

Bridging the Gap in Learning Subject-Verb Agreement: English Language Teachers' Standpoints

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Abstract. This study aimed to explore the teachers' challenges and coping mechanisms in teaching subject-verb agreement (SVA) among the learners in Prime Innovation School of South Davao Inc. and Aplaya Extension High School. It used a qualitative phenomenological study which was conducted among ten (10) English language teachers through in-depth interviews (IDI). Data revealed that teaching subject-verb agreement (SVA) presents challenges due to students' limited access to resources, lack of prior knowledge, time-consuming remediation, complex grammar rules, and the need for lesson plan adjustment. The coping strategies identified include technology-aided instruction, peer tutoring, clear explanations with examples, scheduled remedial sessions, and multi-sensory approaches. Enhancing engagement with technology and the learning gaps in technology are also revealed in the integration of technology.

Keywords: Grammar difficulty; Multisensory learning; Remedial instruction; Subject Verb-Agreement (SVA); Technology integration.

1.0 Introduction

Teaching Subject-verb agreement (SVA) has been an issue for many English language teachers. It presents several challenges, particularly in the development of effective strategies and exercises that will help the students understand its rules and concepts (Abeywickrama & Amaraweera, 2023). Likewise, Indonesian teachers discovered that the majority of the sentences in students' papers were grammatically wrong, specifically in applying subject-verb agreement rules (Putri et al., 2023). Additionally, a study found that teachers in Malaysia were not able to help their students master subject-verb agreement, particularly in writing (Chong & Yunus, 2019).

The same scenario is seen in the national setting. Specifically, teachers claimed that Filipino learners are discovered to have a fundamental problem when it comes to the use of verbs (Langga & Alico, 2020; Pablo, 2023; Pandapatan, 2022). Hence, a study highlights the effectiveness of using technology in improving students' performance and overall learning outcomes (Izquierdo & Lozano, 2019). Also, technology can make grammar learning more effective as it involves learners in a personalized, interactive, and context-sensitive learning process of grammar (Sugiarto, 2023).

Although the research problem of analyzing the challenges of teaching grammar to students occurs in many different nations, particularly in the field of education (Pazilah et al., 2019), most of these studies focus on the learners' difficulties in learning subject-verb agreement. The researcher finds less literature that studies the

challenges of teachers when it comes to teaching grammar, particularly subject-verb agreement, in the local context. The result is expected to address the problem of teachers regarding teaching subject-verb agreement and explore coping strategies as well as the technological integration teachers employ to address the challenges.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research design is a qualitative research method that focuses on exploring the experiences and perspectives of individuals. This design helped the researcher to look into intricate details of the experience related to the teaching of subject-verb agreement and the role of technology among the teachers in their instructional methods for the learners.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

This study was employed among the eight (10) language teachers who were identified using purposeful sampling at Prime Innovation School of South Davao, Inc., and Aplaya Extension High School, Brgy. Aplaya, Digos City, Davao del Sur. The participants were chosen to participate based on the following criteria: (1) they were currently teaching English, particularly in grammar, among the junior high school students, (2) they had at least two years of teaching experience in the field, and (3) they were willing to participate in the study. These teachers were chosen to be interviewed and answer the prepared questionnaires to obtain the necessary data for this study.

2.3 Research Instrument

The main instrument of this study was the interview guide, which included probing questions formulated by the researcher to answer the research questions. Experts, particularly English language experts, validated this. This study used thematic analysis to identify and analyze patterns and themes within the data.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The steps suggested by Creswell (2014) were used to gather the data. First, the researcher sought permission from the teachers in the junior high school to take part in the study. After obtaining consent and building rapport, individual structured interviews were conducted with the selected teachers. An interview protocol was then utilized during the interviews to record the information of the interviewees.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis of Transcribed Data. After the interviews, the researcher gathered detailed descriptions, and then through the data analysis, the researcher used the appropriate techniques to analyze the obtained data.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully taken into account in the conduct of the study. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, ensuring they fully understood the purpose, procedures, and potential risks or benefits of the study. Confidentiality was maintained to ensure privacy and anonymity. Additionally, the study prioritized the well-being and dignity of the participants. A safe and nonjudgmental environment was created to ensure that students felt comfortable sharing their experiences. The researcher was sensitive to the potential emotional impact of discussing speech difficulties and provided appropriate support or referrals when necessary.

3.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion throughout the research process. Thematic analysis was utilized to interpret the responses based on the three research questions. The discussions are based on the specific purpose of the study, which was to explore the challenges faced by teachers in teaching subject-verb agreement and their coping strategies, as well as the integration of technology in enhancing the learning process. Additionally, this section provides a detailed analysis and discussion of the key themes from the analyzed data.

3.1 Challenges Experienced by English Language Teachers in Teaching Subject-Verb Agreement

The first objective of this study is to describe the challenges experienced by English language teachers in teaching subject-verb agreement. As shown in Figure 1, data revealed that these experiences are categorized in five (5) primary themes, which include the lack of prior knowledge, complex grammar structure, time-consuming

intervention, modifications to the lesson plan, and limited access to resources.

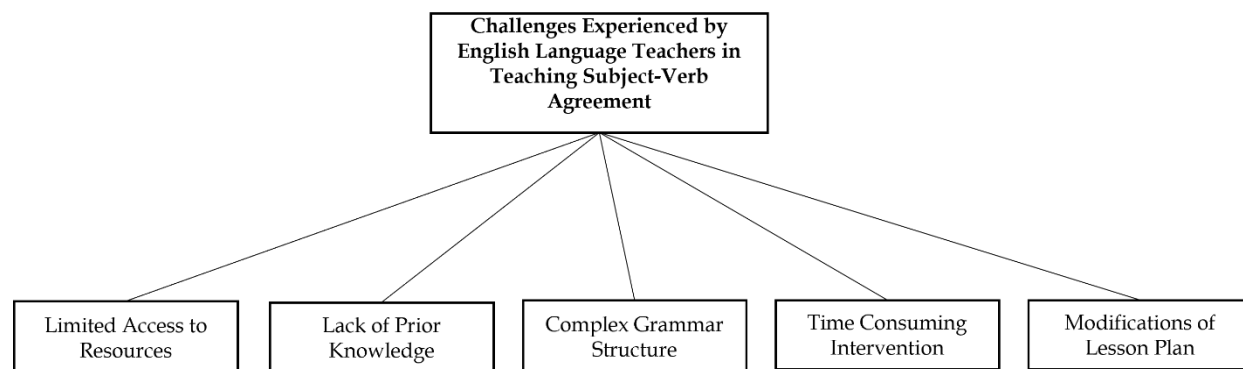


Figure 1. Challenges Experienced by English Language Teachers in Teaching Subject-Verb Agreement

Lack of Prior Knowledge

Another important theme on the challenges of teachers is the learners' lack of knowledge. Many English language teachers notice that students often have trouble with basic skills, especially writing, which they should have learned in elementary school. The lack of learners' basic knowledge affects the application and understanding of the subject-verb agreement competency.

"Most of my students find it hard to understand even the basic subject-verb agreement rules, which they are expected to have mastered." -IDI ELT-001

Participants also discussed that learners are not knowledgeable about compound subjects and complex sentences because they struggle to understand how to use subject-verb agreement correctly. Moreover, some rules in subject-verb agreement do not apply when used alongside other grammatical structures. This is one of the reasons many students struggle – they find it hard to shift from one grammatical context to another.

"The majority of my learners are confused when the subject is compound or when the sentence is very long. They do not have enough knowledge of the appropriate verb. It is like they cannot transfer what they know to different sentence structures." -IDI ELT-005

This supports the study of Aman (2020), which claimed that lack of knowledge led to the common difficulties in applying SVA rules consistently across different contexts. This often fails to help students identify subjects and verbs correctly in sentences. Likewise, Koçak (2019) claims that students were found to have confusion in complex sentences, including compound and compound complex types, compared to simple sentence structure.

Complex Grammar Structure

Participants discussed that learners are having trouble with compound subjects and complex sentences because they struggle to apply subject-verb agreement correctly. Moreover, there are subject-verb agreement rules that cannot be applied to other grammatical structures. That is why many learners struggle as they are unable to change from one context to another.

"My students often struggle with subjects that come between the subject and verb or with compound subjects. They find it hard to understand." -IDI ELT-003

Teachers further claimed that learners get confused when it comes to the use of irregular verbs, particularly in complex sentences. They struggle to identify the correct verb for compound subjects. Also, learners find it hard to remember all the rules of subject-verb agreement based on their level since there are a lot of them, and some of the rules can be applied to a specific context while others are not.

"My students often struggle with irregular verbs and applying the rules in subject and verb in complex or compound sentences. They have difficulty when the words come between the subject and verb." -IDI ELT-010

This is consistent with the study of Akmal et al. (2022) on the everyday difficulties of the learners when it comes to subject-verb agreement (SVA). These include confusion with irregular verbs, compound subjects, and complex sentences, which led the learners to struggle and apply SVA rules consistently. In addition, a study by Coyos et al. (2024) revealed that it is a prevalent issue for students to identify the correct verb relative to the number of subjects in complex sentences.

Time Consuming Interventions

English language teachers revealed that one of the challenges they experienced is the need to spend much time revisiting basic subject-verb agreement rules that learners must have already mastered. This repetition leaves less time for teachers to teach new or more complex SVA rules, which affects the attainment of the target competency.

"It takes more time because you need to fulfill all the challenges that the learner faces to get the rules in using correct and verb correctly in a simple sentence. That is the challenge - it takes more time to teach, and you also need more activities to support their learning." -IDI ELT-009

Furthermore, those learners struggling with these basic rules need frequent remediation sessions. These interventions are important to ensure that all learners can understand and apply subject-verb agreement rules. However, they can be time-consuming, taking away valuable time that could have been used to advance other students who performed well. As a result, these constraints demand significant effort, causing teachers to feel overwhelmed when students show slight improvement. Teachers may lack the time and energy to provide timely feedback because these interventions add to their heavy workload.

"I need to repeat my lesson since my students need additional remedial classes. It is hard because this is added to our heavy workload. Honestly, it is draining to imagine, but we have no choice but to bridge the gap. They need to learn the rules." -IDI ELT-003

This finding supports the claim of Xin Txin and Yunus (2019), who observe that teachers often revisit SVA rules repeatedly to assist students who struggle in mastering them. This can require remedial classes or extra efforts. In addition, Belarmino (2024) believes extra effort and time to improve learners' understanding in SVA are needed, such as through repetitive remediation.

Modification of Lesson Plan. Teachers mentioned that they struggle to adjust their lesson plans to assist students who are experiencing difficulty with subject-verb agreement. The need for flexibility often requires the modification of programmed activities to meet the different needs of learners. Teachers understand that students have many different kinds of difficulties. The constant adjustment may lead to inconsistency in teaching.

"I have to spend additional time making different instructional strategies to address their issue. This affects how I design and make my lesson plan to assess students' understanding. If the approach does not work, I have to adjust my plan on the spot." -IDI ELT-007

Language teachers also shared the importance of being flexible in their strategies. They often need extra time to develop and adjust their teaching methods to meet the needs of the learners. This adaptability influences lesson planning and assessment, including a well-structured plan to be modified on the spot. They also need to continuously seek new methods to make learning easier for the students.

"Even if I have a well-prepared lesson plan, there is a time when I need to change it on the spot. I need to adjust it based on my students' prior knowledge as well as their learning preferences. I need to be flexible, especially when I see someone struggling in my lesson." -IDI ELT-001

Moreover, according to Yang (2024), students exhibit diverse learning styles, influenced by their backgrounds, experiences, and cognitive abilities, which affect their information processing. Therefore, teaching methods must be flexible and tailored to meet the diverse learning needs of the students. Likewise, Troya Sánchez and Benítez Correa (2023) emphasize the need to reconstruct lesson plans for teachers as required by the time, as manifested

by professionalism.

3.2 Coping Mechanism Employed by English Language Teachers in Teaching Subject-Verb Agreement

The second objective of this study is to describe the coping mechanism that English language teachers used in teaching subject-verb agreement. As shown in Figure 2, data revealed that there are five (5) primary themes, including technology-aided instruction, peer tutoring, clear explanation, remedial session, and multi-sensory approach.

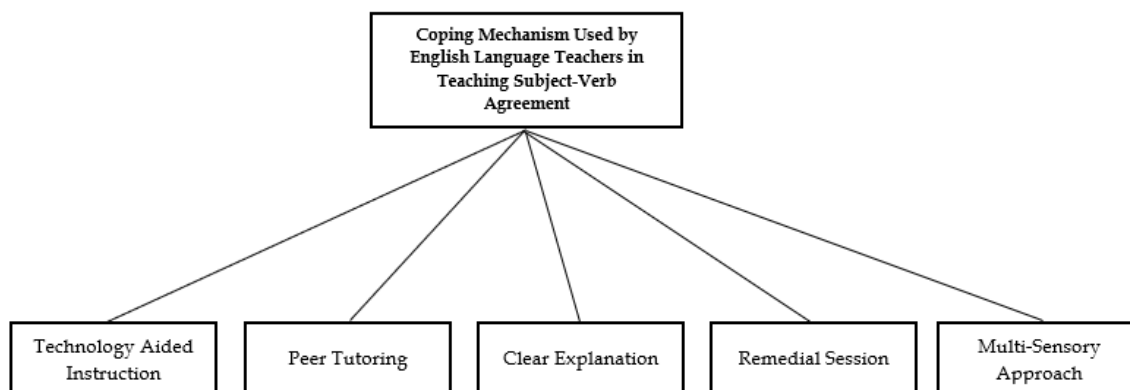


Figure 2. Coping Mechanism Employed by English Language Teachers in Teaching Subject-Verb Agreement

Technology Aided Instruction

English language teachers revealed that integrating technology in teaching subject-verb agreement can effectively enhance students' engagement and understanding. It makes the subject-verb agreement become clearer for the students through integrating visual aids such as educational videos and interactive online assessments that encourage the students to enhance their understanding of subject-verb agreement rules in a clear and accessible manner.

"We use educational videos together with worksheets as a teaching aid. The visuals and illustrations in the video help capture the students' attention, making it easier for them to understand and focus on the lesson." -IDI ELT-005

Moreover, teachers discussed that combining traditional methods with digital resources helps create a balanced and flexible learning environment, where students can actively participate and receive immediate feedback. This integration supports differentiated instruction, making it easier for English language teachers to address common difficulties students face with subject-verb agreement.

"I also use traditional visual aids like charts and diagrams to illustrate the rules and give immediate feedback to the students so that I can find which SVA rules they are struggling with the most." -IDI ELT-003

This is relevant to the study of Tu (2022), which stated that the use of technology to create a teaching aid supports student learning and helps build a deeper understanding of subject-verb agreement. In addition, according to Hayati et al. (2022), by combining traditional and technology teaching methods, educators can create a more engaging and interactive learning environment that supports a deeper understanding of grammatical concepts in both online and offline learning environments.

Peer Tutoring

Based on the data gathered, English language teachers have come up with another coping mechanism, which is the peer tutoring approach. This approach involves pairing the outstanding students with their peers who are struggling to understand subject-verb agreement. This coping mechanism can enhance not just the student's confidence but also promote a collaborative learning experience for the students.

"During class, I pair up students who are doing relatively well so they can help each other and assist in our teaching practice." -IDI ELT-004

Participants also stated that they use pair work activities to have engagement and prevent boredom while teaching subject-verb agreement. This approach aims to create a supportive and non-judgmental learning environment where students can receive help without feeling embarrassed. Teachers observed that students are more motivated and engaged when they work together, making grammar lessons more interactive and less boring.

"I might have students work in pairs to correct sentences with subject-verb agreement errors so they can participate more actively and avoid boredom." -IDI ELT-003

About this, Paskarena and Mukti (2024) emphasized that peer tutoring is a valuable approach for improving grammar competence and creating a more interactive and collaborative learning environment. Similarly, Murtisari et al. (2020) emphasized that peer-assisted learning activities increase students' language awareness and boost motivation by creating an inclusive environment where learners feel safe to make and correct mistakes together.

Clear Explanation

English language teachers provide thorough explanations with examples to make the rules more straightforward and provide a better understanding for the learners by breaking down complex parts of grammar into parts that are easier to understand to help the students better understand the subject-verb agreement rules. This coping mechanism helps students increase their confidence in applying the rules on their own. This also allows the teachers to identify the areas where students are struggling and provide targeted support.

"I also provide clear explanations of subject-verb agreement rules, with examples, because many students often struggle to understand them fully, and this allows me to assist the parts they are struggling with." -IDI ELT-004

In addition, through guided practice, English language teachers can assess learners' understanding in SVA. This strategy helps learners learn grammar effectively and increases their confidence when applying the rules on their own. Teachers often begin by modeling correct usage, followed by structured exercises where students practice under supervision. As students gain more familiarity and accuracy with subject-verb agreement rules, they are encouraged to apply SVA in more complex tasks such as sentence construction or paragraph writing.

"I also provide clear explanations of subject-verb agreement with examples because most of the time, they struggle to understand SVA when there are no examples. After that, I ask them to create sentences so I can see if they understand or if they are struggling with any specific rules." -IDI ELT-001

Moreover, according to Goštautaitė and Sakalauskas (2022), with the right strategies, teachers can effectively teach grammar through comprehensive explanations and detailed, reiterative demonstrations. Likewise, Ismail and Dedi (2021) highlighted that following direct instruction with focused, scaffolded practice—complete with modeling, guided exercises, and corrective feedback—is essential for helping students internalize grammatical forms and then apply them in real-world reading and writing contexts.

Remedial Session

English language teachers conduct scheduled remedial classes with targeted instruction to support learners struggling with subject-verb agreement (SVA). They provide one-on-one assistance and provide extra practice activities for learners to review during their free time, aiming to improve understanding and overcome learning difficulties.

"In National Reading Program, I allocate time for one-on-one remediation sessions, where a group of students receives support on subject-verb agreement through reading." -IDI ELT-008

In addition, English language teachers provide extra activities for learners to practice and review the lessons during remedial sessions. This approach aims to help the learners overcome their difficulties and improve their understanding of subject-verb agreement. Furthermore, students who engage in consistent practice outside of

class are more likely to show improvement in their grammar usage, especially in constructing grammatically correct sentences.

"So, to cope with this, we have a program from the DepEd called remedial classes. We also have sessions on Fridays during their vacant periods, and that is when the lessons are injected. Based on what I have observed, those students are improving." -IDI ELT-004

About this, the study of Hu & Hsu (2020) stated that remedial sessions and focused instruction were used in various educational settings to support learners facing challenges. These interventions offer simplified instruction and a supportive environment, helping struggling students better understand complex concepts like subject-verb agreement (SVA). In support of this, Manalastas (2021) found that remedial teaching significantly improves students' proficiency in the English language by addressing their learning gaps through targeted reinforcement. He emphasized that when learners are given consistent support through focused instruction, their grammar understanding – particularly in rules such as subject-verb agreement – shows measurable improvement.

Multi-Sensory Approach

English language teachers integrate the four macro skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - into their teaching to support diverse learning styles. By using varied activities and materials that engage multiple senses, they make learning more effective and engaging. This balanced approach helps learners better understand and retain concepts, including subject-verb agreement.

"Every activity in my lesson plan taps into the macro skills. I might teach subject-verb agreement through listening and reading activities. In the reading activity, students read a passage and identify the SVA rule being used with it." -IDI ELT-005

English language teachers stated that they observed improvements in students' speaking and writing skills through this approach. They also emphasized that incorporating viewing activities, such as educational videos, further enriched students' learning. As a result, students not only identified SVA rules but also applied them more confidently in both spoken and written communication, demonstrating the effectiveness of this comprehensive and student-centered teaching strategy.

"Okay, it is easier compared to teaching SVA because I can also enrich their four macroskills - or now five, including viewing, since they watch videos. So, it also helped improve their skills beyond just SVA." -IDI ELT-004

This supports the study of Morena Dela Peña (2019), which found that using a multisensory structured approach in language instruction, where learners have the opportunity to engage in varied activities, can significantly improve English performance. Additionally, this supports the study of Srivastava (2019), who viewed that when multiple senses are involved, learners can better process and retain complex grammar rules like subject-verb agreement.

4.0 Conclusion

English Language teachers encountered several issues in teaching subject-verb agreement among the students, including limited access to resources, students' lack of prior knowledge, time-consuming remediation, complex grammar rules, and the need for lesson plan adjustment. In order to resolve and address these problems, specific interventions are done. These include technology-aided instruction, peer tutoring, clear explanations with examples, scheduled remedial sessions, and multi-sensory approaches. These strategies are beneficial to improve the understanding of the students on subject-verb agreement despite persistent constraints

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, proposal writing, data gathering, data analysis
Author 2: conceptualization, data analysis

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

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