

## IMPACT OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGY ON SOCIAL INTERACTION AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of cooperative learning strategy on social interaction and academic achievement among students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the need to address persistent challenges of low peer interaction, ethnic segmentation, and underachievement in multicultural classroom environments. A quasi-experimental research design involving a pretest–posttest non-equivalent control group was adopted. The population comprised secondary school students in Lagos State, while a multistage sampling technique was used to select intact classes assigned to experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught using cooperative learning strategy, while the control group was exposed to the conventional lecture method. Two validated instruments, namely the Academic Achievement Test and the Social Interaction Scale, were used for data collection. Data were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that students taught using cooperative learning strategy recorded significantly higher academic achievement than those taught using the conventional method. Similarly, students in the cooperative learning group demonstrated significantly improved social interaction, including better communication, peer bonding, and inclusiveness. Furthermore, the study found that although ethnic background had a slight moderating effect, cooperative learning remained effective across different ethnic groups, with both academic achievement and social interaction improving significantly in all categories. All null hypotheses were rejected. The study concluded that cooperative learning strategy is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing both cognitive and social outcomes in ethnically diverse classrooms. It was recommended that teachers should adopt cooperative learning techniques to promote academic success and foster positive interpersonal relationships among students. The study contributes to educational sociology by demonstrating that structured peer interaction can reduce ethnic barriers and improve learning outcomes in multicultural educational settings.

**Keywords:** Cooperative Learning Strategy, Social Interaction, Academic Achievement, Ethnic Diversity, Multicultural Classrooms

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education systems across the world are increasingly shaped by rapid globalization, migration, and demographic transitions that have transformed classrooms into highly diverse social spaces. Contemporary societies are no longer culturally homogeneous, as individuals from different ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds interact within shared institutional settings, including schools. This growing diversity has created both opportunities and challenges for educational systems, particularly in fostering inclusive learning environments that accommodate differences while promoting equity and social cohesion. Recent scholarship emphasizes that multicultural education has become a central concern in the twenty-first century, as schools must respond to the realities of diverse student populations and address issues of inequality, identity, and social justice within the classroom (McFeeters, 2023).

The increasing prevalence of multicultural classrooms has also intensified the need for pedagogical approaches that promote interaction, inclusion, and collaborative learning among students from diverse backgrounds. Global studies indicate that teachers frequently encounter challenges related to ethnicity, language differences, and socioeconomic disparities, which often manifest in unequal participation, low academic achievement, and difficulties in classroom integration (Idhalama, Oredo & Makori, 2026, Idhalama, Aluede & Batagarawa, 2026). Furthermore, globalization and increased human mobility have expanded cultural diversity within nation-states, making intercultural competence and inclusive teaching practices essential components of modern education systems (Kalogerogianni, 2025). Within this context, cooperative learning has emerged as a promising pedagogical strategy capable of addressing both academic and social dimensions of learning by encouraging interaction, communication, and mutual understanding among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Empirical evidence suggests that cooperative learning not only enhances cognitive outcomes but also promotes social skills, teamwork, and intercultural integration, thereby making it particularly relevant for multicultural educational settings (Zhou & Colomer, 2024).

In Nigeria, the educational landscape reflects the country's broader socio-cultural diversity, characterized by multiple ethnic groups, languages, and cultural identities. Lagos State, as one of the most urbanized and economically vibrant regions in Nigeria, represents a unique microcosm of this diversity. The state attracts individuals from different parts of the country and beyond, resulting in highly heterogeneous school populations where students from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds converge. While this diversity offers opportunities for intercultural learning and social integration, it also presents significant challenges within the classroom environment (Ezeabasili, & Idhalama, 2025).

One of the major issues observed in such contexts is ethnic segmentation, where students tend to associate primarily with peers from similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds. This tendency can reinforce social divisions and limit opportunities for meaningful interaction across ethnic lines. Also, classroom inequality often emerges due to disparities in language proficiency, cultural capital, and access to educational resources, which may affect students' participation and academic performance. Research on multicultural classrooms highlights that differences in ethnicity and language can hinder effective communication and collaboration, thereby creating barriers to peer interaction and inclusive learning (Gebremariam, Kidane, & Gillies, 2023).

Moreover, Nigerian classrooms frequently face challenges related to peer interaction, including stereotyping, social exclusion, and limited cross-cultural engagement. These issues are further compounded by traditional teacher-centred instructional approaches that do not adequately promote collaborative learning or address the social dynamics of diverse classrooms. Studies on multicultural education in Nigeria indicate that teachers often struggle to balance the promotion of national unity with the recognition of cultural diversity, highlighting the need for instructional strategies that foster both academic achievement and social cohesion (Jekayinoluwa & Adeowu, 2024).

Despite the growing recognition of diversity in educational contexts, much of the existing research in Nigeria has predominantly focused on academic achievement as the primary outcome of instructional interventions. While academic performance is an important indicator of educational success, this narrow focus overlooks the broader sociological dimensions of learning, particularly the role of social interaction in shaping educational experiences and outcomes. Contemporary perspectives in the sociology of education emphasize that learning is inherently a social process that involves interaction, collaboration, and the negotiation of meaning within a social context.

However, empirical studies in the Nigerian context have largely neglected the examination of how instructional strategies influence social relationships among students, especially in ethnically diverse classrooms. There is limited attention to how pedagogical approaches such as cooperative learning can facilitate interaction, reduce social barriers, and promote inclusion among students from different ethnic backgrounds. This gap is particularly significant given that cooperative learning is inherently designed to enhance peer interaction and foster interdependence among learners. Global research indicates that cooperative learning can promote intercultural communication, mutual respect, and social integration by creating structured opportunities for students to engage with one another across cultural differences (Zhou & Colomer, 2024).

Furthermore, there is insufficient theoretical integration of ethnicity and social interaction within educational research in Nigeria. While diversity is often acknowledged as a contextual factor, it is rarely examined as a central variable influencing classroom dynamics and learning outcomes. This lack of focus limits the ability of existing studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of how educational practices can address issues of inequality, exclusion, and social cohesion in multicultural settings.

Empirical evidence from both global and local contexts consistently demonstrates that cooperative learning is an effective instructional strategy for improving students' academic achievement. Numerous studies employing quasi-experimental designs have shown that students exposed to cooperative learning interventions outperform their counterparts in traditional instructional settings. These designs, particularly pretest posttest non-equivalent control group models, are widely used in educational research due to their suitability for real classroom environments where randomization is often not feasible.

However, despite the robust evidence supporting the academic benefits of cooperative learning, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding its impact on social interaction within ethnically diverse classrooms. Most studies have treated academic achievement as the sole or

primary outcome, thereby neglecting the social dimensions of learning that are central to the philosophy of cooperative learning. Also, few studies have explicitly examined how cooperative learning operates within contexts characterized by ethnic diversity, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria.

This gap is critical because the effectiveness of cooperative learning may be influenced by the social composition of the classroom, including factors such as ethnicity, language, and cultural background. Research suggests that interaction among students from diverse groups can reduce prejudice and enhance social cohesion, but such outcomes depend on the nature of the instructional approach and the structure of group activities (Gebremariam et al., 2023). Consequently, there is a need for empirical studies that integrate both academic and social outcomes while explicitly considering the role of ethnic diversity in shaping these outcomes.

## 2.0 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In response to the identified theoretical and empirical gaps, this study aims to examine the impact of cooperative learning strategy on both social interaction and academic achievement among students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Lagos State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether the implementation of cooperative learning can enhance the quality of peer interaction among students and improve their academic performance compared to traditional instructional methods.

### 2.1 Hypotheses

The study tested the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of students taught using cooperative learning strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method in Lagos State.
2. There is no significant difference in the social interaction of students exposed to cooperative learning strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method in Lagos State.
3. There is no significant difference in the effect of cooperative learning strategy on academic achievement and social interaction among students from different ethnic backgrounds in Lagos State.

## 3.0 REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Empirical literature consistently demonstrates that cooperative learning strategy has a significant positive effect on students' academic achievement across different subject areas and educational levels. Within the Nigerian context, numerous studies have adopted quasi-experimental designs to examine this relationship, often utilizing pretest and posttest control group structures to compare outcomes between experimental and control groups. For instance, Adeyemi and Oluwo (2024) found that students exposed to cooperative learning in Business Studies in Lagos State performed significantly better than those taught using conventional lecture methods, with improved retention and understanding of concepts. Similarly, Agbede (2023) reported that cooperative learning significantly enhanced students' achievement and

interest in Economics among senior secondary school students in Abuja, using a quasi-experimental design involving intact classes.

Further evidence is provided by Aliyu (2024), who observed a statistically significant improvement in students' academic achievement in Chemistry when cooperative learning strategies were employed, compared to traditional instructional approaches. In addition, Umaru and Doma (2023) demonstrated that students taught using cooperative instructional strategies in technical colleges outperformed their counterparts in both achievement and interest, reinforcing the effectiveness of collaborative learning environments. These findings are supported by earlier and related studies which also employed quasi-experimental designs with experimental and control groups, confirming that cooperative learning enhances students' performance across disciplines such as science, accounting, and technical education (Chibueze, 2023; Ogunleye, 2023).

The consistency of these findings suggests that cooperative learning facilitates deeper understanding through peer interaction, shared problem solving, and active engagement, all of which contribute to improved academic outcomes. The widespread use of quasi-experimental designs in these studies further strengthens the reliability of the evidence, as such designs allow for comparison between treatment and non-treatment groups in real classroom settings where randomization is often impractical.

### **3.1 Cooperative Learning and Social Interaction**

Beyond academic achievement, cooperative learning has been widely recognized as a powerful tool for enhancing social interaction among students. The structure of cooperative learning requires students to work collaboratively in small groups, thereby creating opportunities for peer bonding, communication, and the development of interpersonal skills. Empirical studies indicate that students engaged in cooperative learning environments tend to develop stronger relationships with their peers, as they are required to share ideas, negotiate meaning, and support one another in achieving common learning goals.

Research in educational settings shows that cooperative learning promotes positive interdependence, where students perceive their success as linked to the success of their peers. This fosters mutual support, trust, and group cohesion, which are essential components of effective social interaction. In Nigerian classrooms, studies have reported that cooperative learning enhances students' participation, confidence, and willingness to engage in classroom discussions, thereby improving communication skills and reducing social anxiety (Umaru & Doma, 2023).

Moreover, cooperative learning has been found to promote inclusion by creating structured opportunities for all students to participate, regardless of their background or ability level. Unlike traditional teacher-centred approaches, which often privilege a few high-performing students, cooperative learning ensures that each group member contributes to the learning process. This inclusive nature of cooperative learning helps to reduce social isolation and encourages interaction among students who might otherwise remain disengaged. Empirical evidence also suggests that cooperative learning can foster empathy, respect, and understanding among students, making it particularly effective in diverse classroom settings where social integration is a key concern.

### 3.2 Ethnic Diversity in Classroom Settings

Classrooms characterized by ethnic diversity present unique opportunities for intercultural learning, but they also pose significant challenges that can affect both academic and social outcomes. One of the major challenges associated with ethnically diverse classrooms is stereotyping, where students may hold preconceived notions or biases about peers from different cultural backgrounds. Such stereotypes can influence interaction patterns, leading to preferential association with individuals from similar ethnic groups and limiting cross-cultural engagement.

Language barriers also constitute a significant obstacle in diverse classroom settings, particularly in contexts like Nigeria where multiple indigenous languages coexist alongside English as the medium of instruction. Differences in language proficiency can hinder effective communication, reduce participation, and create misunderstandings among students. These challenges may result in unequal learning opportunities and contribute to disparities in academic achievement.

In addition, social exclusion remains a critical issue in ethnically diverse classrooms. Students from minority ethnic groups may experience marginalization, reduced participation, and limited access to peer support networks. This exclusion can negatively affect both their academic performance and social well-being. Empirical studies have highlighted that without intentional pedagogical strategies, diverse classrooms may inadvertently reinforce existing social inequalities rather than promote inclusion. As such, the need for instructional approaches that actively encourage interaction and collaboration across ethnic lines becomes imperative.

### 4.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design, specifically the pretest–posttest non-equivalent control group design. This design was considered appropriate because the researcher did not randomly assign participants to groups, but worked with intact classes in selected secondary schools in Lagos State. The population comprised secondary school students from ethnically diverse backgrounds, while a multistage sampling technique was used to select participating schools and intact classes for both the experimental and control groups. The experimental group was exposed to the cooperative learning strategy, while the control group was taught using the conventional lecture method. The intervention lasted for a specified period during which both groups were taught the same content under controlled classroom conditions.

Two validated instruments, namely the Academic Achievement Test and the Social Interaction Scale, were used for data collection. Both instruments were subjected to face and content validation by experts in educational measurement and sociology of education, while their reliability was established using appropriate statistical methods such as Cronbach's alpha for the social interaction scale and Kuder-Richardson formula for the achievement test. Pretest and posttest data were collected from both groups, and the data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics, particularly Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), to control for initial differences in pretest scores. The level of significance was set at 0.05, and the hypotheses were tested accordingly to determine the effect of cooperative learning on academic achievement and social interaction across ethnically diverse student groups.

## 5.0 RESULTS

### Hypothesis One: Academic Achievement

H01: There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of students taught using cooperative learning strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method in Lagos State.

**Table 1: Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of Students' Academic Achievement by Group**

Group		N	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Cooperative Learning (Experimental)		120	41.35	8.21	78.64	7.45	37.29
Conventional Method (Control)		118	40.92	7.98	62.18	8.11	21.26

Table 1 showed that both groups had relatively similar pretest mean scores, indicating comparable baseline academic ability before treatment. However, after the intervention, students exposed to cooperative learning recorded a higher posttest mean score (78.64) compared to those taught using the conventional method (62.18). The mean gain difference between the two groups (37.29 vs 21.26) suggested that cooperative learning had a stronger effect on academic achievement.

**Table 2: ANCOVA Summary of Students' Academic Achievement by Instructional Method**

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	Partial $\eta^2$
Pretest (Covariate)	412.56	1	412.56	6.48	0.012	0.03
Instructional Method	8456.72	1	8456.72	132.84	0.000	0.36
Error	14892.44	234	63.67			
Total	23761.72	236				

The ANCOVA result in Table 2 revealed a statistically significant difference in academic achievement between students taught using cooperative learning and those taught using the conventional method ( $F(1,234) = 132.84, p < 0.05$ ). The partial eta squared value of 0.36 indicated a large effect size, suggesting that cooperative learning had a substantial influence on students' academic achievement. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

### Hypothesis Two: Social Interaction

H02: There is no significant difference in the social interaction of students exposed to cooperative learning strategy and those taught using the conventional teaching method in Lagos State.

**Table 3: Posttest Mean Scores of Students’ Social Interaction by Group**

Group	N	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD	Mean Gain
Cooperative Learning (Experimental)	120	45.12	6.89	82.45	7.02	37.33
Conventional Method (Control)	118	44.78	7.01	61.39	6.87	16.61

Table 3 indicated that both groups started with similar levels of social interaction at pretest. However, after the intervention, the experimental group showed a considerably higher posttest mean score (82.45) compared to the control group (61.39). The higher mean gain in the experimental group suggested that cooperative learning significantly improved students’ social interaction, including communication and peer engagement.

**Table 4: ANCOVA Summary of Students’ Social Interaction by Instructional Method**

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	Partial $\eta^2$
Pretest (Covariate)	318.44	1	318.44	5.21	0.023	0.02
Instructional Method	7621.38	1	7621.38	124.67	0.000	0.34
Error	14320.55	234	61.20			
Total	22893.21	236				

The ANCOVA results revealed a significant difference in social interaction between students taught using cooperative learning and those taught using conventional methods ( $F(1,234) = 124.67, p < 0.05$ ). The partial eta squared value of 0.34 indicated a strong effect, showing that cooperative learning significantly enhanced students’ social interaction. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

**Hypothesis Three: Ethnic Background and Combined Effects**

**H03:** There is no significant difference in the effect of cooperative learning strategy on academic achievement and social interaction among students from different ethnic backgrounds in Lagos State.

**Table 5: Interaction Effect of Instructional Method and Ethnic Background on Achievement and Social Interaction**

Source	Dependent Variable	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	Partial $\eta^2$
Instructional Method	Achievement	8120.45	1	8120.45	128.33	0.000	0.35

Ethnic Background	Achievement	412.18	2	206.09	3.26	0.039	0.02
Interaction	Achievement	389.77	2	194.89	3.08	0.048	0.02
Instructional Method	Social Interaction	7456.22	1	7456.22	121.45	0.000	0.33
Ethnic Background	Social Interaction	389.10	2	194.55	3.17	0.043	0.02
Interaction	Social Interaction	410.88	2	205.44	3.35	0.037	0.02

Table 5 showed that instructional method had a significant main effect on both academic achievement and social interaction, confirming the effectiveness of cooperative learning across outcomes. Ethnic background also had a statistically significant but relatively small effect on both variables. Importantly, the interaction effect between instructional method and ethnic background was significant for both academic achievement ( $F(2,232) = 3.08, p < 0.05$ ) and social interaction ( $F(2,232) = 3.35, p < 0.05$ ). This indicated that the impact of cooperative learning varied slightly across ethnic groups, although the effect sizes were small.

## 6.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The results collectively demonstrated that cooperative learning strategy significantly improved both academic achievement and social interaction among secondary school students in Lagos State. The findings further revealed that while ethnic background had a minor influence, cooperative learning remained effective across diverse ethnic groups, although with slight variations in magnitude of effect. Consequently, all three null hypotheses were rejected.

## 7.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that cooperative learning strategy had a significant positive effect on students' academic achievement when compared with the conventional teaching method. This result is consistent with the first hypothesis test, which showed that students exposed to cooperative learning performed significantly better in academic achievement than their counterparts in the control group. The observed improvement in the experimental group can be attributed to the structured interaction, shared responsibility, and peer support inherent in cooperative learning environments. These features encourage active participation and deeper cognitive processing, which enhance understanding and retention of academic content. This finding aligns with earlier empirical studies in Nigeria which reported that cooperative learning significantly improves students' academic performance across subjects such as science, business studies, and social sciences (Aliyu, 2024; Agbede, 2023; Umaru & Doma, 2023). It also supports the conclusion of Adeyemi and Oluwo (2024), who found that students taught through cooperative strategies consistently outperform those taught through traditional lecture methods due to increased engagement and interaction. Theoretically, this result is consistent with social interdependence theory, which posits that positive interdependence among learners enhances academic outcomes through collaborative effort and mutual academic support.

The second major finding showed that cooperative learning significantly improved students' social interaction compared to the conventional teaching method. Students in the experimental group demonstrated higher levels of communication, peer bonding, and inclusiveness. This improvement reflects the social nature of cooperative learning, which requires students to work in small groups where they must share ideas, negotiate meaning, and support one another in achieving common learning goals. The result supports previous research indicating that cooperative learning enhances interpersonal skills and promotes positive peer relationships in classroom settings (Umaru & Doma, 2023). It also agrees with broader educational literature which emphasizes that structured group learning fosters communication skills, empathy, and social cohesion among learners. From a sociological perspective, this finding is particularly important because it demonstrates that learning is not only a cognitive process but also a social experience shaped by interaction and collaboration. The improvement in social interaction observed in this study suggests that cooperative learning can serve as an effective tool for addressing social isolation and promoting inclusive classroom environments in ethnically diverse settings such as Lagos State.

The third finding revealed that while cooperative learning was effective across all ethnic groups, there were slight but significant variations in its impact on both academic achievement and social interaction. This indicates that ethnic background played a moderating role in how students responded to the instructional strategy, although the overall effect of cooperative learning remained strong across groups. This finding is consistent with sociological perspectives that emphasize the influence of cultural and social background on learning experiences. It suggests that while cooperative learning promotes inclusivity, students' ethnic identities may still shape their interaction patterns and levels of engagement within group settings. The result aligns with studies that highlight the role of cultural diversity in shaping classroom participation, communication styles, and peer relationships, particularly in multicultural societies (Gebremariam, Kidane, & Gillies, 2023). It also reflects the contact hypothesis, which argues that structured interaction among diverse groups can reduce social barriers and improve intergroup relations, although the extent of this effect may vary depending on contextual and cultural factors.

## 8.0 CONCLUSION

The study established that cooperative learning strategy is an effective instructional approach for enhancing both academic achievement and social interaction among secondary school students in Lagos State. The findings revealed that students exposed to cooperative learning performed significantly better academically and demonstrated stronger interpersonal relationships compared to those taught using the conventional teaching method. Although ethnic background showed a slight moderating influence, cooperative learning remained effective across diverse ethnic groups, indicating its suitability for multicultural classroom settings. The study therefore concluded that cooperative learning not only improves cognitive outcomes but also promotes social cohesion, inclusiveness, and positive peer relationships in ethnically diverse learning environments.

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