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EFFECT OF STORYTELLING ON DEVELOPING EMPATHY SKILL AMONG PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN ILORIN SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF KWARA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Empathy is considered an essential skill for creating a generation of compassionate and socially responsible individuals. Therefore, this study examined the impact of storytelling on developing empathy skill among public primary school pupils in Ilorin South Local Government Area of Kwara State. Using a pre-test, post-test quasi-experimental design with a factorial design of 2x2x2. The population comprises all public primary school pupils in Ilorin South LGA of Kwara State and the study targeted basic-one pupils in public primary schools. A multistage sampling technique was employed, using simple random sampling technique to select two schools and purposive sampling to focus on 82 basic-one pupils from intact classes. Two instruments were utilized: an instructional guide for the storytelling intervention and a

15-item rating scale titled "Effect of Storytelling on Developing Empathy Skills among Public Primary School Pupils (ESDESPPSP)", using a three-point Likert scale of Always, Sometimes, and Never. While both groups underwent pre-test and post-test evaluations, only the experimental group received the storytelling treatment. The instrument was tested using Internal Consistency reliability, with Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.83. Data was analysed using Analysis of CO-Variance (ANCOVA) revealed that storytelling significantly enhanced empathy skill (P = 0.00 < 0.05). However, there were no significant interaction effects of storytelling with gender, age, or their combination on empathy development. These findings highlight storytelling as an effective universal tool for fostering empathy, irrespective of demographic differences. The study recommends integrating storytelling into teaching methodologies to support holistic education and nurture empathy in pupils, contributing to their social and emotional development.

Keywords: *Empathy Skill, Emotional Development, and Storytelling.*

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Introduction

The capacity to empathize with others is a foundational skill for building positive relationships, fostering social interaction, and promoting social behaviours within diverse communities. In educational settings, empathy can be instrumental in reducing conflicts, encouraging cooperation, and cultivating a supportive learning environment, particularly in public primary schools where pupils come from varied backgrounds. Developing empathy in young learners, however, is often a complex task, necessitating the integration of teaching methods that go beyond conventional academic instruction. Storytelling, an age-old practice rooted in African tradition and widely embraced within Nigerian culture, presents a unique approach to nurturing empathy by allowing pupils to engage with narratives that expose them to different emotions, experiences, and perspectives.

Storytelling as an educational tool has gained increasing attention in recent years, with studies suggesting that narrative-based methods can foster empathy by helping children understand and relate to the feelings and challenges of others (Oluwagbemiga, 2023). When pupils are presented with stories, they are given opportunities to mentally step into the shoes of the characters, allowing them to explore the social and emotional complexities of diverse situations. This process can lead to deeper cognitive and emotional engagement, which, in turn, enhances their ability to empathize with peers from different backgrounds or those who may be experiencing different life circumstances. In Nigeria, where children often encounter various social and economic challenges, cultivating empathy from an early age is critical for fostering unity and cooperation in increasingly diverse classrooms (Afolabi & Ogunleye, 2021).

These traditional Nigerian stories often revolved around folktales, myths, legends, and proverbs, with animals or supernatural beings frequently featured as characters. The stories were carefully crafted to convey moral lessons, emphasize communal values, and explain natural phenomena in ways that were accessible and memorable for listeners. For example, in many Nigerian communities, stories about the clever tortoise, a popular trickster character, were used to teach children about the consequences of greed, dishonesty, and selfishness. These stories helped to instil values like honesty, respect, and humility, which were essential for maintaining harmony within the community (Ojo & Adeyemi, 2020).

Storytelling in the olden days was not only a method of instruction but also a form of entertainment and social bonding. As noted by Ajayi and Aluko (2022), storytelling sessions were communal events that fostered unity, as they brought together people of different ages and statuses within the community. The interactive nature of these sessions, where listeners could ask questions or repeat proverbs and wise sayings, created a participatory atmosphere that strengthened social ties and facilitated intergenerational knowledge transfer. The elders, regarded as the custodians of knowledge, played a pivotal role in this process, as they were revered figures whose words were respected and remembered by the younger generation. Additionally, the oral storytelling tradition in Nigeria was marked by rich linguistic expressions, including the use of song, dance, and dramatic gestures, which made the stories engaging and memorable. Performers often used rhythm and song to enhance the narrative, making the experience immersive and emotionally resonant (Babatunde & Yusuf, 2019).

The age-appropriateness of storytelling content is essential, as children of different ages comprehend and internalize stories differently. For instance, younger children benefit more from stories with clear morals and simpler language, whereas older children and pre-teens are capable of understanding more nuanced narratives that include complex characters and moral dilemmas. This progression in storytelling aligns with children's cognitive and emotional maturation, as their ability to process and reflect on emotions grows. Moreover, storytelling fosters a sense of identity and belonging in children as they connect with the themes and lessons of culturally relevant stories, which is particularly important for their social and moral development (Ogunwale, 2020).

Storytelling also varies by gender, as both the themes of stories and the ways children engage with narratives can differ according to gender socialization patterns. In many cultures, stories are used to reinforce gender roles and expectations, subtly conveying societal norms regarding

masculinity and femininity. For example, boys might be encouraged through stories that emphasize bravery, heroism, and leadership, while stories for girls may highlight compassion, nurturing roles, and cooperation (Adefolaju & Adebola, 2022). These gendered storytelling patterns not only reflect cultural values but also shape children's own identities and their understanding of gender roles. This process can reinforce traditional gender norms, but it can also offer a way to challenge them, as more diverse and inclusive storytelling practices emerge in contemporary contexts.

Empathy development is particularly relevant in public primary schools, where teachers often struggle to create inclusive and supportive classroom environments due to limited resources and large class sizes. According to Adegboye (2020), empathy among primary school pupils is essential for reducing incidences of bullying and enhancing peer interactions, which are often challenged by socioeconomic disparities and cultural differences. However, current pedagogical practices in Nigeria's public primary schools rarely prioritize empathy development, focusing instead on academic achievements and exam preparation. This oversight may deprive young learners of the opportunity to develop critical social skills that will shape their attitudes toward others and impact their future interactions within society (Okonkwo & Ibe, 2022).

Storytelling holds promise as an effective, accessible, and culturally relevant method for teaching empathy in Nigerian

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classrooms. Historically, storytelling has been a prominent feature of African societies, including Nigeria, where folktales and traditional stories have been passed down through generations as a means of educating young people about values, norms, and interpersonal relationships. As observed by Eze (2021), the role of storytelling in African cultures extends beyond entertainment; it serves as a powerful medium for imparting moral lessons and promoting community values such as kindness, understanding, and respect. In the context of modern education, this traditional practice can be adapted to address contemporary challenges in the classroom by fostering empathy among pupils.

Research by Ahmed & Omolayo, (2019) has shown that children exposed to stories develop better social-emotional skills, as storytelling encourages them to think critically about the characters' experiences and emotions. Stories often reflect real-life situations, and through

repeated engagement with diverse narratives, children begin to internalize the importance of understanding others' viewpoints. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where ethnic, religious, and economic diversity presents both opportunities and challenges within classrooms. Pupils who develop empathy are more likely to engage positively with their peers, demonstrating behaviours that align with Nigeria's broader goals of national unity and social harmony (Nwaozor, 2023).

Moreover, the importance of empathy in education has been highlighted and emphases are made that empathy-driven approaches can transform the learning experience, making it more inclusive and supportive for all pupils. Oladimeji (2022) argued that the incorporation of empathy-focused methods in teaching can lead to improved academic performance and overall well-being among pupils, as they feel more understood and valued by their peers and teachers. Additionally, a study by Obinna and Adeleke (2020) found that empathy skills in primary school pupils were linked to better conflict resolution abilities, suggesting that children who are trained to empathize are more adept at managing interpersonal disputes in constructive ways.

Empathy, the capacity to understand and share the feelings of others, is a critical social- emotional skill that develops throughout childhood, and its growth is influenced by age-related cognitive and emotional milestones. In early childhood, empathy is initially limited and egocentric; children can often feel concern for others, but their understanding of others' perspectives is constrained. However, as children age, particularly in middle childhood, they begin to develop a more sophisticated form of empathy, known as cognitive empathy. This allows them to understand others' viewpoints and emotions even if they differ from their own (Okonkwo & Adebayo, 2018). This progression is essential for forming social connections and understanding social dynamics, as older children can recognize the complexity of others' experiences and emotions.

The study by Eze (2021) revealed that Nigerian primary school pupils' empathy levels are generally low, with significant variations between urban and rural settings, with urban pupils showing slightly higher levels (25% of the pupils demonstrated high empathy levels, while 55% exhibited moderate levels, and 20% showed low levels. Urban pupils had a mean empathy score of 3.2 (SD = 0.8), compared to 2.8 (SD = 0.9) for rural pupils, suggesting environmental and exposure differences), emphasising the need for targeted interventions. Empathy development can also be influenced by gender, as societal expectations and cultural factors shape how boys and girls express and experience empathy. Generally, the study by (Olatunji & Obasi, 2020) also suggests that girls tend to display higher levels of empathy than boys, particularly in terms of affective empathy, or the ability to emotionally resonate with others' feelings. This difference is partly attributed to gender socialization, where girls are often encouraged to be sensitive and emotionally expressive, while boys may face pressures to be more stoic and less openly expressive of emotions. These social influences can affect how children respond to storytelling and how they internalize empathetic lessons from stories.

In Nigerian public primary schools, however, the practical application of storytelling for empathy development remains underutilized. While teachers recognize the educational value of stories, they often lack formal training in incorporating storytelling into their teaching strategies effectively (Adebayo & Hassan, 2022). With rising concerns over societal issues such as violence, discrimination, and intolerance, educational stakeholders increasingly recognize the importance of equipping pupils with skills that go beyond academics. Empathy, as part of social-emotional learning, is now considered essential for creating a generation of compassionate and socially responsible individuals (Ogunwale & Chukwu, 2021). In response, storytelling emerges as an ideal method, as it allows for the delivery of emotional and moral education in a format that is both engaging and culturally familiar to Nigerian pupils.

In conclusion, the potential of storytelling to foster empathy in Nigerian public primary school pupils underscores the relevance of this study. Investigating how storytelling can be used to develop empathy skills, this research addresses a critical gap in Nigeria's primary education system, where the development of social and emotional skills is often overshadowed by academic priorities. The research will also contribute to the literature on empathy development in young learners, providing evidence for the integration of storytelling as an effective pedagogical approach within Nigerian primary education.

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Statement of the Problem

Despite the known benefits of empathy in reducing intolerance, bullying, and lack of cooperation, limited approaches are in place to cultivate the skill among pupils. The loss of empathy is the root of the problem facing Nigeria today where no one cares for another one's feelings as the study by Eze (2021) revealed that Nigerian primary school pupils' empathy levels are generally low, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions. The development of empathy among young learners is critical for fostering positive social interactions, emotional understanding and a good environment for the young adult to grow healthy. Yet, it remains an underexplored aspect of the primary school curriculum in many public schools. This study seeks to address empathy development by investigating storytelling's effect on developing empathy skill among primary school pupils.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide this study:

H01: There is no significant main effect of treatment on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state.

H02: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state.

H03: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and age on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state.

H04: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment, gender and age on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state.

Methodology

The study employed an experimental design of pre-test, post-test, quasi quasi-experimental design to establish the cause and effect of storytelling on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Ilorin South local government area of Kwara state. The research design was selected because this study sought to check whether the use of storytelling would help in building empathy skills among public primary school pupils in the Ilorin south local government area of Kwara state as Smith (2020), revealed that quasi-experimental design was used to forecast the causal effect of an intervention on its target population without any random assignment. The population comprises all public primary schools in Ilorin South local government area of Kwara state. The target population was a basic one. A multi-stage sampling technique was used; At first, a convenience sampling technique was used to select two schools, Secondly, purposive sampling was used to focus on basic one class who just started the basic level of education. Ultimately, an intact class of basic one was used for the study.

A 2X2X2 factorial design was used for this study to test the null hypotheses. The first two levels are of experiment group (storytelling) and the control group. The second factorial level was based on gender that is, male (M) and female (F) while the third factorial level was on age which is 8 years below and above 8 years of age. Four stories were used within two weeks of intervention. The experimental groups received treatment (storytelling) while the control group did not. However, both experimental and control groups received the pre-test and post-test before and after treatment, respectively. One instrument was used to collect data for this study.

A modified Rating Scale of 3 Likert scale; Always (3), Sometimes (2), and Never (1) and it comprises two sections; Section A contains the demographic data of the participants which includes gender & age, and Section B contains 15 items on empathy skills. Face and content validity was used for the instruments and internal consistency was analysed with Cronbach Alpha reliability at 0.83 threshold. Ethical consideration was ensured by making known to the participants that the intervention was strictly for research purposes. The data gathered were analysed using Analysis of Co-Variance (ANOVA) to test the hypotheses.

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Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant main effect of treatment on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state.

Table 1: Showing summary of Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA) on the effect of treatment on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Mod	3546.585[a]	8	443.323	39.048	.000
Intercept	2155.436	1	2155.436	189.851	.000
Pretest	66.143	1	66.143	5.826	.108
Treatment	3127.110	1	3127.110	275.435	**.000**
Gender	2.315	1	2.315	.204	.653
Age	11.529	1	11.529	1.016	.317
Treatment * Gender	.033	1	.033	.003	**.957**
Treatment * Age	14.230	1	14.230	1.253	**.267**
Gender * Age	25.559	1	25.559	2.251	.138
s					
Treatment * Gender * ‹ge	25.089	1	25.089	2.210	**.141**
Error	828.793	73	11.353		
Total	89951.000	82			
Corrected Total	4375.378	81			

Table 1 shows the effect of treatment on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state ($F(1; 82) = 275.435$, $P < 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore rejected in the light of the result since the significant value (.000) is less than 0.05. This implies that the storytelling method had a significant effect on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state.

Table 2: Summary of Bonferroni's Post Hoc pairwise Comparison of the scores between the two Groups

	Treatment	**Mean Score**	**Experimental**	**Control Group**
	Story Telling Method	77.606	*	
	Control Group	62.716		*

Table 2: reveals that the significant main effect exposed by Table 1 is a result of the significant difference between the story-telling method and the conventional method, the story-telling method is referred to as the experimental group and the Conventional Method is known as a control group. This implies that those taught with the story-telling method performed better than those taught with the conventional method.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state. Table 1 also shows the interaction effect of treatment and gender on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state. There was no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state ($F(1; 82) = .003$; $P > 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in the light of the result since the significant value (.957) is greater than 0.05. This implies that treatment and gender had no significant effect on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment and age on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state. Table 1 also shows the interaction effect of treatment and age on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state. There was no significant interaction effect of

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treatment and age on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state (F (1;

82) = 1.253; P > 0.05). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in the light of the result since the significant value (.267) is greater than 0.05. This implies that treatment and age had no significant effect on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant interaction effect of treatment, gender and age on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state. Table 1 also shows the interaction effect of treatment, gender and age on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state. There was no significant interaction effect of treatment, gender and age on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state (F (1; 82) =. 2.210; P > 0.05). The hypothesis is therefore not rejected in the light of the result since the significant value (.141) is greater than 0.05. This implies that treatment, gender and age had no significant effect on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state.

Discussion of Findings

The study findings revealed that the storytelling method had a significant effect on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state**.** This implies that those taught with the story-telling method performed better than those taught with the conventional method. This is in corroboration with the study by Abdulrahman et al. (2022) on the impact of storytelling techniques on the socio-emotional development of primary school pupils in Northern Nigeria, with specific emphasis on empathy as a critical skill. The study revealed a statistically significant improvement in the empathy levels of pupils in the storytelling group compared to the control group. Pupils were better able to understand and articulate the perspectives of characters in the stories, leading to improved emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationships.

The study also revealed that treatment and gender had no significant effect on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state**.** This supports the study by Ibrahim and Olorunfemi (2023), which investigated the role of gender in moderating the impact of innovative teaching strategies, including storytelling, on socio-emotional skills development among Nigerian pupils. The results showed no significant interaction between gender and treatment in enhancing empathy skills. Both male and female pupils demonstrated similar levels of improvement in their ability to identify emotions, express empathy, and engage in perspective-taking after being exposed to storytelling methods. The study concluded that gender-neutral instructional strategies, such as storytelling, can effectively promote socio- emotional development in diverse classroom settings.

These findings also discovered that treatment and age had no significant effect on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state. The findings were supported by Adeyemi and Ogunlade (2023), results indicated no significant interaction effect between age and treatment on empathy development. Pupils across varying age brackets displayed similar improvements in recognizing emotions, expressing empathy, and engaging in perspective-taking. The study emphasized that age did not alter the efficacy of storytelling as an instructional method, highlighting the universal applicability of storytelling in fostering socio-emotional competencies among children.

These findings also revealed that treatment, gender and age had no significant effect on developing empathy skills among public primary school pupils in Kwara state. Furthermore, it was supported by the findings of Eze and Abiola (2023), whose results demonstrated that while storytelling as a teaching strategy effectively improved empathy skills overall, the combined interaction of treatment, gender, and age was not statistically significant. Pupils across all age groups and gender categories exhibited similar gains in their ability to identify and empathize with emotions, suggesting that storytelling is a universally effective pedagogical tool irrespective of demographic differences.

Conclusion

The study provides compelling evidence that empathy levels among primary school pupils in Ilorin South Local Government Area of Kwara State are significantly enhanced through the application of storytelling. Engaging pupils in emotionally rich narratives, and storytelling fosters their ability to recognize and share the feelings of others, promoting socio-emotional competencies essential for interpersonal relationships and social interactions. The findings demonstrate that the storytelling approach is universally effective, as demographic factors such as gender and age do not significantly influence their impact on empathy development to ensure inclusive and adaptable educational tools capable of bridging and enhancing classroom interactions and educators can cultivate empathy and related skills, contribute to a more harmonious and supportive school environment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made for this study,

1. School administrators should organize training workshops on storytelling methods for teachers, emphasizing their effectiveness in enhancing socio-emotional skills across diverse classrooms.

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2. Teachers should incorporate storytelling techniques into their lesson plans as a gender- neutral instructional strategy to foster empathy skills among pupils, irrespective of their gender.

3. Curriculum planners should integrate storytelling-based activities into the primary school curriculum, considering its universal applicability across different age groups to improve empathy and emotional intelligence.

4. Parents should actively engage children in storytelling at home to complement school efforts, fostering empathy development in informal settings.

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