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Effect of Literature in The School Library on The Social Development of Empathy and Friendship Skills of Children

Ngozi Ojeabulu Mrs
Federal University of Petroleum Resources,Effurun,Delta State,Nigeria, ojeabulu.ngozi@fupre.edu.ng

EFFECT OF LITERATURE IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY ON THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF EMPATHY AND FRIENDSHIP SKILLS OF CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

The school library is a library situated in a nursery school, primary school, secondary school or Teacher Training College. The aim of setting up school libraries is to meet the academic and social needs of the school community, through the provision of a wide range of information resources. According to Colorado Department of Education(2014),a school library is a dedicated facility located in and administered by the school that provides at least the following – an organized, circulating collection of printed and /or audiovisual and/or computer based resources, or a combination thereof; paid staff, an established schedule during which services of the staff are available to students and faculty; instruction on using library materials to support classroom standards and improve student research and literacy skills. The school library is central to learning and plays a key role as a place for encouraging innovation, curiosity and problem solving, Nayak & Bankapur (2016). Against this backdrop, the school library as a transformational ground, plays a crucial role in the social development of children at the nursery and primary levels. Early introduction of children to school library affords them the opportunity to be exposed to books and activities that will make lasting impression on their social lives. According to Nayak & Bankapur (2016), two-decade long research studies have shown that early childhood surrounded by books and educational toys will leave positive fingerprints on a person's brain well into their late teens.

The school library plays a crucial role in the social development of children because it affords them the opportunity of getting exposed to the world of literature. It is a veritable means of attracting and sustaining children's interest in reading. The pivotal role of the school library in the social development of children should be paramount when setting up a school library. The library environment should be conducive and attractive so as to encourage its use by children. In the same vein, Akanwa (2013) posits that a well-ventilated library with appropriate furniture encourages children to read. In addition, the school library should stock relevant and appropriate literature books that will impact the social development of children. In consonance, Ker (2015) opines that books intended for children must teach them honesty and should be visionary. They should be books that make them grow into responsible adults. It can be inferred therefore, from the above positions that the school library has a very important role to play in the social development of empathy and friendship skills in children.

Development refers to the changes that occur in the life of a human being at different stages of life. Development in most children is progressive and occurs physically, mentally and socially. Against this backdrop, Kid Sense (2020) posits that child development refers to the sequence of physical, language, thought and emotional changes that occur in a child from birth

to the beginning of adulthood. During this process, a child progresses from dependency on their parents /guardians to increasing independence.

As children develop, they acquire social skills among which are empathy and friendship skills. Empathy is a social skill that enables one to understand the feelings and experiences of another person, to see and experience things from another person's standpoint. Passer & Smith (2001) opined that although we can never directly experience another person's feelings, we can often infer that someone is angry, sad, fearful or happy on the basis of his or her emotional displays, or expressive behaviours. The authors further asserted that sometimes too, others' emotional displays can evoke similar emotional responses in us, a process known as empathy. On the other hand, friendship can be defined as a pleasant and rewarding relationship between two or more persons. Friends are people who know and like each other, and all human beings need to share the common bond of friendship with others (Yu yeong, Ostrosky & Fowler,2011). Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner (2002) observed that establishing friendships is an important development goal of early childhood. These skills of empathy and friendship can be acquired by children as they read literature books whose themes portray those skills as worthy.

Literature can be described as creative work usually characterized by excellence of style and expression and by themes of general interest. It can come in form of prose, drama, essays, poetry, folklore etc. Exposing children to literature early is of great importance because in their growing years they are malleable and easily impacted. Cuppy (2020) corroborated this in her assertion that eighty percent of a child's brain development happens in the first three years of his or her life. According to her, children are like sponge: they soak up information during this time. Reading is critical during these early years, as children will quickly begin to learn new words and new concepts that will help carry them through the rest of their lives, and even set them ahead of the learning curve. Literature books are written for the purpose of learning and entertainment. They are usually didactic in context and at the same time plotted in such a way that they appeal to the readers and also sustain their interest. To buttress this, Nina(2016) avers that it takes years to acquire wisdom that a single book of literary merit instills in a reader. Literature, therefore can lay a strong foundation upon which a child's personality is built. Literature is written for both children and adults but the emphasis of this study is on children's literature.

Children's literature describes the type of literature that is written specifically for children and it has special appeal to them. Akanwa (2013) lends credence to this view in her assertion that children's literature is any literature enjoyed by children. Children's literature is a very valuable resource which plays a pivotal role in the social development of children as it imbues them with social skills over time of frequent contact. Cuppy (2020) succinctly avers that children observe through stories how they should respond to different people and situations. The author further asserts that children whose parents read to develop emotional and social skills quickly, and learn to effectively employ them in daily lives. Similarly, Stephenson (2017) opines that children's literature is an important way of helping kids become well-rounded

individuals with empathy, healthy imaginations and communication skills and also gives kids a way to explore parts of the world they cannot or haven't yet directly experienced. In view of the above, the school library is supposed to be a major deport for children's literature in order to fulfill the mission of impacting their social development through the various themes portrayed in children's literature.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Children literature, by their design portray various themes which are intended to influence the character of children positively. They are of great relevance in the social development of children because the moral values that are depicted in the themes add to their life experience which help to mold their characters. As a result, it is imperative that children are exposed to literature early in life. The school libraries should therefore consider it a priority to stock literature books in large quantity. However, in Nigeria, the school library which is supposed to lay the foundation for good reading and library habit for children does not exist in most nursery, primary and secondary schools. In the few cases where they exist, they do not give literature books the requisite attention when acquiring books. Consequently, most children are denied the opportunity of benefitting from the rich world of literature at the developmental stage of their lives. This study is therefore aimed at finding out some of the benefits of exposing children to literature at the developmental stage of their lives.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to

1.Ascertain the effect of literature in the school library on the development of empathy skill in children.

2.To determine the effect of literature in the school library on the development of friendship skill in children.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions were asked:

1.What is the effect of children's literature on the development of empathy skill in children as measured by the mean scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test.

2.What is the effect of children's literature on the development of friendship skill in children as measured by mean scores of the participants in the school and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test.

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses guided the study:

HO$_1$:   There is no significant difference in the effect of literature on the   development of empathy skill in children at pre-test and post-test

HO$_2$:   There is no significant difference in the effect of literature on the   development of friendship skill in children at pre-test and post-test

LITERATURE REVIEW

The school library is a library that is situated in the nursery, primary, post-primary or teacher training colleges. Edom (2012) opines that school libraries are those libraries established in pre-primary, primary, post-primary, teacher training colleges (TTC$_S$) and schools of nursing, midwifery and health technology. The school library is also called instructional materials center, learning resources center, media center, media resources center, school media center, multimedia center and audiovisual center (Anyanwu,2016). In spite of the variation in name, the school library exists to provide information in various media for the education and development of children. A school library is an integral component of the school system. It is the nerve center of academic learning and a wonderful place to spend leisure time as well (Sanskritschools,2017). Against this backdrop, Kristoff (2019) averred that the library exemplifies equitable access to knowledge and opportunity, and all learners – no matter their age, neighbourhood, or ability deserve this experience. The school library is set up to expose pupils and students to a world of knowledge early in life so that they will imbibe a reading habit that will transform them into lifelong learners. Ultimately the school library impacts the character of children in all aspects of their development. In the view of Roy (2018), your school library encourages curiosity, innovation and problem solving. It is integral to the cultural and social life of the school. The school library is a central point for all kinds of reading, cultural activities, access to information, knowledge building, deep thinking and lively discussion.

Development, which is a process by which an individual advances, expands or evolves takes place in children from the time they are born and continues until they attain full growth, mentally, physically and socially. In the view of Raisingchildren (2020), development means changes in your child's physical growth. It is also the changes in your child's social, emotional, behaviour, thinking and communication skills. All of these areas of development are linked and each depends on and influences the others.

Social development refers to the process in which a child develops language and thinking skills and understanding the rules necessary for social interaction. Kids Matter (2017) averred that social development involves learning the values, knowledge and skills that enable children to relate to others effectively and to contribute in positive ways to family, school, and the community. Literature gives children one vehicle to develop social skills. To buttress this, Grayson (2017) opined that children can learn language by reading and listening to stories, and they also can develop socially by reading books that explore social and cultural topics.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND EMPATHY

Empathy is a social skill that enables one to identify the thoughts, feelings or state of another person. It is a capacity to put oneself in another person's position so as to understand how the person feels or views things. Djikic and Oatley (2014) averred that empathy is tied into our basic ways of relating to others, including our intimate partners. It is also related to openness to experience, in that the more open you are to your experience, the better you are at being able to feel and imagine the experiential world of others. According to Mcsheehy (2017), novels and short stories are filled with emotions. The characters in them experience the ups and down of the human condition, often in dramatic fashion. As we read along, we feel things too about the characters and ourselves. For those reasons, literature offers a gateway to Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) in your classroom. In a related view, Pinker (2016) noted that we have long known about the collateral benefits of habitual reading – a richer vocabulary, for example but that's only part of the picture. Mounting evidence over the past decade suggests that the mental calisthenics required to live inside a fictional character's skin foster empathy for the people you meet day-to-day. Djikdic & Oatley (2014) also noted that one personality quality enhanced by literature is empathy, the ability to understand someone else's point of view, that all other things being equal people who read more fiction are also better at reading other people's emotions. It is not that empathic people read more, but that reading promotes empathy. According Palmer (2013), new research suggested that literary fiction enhances a person's ability to read to read another person's emotions – and, by extension, their ability to navigate complex social relationships. Ina a related study, Briggs(2015) noted that fiction improved a reader's capacity to understand what others are thinking and feeling, while Kotovych et al. as cited in Briggs(2015) posited that reading is like a conversation between narrator and reader: when we try to understand a character in a book, we make similar inferences about what the other is thinking and feeling as in conversation, and making such inferences would increase our understanding of and identification with the character.

Bal & Veltkamp (2013) observed that when people read fiction, they are emotionally transported into the story, they become more empathic. In the same vein, Stanfield & Bunce (2014) posited that both lifetime experience of reading fiction and the extent to which a reader feels "transported" by the narrative are associated with empathy. According to Weintraub (2016), research into the psychological impact of literature suggests that when we read stories in which characters are rich and well developed, we actually slip into those characters ourselves. By taking on these personalities, we learn what it's like to be someone else, and improve our own social skills.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND FRIENDSHIP SKILL

A friend is someone that one knows and likes outside the family circle, and friendship is a relationship between friends. Every human being is born with an intrinsic desire to bond with others through friendship. Making friends comes naturally to some persons whereas it doesn't come so easy to some. Establishing friendship is an important developmental goal of early childhood (Buysse, Goldman and Skinner,2002). In a related view, (Brookes 2018) stated that friendship and social play skills are key capabilities for young kids to develop in early years of school – they form the foundation of long-term successes in school and in the community. In sperate but related studies, Dunn (2004) and Ladd (2009), posited that research supported the notion that children benefit in many ways from positive peer interactions. Participation in school library activities offers children great opportunity for positive peer interaction. In early childhood programmes, friendships foster a sense of connection and security and build self-esteem and self-confidence, helping young children adapt more readily to the pre-school setting. Friendships provide valuable opportunities for children to learn and develop.

Using children's literature for teaching friendship skills can be invaluable to students and to teachers. The skills become meaningful to students through the stories,so that they are able to use the skills outside of classroom activities (DeGeorge, 1998). Friendship is a huge theme in children's literature, as many books teach moral lessons on how to be a good friend and how not to be a bad friend. They teach the importance of honesty, trust, mutuality and compassion. Friendship themed books are perfect for young children because once they start school, they will need to learn how to make friends and maintain a good relationship with their peers. Studies have shown that having friendship can help children feel more secure outside of their family by learning to trust their peers (Arv Children's Literature,2017).

Children's literature provides creative ways to teach children friendship skill. The stories provide a way for children to learn how to make friends by learning how to pay attention to their own actions and behaviours (DeGeorge, 1998). Friendship as a common theme in children's literature is a great way to teach kids how to make friends and what it means to be one. Characters in books typically model good social skills, but book characters displaying poor social habits also teach children what actions society labels as "inappropriate". Books such as "A Splendid Friend Indeed" by Suzan Bloom and "Guess How Much I Love You" By Sam Macbratney show children how to make friends with others and how to behave as a good

friend. Making friends requires self-regulation and understanding social perceptions. Books can teach children how to do both.

Storytelling, which constitutes part of school library activities, is also an effective medium for transmitting friendship skill to children. Making friends is viewed as a natural process in every culture, and through folktales children are taught valuable skills that will enable them make friends and keep them. Against this backdrop, Akanwa (2014) posited that many folktales for children deal with various emotions related to friendship. Best friends may have strong attachment with each other, as shown in Mircaine Cohen's "Best Friends" and Russel Hoban's "Best Friends for Francis". True friendship is always revered, as in the case of two friends, "Okon and Ottong" by Miriam Edet. In the book, Okon goes into the forest in search of a magic bird and was lost. His friend Otong follows him into the forest, and uses the experience he gathered from his father, who is a hunter to rescue his friend. Both of them returned to the village amidst celebrations and jubilation. Heule (2006) observed that the "Faithful Friend" by Robert D. San Souci is a heart-warming folktale for younger readers that demonstrate how important it is to be loyal to those you love. With its simplistic nature in plot, characterization, setting, theme, and overall style, complemented by its interestingly complex illustrations, this is a folktale that is sure to be memorable to children.

METHODOLOGY

The quasi-experimental research design was adopted for the study. The experiment was in two phases, pre-test and pro-test non equivalent control group design. The population of the study comprised of twenty-five thousand and ninety-eight (25,098) pupils from the two hundred and sixty-six (266) private primary schools in Udu Local Government Area of Delta State. The sample consisted of 63 male and female primary four pupils in DSC Model Primary Schools I and III, Orhuwhorun in Udu Local Government Area of Delta State. Purposive and cluster sampling techniques were used to sample 32 pupils in the experimental group I and 31 in the experimental group II (the control group). In order to get the treatment and control groups, two intact classes were randomly selected from the two schools. One of the intact classes, the experimental group were guided in their use of library while the control group were left in their normal library situation. Selected literature books in the library were administered on the pupils for a period of 6(six) weeks. The remaining 2(two) weeks were used for story-telling, making it 8 (eight) weeks of experiment. The experimental class, primary 4a in DSC Model Primary School I, has one period each week for the use of library and the experiment was carried out during the library period. The researcher in collaboration with the librarian distributed the literature books to the pupils. They would read till the end of the period. Those who were able to finish theirs would exchange while those who were not able to finish theirs would take their books home to continue reading. During the next period, the librarian would discuss the books with the pupils, highlight lessons learnt from the stories and apply them to real life situations.

Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used in testing the null hypotheses whereby the pre-test scores on the students' achievement served as covariates to the post-test scores. ANCOVA was used as statistical tool to serve as a technique for controlling extraneous variables and experimental contamination of subjects. The hypothesis decision rule was based on the calculated f-cal against the tabulated f-tab.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the effect of children's literature on children's empathy skills as measured by the mean scores of the participants in the control and experimental groups at pre-test and pro-test?

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference in the effect literature has on children's empathy skill at pre-test and post-test.

It is indicated in Table 1 that at pre-test, the mean scores of the two groups (experimental and Control) were as low as 10.47 and 10.52 respectively, but at post-test, the mean scores of Experimental group is increased to 14.53 while that of control was still minimal at 10.00. The increase in the mean score of the experimental group implies that exposure to literature is effective in the improvement of children's ability to empathize with others in primary schools. It is further indicated in the table that the f-calculated is 59.191 and its significance value is .000. This significance value is less than 0.05 level of significance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and concluding that there is significant difference in the effect of literature on children's ability to empathize with others as measured by the mean scores of the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference in the effect of literature on children's friendship skill at pre-test and post-test.

It is indicated in Table 2 that at pre-test, the mean scores of the two groups (Experimental and Control) were as low as 10.81 and 11.19 respectively, but at post-test, the mean scores of Experimental group increased to 14.75 while that of control was still minimal at 10.39. The increase in the mean score of the experimental group implies that exposure to literature is effective in the improvement of children's friendship skill in primary schools. It is further indicated in the table that the f-calculated is 57.1241 and its significance value is .000. This significance value is less than 0.05 level of significance leading to the rejection of the null hypotheses and concluding that there is significant difference in the effect of literature on the

children's friendship skill as measured by the mean scores of the control and experimental groups at pre-test and post-test.

Table 1:

Sample Size(n), $\mathrm{Mean}\ (\overline{X})$, Standard Deviation(S), and ANCOVA F-test statistics

Test: Literature		Pre-test			Post-test	
Group	N	x	S		x	S
Experimental	32	10.47	1.65		14.53	3.10
Control	31	10.52	1.29		10.00	1.00

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Post Test

Source	Type III Sum Of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Controlled Model	324.201[a]	2	162.100	29.737	.000
Intercept	205.308	1	205.308	37.663	.000
Pre-Test	.900	1	.900	.165	.686
Treatments	322.661	1	322.661	59.191	.000
Error	327.069	60	5.451		
Total	10185.000	63			
Corrected Total	651.270	62			

a-R Squared = .498(Adjusted R Squared=.481)

FINDINGS

The following findings were made from this study:

1. When children were exposed to literature there was improvement in their empathy skill hence the effectiveness of literature proved significant when tested.
2. 2. Exposing children to literature is effective in the improvement of their friendship skills and when tested, the effectiveness proved significant.

DISCUSSION

EFFECT OF LITERATURE ON CHILDREN'S ABILITY TO EMPATHIZE WITH OTHERS

The study revealed that exposure to literature is effective in the improvement of children's ability to empathize with others and when tested the effectiveness proved

significant. The implication is that the exposure of children to literature in the school library enhances children's ability to empathize with others. Novels and short stories are filled with emotional stories. The characters in them experience the ups and down of human condition, often in dramatic fashion, and as one reads along, he is transported into the world of the characters and naturally feels what the characters are feeling. For those reasons, literature offers a gateway to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in the classroom. In agreement with this finding, Bal and Veltkamp(2013) in their study showed that the effect of fictional experience is different from the control condition in which non-fictional texts were used, thereby influencing empathy skill over time. In consonance with this assertion, Djikdic and Oatley (2014) stated that one personality quality enhanced by literature is empathy. Hence, literature improves a reader's capacity to understand what others are thinking and feeling.

EFFECT OF LITERATURE ON CHILDREN'S FRIENDSHIP SKILL

The study also revealed that frequent contact with literature is effective in the improvement of children's friendship skill and when tested, the effectiveness proved significant. This implies that literature in the school library significantly affects children's friendship skill, thereby enhancing friendship among children. Establishing friendship is an important developmental goal of early childhood, hence making friends is important to children, starting at a very young age. It is not only important for social emotional adaptation but also for children's academic achievements. Using children's literature has many benefits for teaching friendship skills to children. In line with the above finding, DeGeorge (1998), indicated that as a tool for teaching, stories provide easy and creative ways to a topic of friends, socializing, conversation and playing together. Akanwa (2014) also maintained that many folktales for children deal with various emotions related to friendship. Best friends may have strong attachment with each other, as shown in Mircain Cohen's "Best Friends" and Russel Hoban's "Best Friends for Francis". With the above finding, it is clear that children's literature provides creative ways to teach children friendship skill. These stories provide ways for children to learn how to make friends by learning to pay attention to their own actions and behaviours.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher has the following recommendations;

1. Schools' Management and Librarians should pay adequate attention to literature books when stocking the library. Literature books with empathy and friendship as themes will enhance those skills in the children as they develop.
2. Storytelling should be an integral part of school library services as folktales and children's story books are didactic and full of lessons that can impact the social development of children greatly.

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