
Conventional Method Group	106	47.43	2.43

Table 2 reveals that the Learning Together Strategy group had a higher mean score (51.07) compared to the Conventional Method group (47.43). The standard deviation for the Learning Together Strategy group (4.66) is higher than that of the Conventional Method group (2.43). This suggests that there may be more variability in the scores within the Learning Together Strategy group. The higher mean score in the Learning Together Strategy group compared to the Conventional Method group indicates that students who were exposed to the Learning Together Strategy achieved higher academic outcomes in civic education. To formally test for the significance of this difference, an analysis of covariance was conducted in table 2 below.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the attitude of students taught using learning together and conventional lecture method.

Table 3. ANCOVA Summary Table of Difference in the Attitude of the Learning together and conventional lecture group

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: Post Attitude test

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1165.423[a]	15	77.695	4.242	.000	.182
Intercept	17889.077	1	17889.077	976.745	.000	.774
Pre attitude questionnaire	102.425	1	102.425	5.592	.019	.019
Teaching Strategy	292.543	2	146.272	7.986	.000	.053
Error	5238.087	100	18.315			
Total	752828.000	103				
Corrected Total	6403.510	101				

R Squared = .182 (Adjusted R Squared = .139)

Table 3 reveals that at 95% confidence level and with the statistical tool having adjusted for any initial difference using the pretest attitude scores, the result of the ANCOVA shows that a statistically significant difference exists in the attitude of the students in the learning together and conventional lecture group, in favour of the earning together group [$F(1, 100) = 7.99$; $p < 0.05$]. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no statistically significant difference in the attitude of students taught using learning together and conventional lecture method is rejected. This finding is in accord with the findings of previous studies by OGAR et al. (2020) which revealed that students taught with learning together method significantly developed better attitude than those taught with conventional method. Similarly, Samuel (2018) revealed that the use of Learning Together strategies had significant effects on students' attitude and retention in Basic Science.

This finding underscores the effectiveness of collaborative learning methods, as evidenced by the more favorable attitudes observed in the learning together group. Collaborative learning, characterized by interactive engagement, peer-to-peer interaction, and shared responsibility for learning outcomes, offers distinct advantages over traditional lecture-based instruction. The preference for the

learning together group suggests that students derive greater satisfaction, engagement, and motivation from collaborative learning experiences. The sense of camaraderie, mutual support, and collective achievement inherent in collaborative learning can enhance students' sense of belonging and investment in the learning process. As a result, students may exhibit more positive attitudes towards their coursework, peers, and overall educational experience, leading to improved academic performance.

Furthermore, the statistically significant difference in attitudes between the two groups highlights the need for educators to reconsider instructional methods and pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs and preferences of students. While traditional lecture-based instruction remains a staple in many educational settings, this finding suggests that incorporating collaborative learning strategies can yield tangible benefits in terms of student engagement, satisfaction, and learning outcomes.

Research question 2: Is there any significant difference in the attitude of male and female students taught with learning together strategy

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Attitude Scores of male and female students

Group	Mean	SD
Male	39.64	13.33
Female	35.02	14.18

Table 4 reveals that male student had a higher mean score of 39.64 while the female students had a mean score of 35.02. This showed that there was a difference in the academic attitude of the male and female students. To determine if this difference attain significant hypothesis 2 was tested in table 4 below.

Hypothesis II: There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female students taught with learning together strategy

Table 5. ANCOVA Summary Table of Difference in the Attitude of male and female students

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1165.423[a]	15	77.695	4.242	.000	.182
Intercept	17889.077	1	17889.077	976.745	.000	.774
Pre attitude questionnaire	102.425	1	102.425	5.592	.019	.019
Gender	45.700	1	45.700	2.495	.115	.009
Error	4185.328	88	14.634			
Total	377223.000	91				
Corrected Total	38303.500	90				

a. R Squared = .891 (Adjusted R Squared = .885)

Table 5 reveals that at 95% confidence level and with the statistical tool having adjusted for any initial difference using the pretest attitude scores, the result of the ANCOVA shows that a statistically significant difference does not exists in the academic attitude of male and female students in the learning together group [F (1, 88) = 2.49; p > 0.05]. This implies that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female students taught with learning together strategy is not rejected.

This is in accord with the findings of previous studies by Ahmed & Lawal (2020), which revealed that there was no significant difference in the attitude of male and female taught with learning together strategy. This finding suggests that collaborative learning environments, characterized by interactive engagement, peer-to-peer interaction, and shared responsibility for learning outcomes, can effectively mitigate gender disparities in academic. By providing equal opportunities for all students to participate and contribute to the learning process, collaborative learning approaches promote equity and inclusivity in educational settings. The absence of a significant gender gap in academic achievement within the learning together group highlights the potential of collaborative learning to create a level playing field where students are judged based on their individual merits and contributions rather than gender stereotypes or biases. the lack of a statistically significant difference in academic achievement between male and female students in the learning together group challenges traditional notions of gender differences in learning styles and capabilities. Historically, gender stereotypes have often influenced perceptions of academic ability, with certain subjects or disciplines being associated more closely with one gender over the other. However, this finding suggests that collaborative learning environments can provide a conducive setting for all students to excel academically, regardless of gender, by fostering a supportive and inclusive learning community.

The implications of this finding extend beyond academic achievement to broader issues of gender equality and representation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. Given the underrepresentation of women in STEM disciplines, efforts to promote gender equality in these fields are essential for fostering diversity, innovation, and societal progress. The absence of a significant gender gap in academic achievement within the learning together group suggests that collaborative learning approaches may hold promise in addressing gender disparities in STEM education and promoting greater participation and success among female students.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study shed light on the profound impact of collaborative learning approaches on student attitudes, engagement, and academic outcomes. The statistically significant difference in attitudes between the learning together group and the conventional lecture group highlights the efficacy of collaborative learning in fostering positive perceptions, increased engagement, and enhanced learning experiences among students. The lack of a statistically significant difference in

attitude between male and female students in the learning together group underscores the potential of collaborative learning approaches to address gender disparities in academic outcomes and promote equity in educational settings. Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Educators and institutions should prioritize the adoption and integration of collaborative learning pedagogies into their teaching practices.
2. Training sessions, workshops, and peer collaborations should be organized to train teachers on how to effectively implement collaborative learning strategies in their classrooms.
3. Efforts should be made to create inclusive learning environments that value diversity and promote equitable participation among all students.

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