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IMPACT OF STORYTELLING ON THE LITERACY SKILLS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN AWKA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the impact of storytelling on the literacy skills of primary school pupils in Awka South LGEA. Three research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population for the study comprised of 612 primary school teachers in the 45 public primary schools in Awka South Local Government Education Authority of Anambra State. The sample size for the study is 100 primary school teachers using the simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection is a structured validated questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on the Impact of Storytelling on Literacy Skills of Primary School Pupils" (QISLSPSP) developed by the researcher. The copies of the instrument were collected and the reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha method and the overall coefficient of 0.80 was obtained. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using Mean scores. The findings revealed that storytelling enhance the reading interest, speaking skills and writing skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. Based on this finding, it was recommended amongst others that educational authorities should encourage the use of storytelling in primary schools by providing professional development to teachers on the effective use of storytelling.

Keywords: Storytelling, Literacy, Literacy Skills, Pupils, Primary Schools

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Introduction

Primary education refers to the initial stage of formal education, typically beginning between the ages of 5 and 7 and lasting for about six to eight years. It focuses on imparting foundational skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, along with basic knowledge in subjects such as science and social studies, and is usually compulsory. It forms the foundation for further education and lifelong learning, aiming to equip children with essential cognitive and social skills (World Bank 2020). The objectives of primary education vary in different nations of the world.

The Federal Government of Nigeria gave the primary education prominence in National Policy on Education (NPE 2014) to include among others: to inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively; lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking; give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribution to the life of the society; mold the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child; develop in the child ability to adapt to the child's hanging environment; give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable the child to function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capacity; provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement, including preparation for trades and craft of the locality**.** The development of literacy skills is one of the objectives of the primary level of education.

Literacy skill connotes the ability to read and write. Fox, (2019) defined literacy skills as the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, three Rs. It is vital for the individuals to possess these skills, to carry out various tasks and activities and sustain their living conditions in an appropriate manner. Literacy skill according to Miller and Almon, (2019) is the ability to interpret and understand messages relayed from others as means to communicate. Literacy skills encompass those skills that make for effective communication. The researcher defined literacy skills as possessing the ability to read, write, speak and listen to language for effective communication.

Reading skills in primary education refer to the foundational abilities that children develop to understand, interpret, and interact with written language. These skills include phonemic awareness (recognizing sounds in words), decoding (sounding out words), fluency (reading with speed and accuracy), vocabulary development, and comprehension (understanding the meaning of texts). According to Snow, Burns, and Griffin (2018) developing these skills is crucial for success in other academic areas and in lifelong learning. Teachers often use guided reading exercises, phonics instruction, and vocabulary-building activities to support pupils in gaining these abilities.

Speaking skills in primary education refer to the abilities young students develop to effectively express their thoughts, ideas, and needs through spoken language. These skills involve pronunciation, vocabulary usage, sentence formation, listening, and turn-taking in conversations. Speaking skills are essential for both academic success and social interaction, as they help children communicate clearly and confidently with teachers, peers, and others. Writing skills in primary education refer to the abilities children develop to express their thoughts, ideas, and knowledge through written language. These skills include forming letters, understanding grammar, developing vocabulary, and constructing coherent sentences and paragraphs.

Writing is a crucial part of the learning process, as it helps children communicate their understanding of subjects and enhances critical thinking skills. For example, in primary two classroom, pupils might be asked to write a short paragraph about their favorite holiday. A student might write, "My favorite holiday is Christmas because I get to spend time with my family, and we eat delicious food." Through this exercise, the student practices sentence structure, spelling, and organizing thoughts into a clear and cohesive narrative. According to Graham and Harris (2016) writing tasks often progress from simple word formation to more complex sentence and paragraph construction as students advance in their education.

The development of literacy skills is significant in the educational process of children by preparing them for the acquisition of other relevant skills facilitates their educational process. According to Bennett and Bone (2020) the development of early literacy skills is critical for children's learning and later school achievement. In view of that, there are several teaching strategies put in place to ensure the acquisition and development of literacy skills such as storytelling, vocabulary instructions, guided reading and phonics instructions. Zettler-Greeley et al. (2018) stated that in primary school, the development of early literacy skills is generally addressed in the form of teacher-led delivery of literacy instruction followed by drill-and-practice exercises. The use of storytelling is one of the instructional methods used in the development of pupils' vocabulary, phonological awareness and overall literacy skills. Storytelling as an instructional method involves the use of stories, and folktales to teach concepts and values to pupils.

Throughout history, sharing stories has been one of the most common means of knowledge transmission from generation to generation. According to Roig, Pires de Sá, and Cornelio, (2018) the activity of storytelling is a social and cultural practice oriented around the act of telling and sharing stories. The researcher defined storytelling as the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, sometimes with improvisation, theatrics or embellishment. The use of

storytelling offers several benefits in the educational process of primary school pupils. These benefits include the development of listening skills, retention ability and the development of verbal prowess. Bietti, Tilston, and Bangerter, (2019) posited that in primary schools' classrooms, a storytelling session, where a teacher tells a story to the children, can capture the children's interest and motivation, and by connecting the story to their everyday life and prior experience, it can support sense-making.

Sintonen, Kumpulainen, and Vartiainen (2018) stated that while storytelling can indeed be relaxing and entertaining, it also has the advantage of communicating narrative structures, and these involve the elements of setting, theme, characters, plot and conflict that allow storytelling to provide a model of speech, a context for learning and a way to expand imagination, which all contribute to literacy development. There is a considerable body of research on the effects of storytelling interventions on children's story-related abilities, including story comprehension and the acquisition of story structures such as diction, grammatical structure and content (Wessel-Powell, Kargin, and Wohlwend, 2016). Research has also investigated its effects on general or second language development and social-emotional development (Cekaite and Björk-Willén, 2018; Sunday, 2018). However, the contribution of a storytelling approach to early literacy skills development has hardly ever been investigated.

One prominent exception is Vivian Paley's research (Cooper, 2015). Paley designed a storytelling curriculum that has children tell stories and act them out. The holistic nature of the storytelling curriculum is evident in the learning goals that it promotes in many areas of development, from language development to social-emotional development, including some literacy skills (Nicolopoulou et al, 2015). Two critical aspects in Paley's storytelling curriculum are prior knowledge and group size.

For the curriculum to be effectively employed, the children need to have a basic understanding of the narrative structure, and teaching should be done with a relatively small number of children in a group (Flewitt, Cremin, and Mardell, 2016). The latter can especially be an obstacle when kindergarten classrooms may consist of a greater number of children. This study proposed to test the effectiveness of storytelling activities that are appropriate to children at the beginning of the school year (without any prerequisite knowledge on narrative structure) and applicable to a relatively large group. Assuming that children have an innate love of stories, it is also worth noting that today's children are increasingly involved in storytelling interactions across multiple media platforms (Sintonen, Kumpulainen, and Vartiainen, 2018).

Introducing storytelling activities in primary school education may therefore benefit from

bringing in not only property-related story features such as pictures and puppets, but also digital technology, yielding a form of digital storytelling. Digital storytelling combines the art of telling stories with a mixture of digital media, including pictures and narration (Robin, 2016). Regular stories can be adapted to the digital field with the same benefits, and possibly even more advantages, because digital stories have different elements (Ryan, 2014). Digital storytelling adopts a specific point of view, contains a dramatic question, and has emotional content to personalize the content of the story.

Moreover, in digital storytelling, the gift of voice, power of soundtrack, economy and pacing can be attended to in the design to personalize the delivery of the story (Robin, 2016). Most digital stories are short and between 2 and 10 min long. There are many different kinds of digital stories, but one major type is the personal narrative (Robin, 2016). This type fits the common themes at the beginning of the academic year in kindergarten; therefore, it was employed in the present study.

There is growing interest in digital storytelling for young learners. Most research on this issue has concentrated on its use by primary school teachers (Yuksel-Arslan, Yildirim, and Robin, 2016) or older children (Sadik, 2018). The development of literacy skills is a significant aspect of childhood development that makes for the acquisition of other relevant skills, and it's also one of the core objectives of the primary level of education. Storytelling is one of the instructional methods that hold the potential to enhance several aspects of childhood development. However, there are limited studies on the impact of storytelling on the literacy skills of primary school pupils. Hence, the researcher deemed it fit to investigate the impact of storytelling on literacy skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority of Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority continue to struggle with literacy skills, despite ongoing educational efforts. Traditional teaching methods often fail to engage students effectively, leading to poor reading and writing proficiency. This study seeks to examine the impact of storytelling, a culturally significant and interactive teaching tool, on improving literacy skills among these pupils. The declining literacy rates in Awka South and the ineffectiveness of conventional teaching methods motivated me to explore alternative approaches. Observations revealed that storytelling, widely used in African culture, could potentially foster greater engagement and enhance literacy development in young learners. Therefore, the continued poor literacy levels will limit pupils' academic success and future opportunities. Without innovative approaches like storytelling, this issue could

perpetuate cycles of low achievement and socio-economic challenges in the region. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Impact of storytelling on the reading skill of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.
2. Impact of storytelling on the speaking skill of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.
3. Impact of storytelling on the writing skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. What are the impact of storytelling on the reading skill of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?
2. What are the impact of storytelling on speaking skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?
3. What are the impact of storytelling on the writing skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority?

Theoretical Underpinning

Sociocultural Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978)

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) is a foundational framework for understanding how storytelling can impact the literacy skills of primary school pupils, particularly in the context of the Awka South Local Government Education Authority. Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction, cultural context, and language in cognitive development, making it highly relevant for analyzing how storytelling can foster literacy growth in young learners. Storytelling, according to Vygotsky's theory, is inherently a social activity that promotes learning through interaction. In the classroom, when teachers engage pupils in storytelling, they create a social context where learning is mediated by language and guided by more knowledgeable individuals (teachers or peers). This aligns with Vygotsky's belief that cognitive development occurs through social interaction.

During storytelling sessions, pupils listen to stories told by their teacher or peers, ask questions, and participate in discussions about the story. This interaction helps them make sense of the narrative, expand their vocabulary, and develop their understanding of language structures. Storytelling in a classroom often involves group activities, where pupils discuss the story's meaning, characters, and events. These collaborative discussions foster deeper comprehension and encourage pupils to articulate their thoughts, enhancing both their spoken and written literacy skills.

Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the role of culture in shaping cognitive development.

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Storytelling often reflects the cultural values, beliefs, and norms of a society, making it a key tool for transmitting cultural knowledge to pupils. In the context of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority, storytelling can serve as a medium through which cultural heritage and social norms are passed down to younger generations, thereby fostering both literacy and cultural awareness. When stories are culturally relevant, they resonate more deeply with pupils, helping them connect the content of the story to their own lives. In Awka South Local Government Education Authority, stories rooted in local folklore or traditions may be particularly effective in enhancing literacy, as pupils relate to the themes and characters, making the learning experience more meaningful. Storytelling is not only about listening but also about encouraging pupils to think critically about the content of the story. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory suggests that with the guidance of teachers, pupils can engage in higher-level thinking that involves analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population for the study comprised of 612 primary school teachers in the 45 public primary schools in Awka South Local Government Education Authority of Anambra State. (Source: Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board (ASUBEB). The sample size for the study is 100 primary school teachers using the simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection is a structured validated questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on the Impact of Storytelling on Literacy Skills of Primary School Pupils" (QISLSPSP) developed by the researcher.

The copies of the instrument were collected and the reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha method and the overall test yielded reliability coefficient of 0.80, 0.84 and 0.78 respectively. The overall test yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.80 which is high enough for the instrument to be considered reliable. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using Mean scores. The decision point is 2.50. Therefore, any item with a mean of 2.50 and above is deemed agreed, while any item below a mean of 2.50 was disagreed.

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Results

Table 1: Mean response on the impact of storytelling on the reading skills of primary school pupils

S/N	Impact of storytelling on pupils' reading skills	X	Remark
1	Storytelling helps pupils to become more interested in reading	3.16	Agree
2	Pupils can understand stories better when they are being told than when they read them alone	2.65	Agree
3	Storytelling sessions improves pupils' abilities to recognize new words while reading	3.02	Agree
4	Listening to stories makes reading more enjoyable for pupils	3.22	Agree
5	Storytelling sessions helps pupils to read longer passages without getting tired	2.90	Agree
6	Storytelling improves pupils' ability to remember details from what they read	3.30	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**3.04**	**Agree**

The analysis in Table 1 shows that all the items in the table have mean score above 2.50 which is the cutoff point, with an overall cluster mean of 3.04. This indicates that the respondents agreed that all the items are the impact of storytelling on the reading skill of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority.

Table 2: Mean response on the impact of storytelling on the speaking skills of primary school pupils

S/N	Impact of storytelling on pupils' speaking skills	X	Remark
7	Storytelling helps pupils' speak more confidently in class	3.21	Agree
8	Listening to storytelling improves pupils' pronunciation of words	2.98	Agree
9	Storytelling encourages pupils' to express themselves better in English	2.69	Agree
10	Pupils feel more comfortable sharing their own stories after hearing others	2.95	Agree
11	Storytelling improves pupils' ability to hold conversations with peers	3.34	Agree
12	Storytelling activities improves pupils' ability to explain ideas clearly	2.48	Disagree
	Cluster Mean	**2.94**	**Agree**

Analysis Table 2 showed that items 7-11 have mean scores of above the cutoff point of 2.50, with an overall cluster mean of 2.94. This shows that the respondents agreed that item 7-11 are the impact of storytelling on speaking skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. However, the respondents disagreed that item 12 with mean score of 2.48 is an impact of storytelling on the speaking skills of primary school pupils.

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Table 3: Mean response on the impact of storytelling on the writing skills of primary school pupils

S/N	Impact of storytelling on pupils' speaking skills	X	Remark
13	Listening to stories makes it easier for pupils' to write their own stories	2.75	Agree
14	Storytelling improves pupils' ability to organize ideas in writing.	3.08	Agree
15	Storytelling helps pupils to make use of more interesting words when writing	3.01	Agree
16	Storytelling helps pupils come with better storylines when writing	2.59	Agree
17	Listening to stories improves pupils' ability to write longer pieces of texts	2.88	Agree
18	Storytelling helps pupils to describe characters and settings	2.34	Disagree
19	Storytelling improves pupils' grammar and sentence structure in writing	3.00	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**2.80**	**Agree**

The analysis in Table 3 shows that item 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19 has mean score of above 2.50 which is the cutoff point, with an overall cluster mean 2.80. This reveals that the respondents agreed that item 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19 are the impact of storytelling on the writing skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. However, the respondents disagreed that item 18 with mean score of 2.34 is an impact of storytelling on the writing skills of primary school pupils.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that storytelling enhance the reading interest, word recognition and the reading skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. The finding of this study is related to the findings of Eng and Chandrasekaran, (2014) which revealed that the pupils who participated in contextualized storytelling performed significantly better than those in the other two groups in reading comprehension. The finding of this study is also in consonance with Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, (2012) who stated that research shows that children who are frequently exposed to stories have a richer vocabulary, which is essential for reading comprehension.

The findings also revealed that storytelling positively impacts the speaking skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. The finding of this study is in harmony with the findings of Chikamadu, Chidi-Onwuta, and Iwe, (2022) which revealed that students in the experiment class were curious to discuss and write about their understanding of the story thereby increasing their oral communication skills than their counterparts. The findings of this study also agrees with Wright, (2017) who demonstrated that pupils who participated in storytelling activities showed marked improvement in their vocabulary usage during speaking exercises, illustrating the direct relationship between storytelling and enhanced linguistic repertoire.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that storytelling improves the writing skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. The

finding of this study is in harmony with Baker, McKeown, and Kucan, (2018) who found that children who actively participate in storytelling demonstrate better comprehension of narrative elements, allowing them to articulate their thoughts and feelings more clearly. The finding of this present study is also in alignment with Beck, McKeown, and Kucan, (2018) who states that research shows that listening to stories increases pupils' vocabulary, which is directly linked to improved writing quality.

Conclusion

This study concluded that the use of storytelling significantly impacts the reading skills, speaking skills and the writing skills of primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Education Authority. It is expected that the implementation of storytelling as an instructional strategy in primary schools will promote and improve pupils' acquisition of literacy skills, resulting to an enhanced academic performance and overall educational outcome.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made the following recommendations.

1. Educational authorities should encourage the use of storytelling in primary schools by providing professional development to teachers on the effective use of storytelling.
2. Government should make provision of storytelling resources such as literature materials, prints among others, to ensure the implementation of storytelling in primary schools.
3. Curriculum developers should modify the existing curriculum to accommodate the use of storytelling as an instructional strategy in primary schools.

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