

Effect Of Outdoor Storytelling On Social Skills Acquisition Among Pupils With Learning Disabilities In Ogbomoso, Oyo State

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Abstract: This study examined the effect of outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disabilities in Ogbomoso, Oyo State. The study adopted a non-randomized pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design. A sample of 20 pupils with learning disabilities was drawn from primary schools in Ogbomoso through a multi-stage sampling procedure combining purposive and random sampling techniques, with 10 pupils assigned to the outdoor storytelling group and 10 to the control group. The Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scale Student Form was used to screen participants, while the researcher-constructed Social Skills Acquisition Scale (SSAS) served as the pretest and posttest instrument. Data were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a significant main effect of outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disabilities, with pupils exposed to the strategy recording a higher adjusted posttest mean than those in the control group. The interaction effect of outdoor storytelling and gender was not significant, indicating that the strategy benefited male and female pupils comparably. The study concludes that outdoor storytelling is an effective, gender-equitable strategy for enhancing social skills among pupils with learning disabilities and recommends its integration into instructional practice for learners with special needs.

Keywords: Outdoor storytelling, social skills acquisition, learning disabilities, pupils, gender

Introduction

Education is a fundamental right that should be accessible to all learners regardless of their abilities or disabilities, yet pupils with learning disabilities frequently experience difficulties that extend beyond academic performance into the domain of social participation. Pupils with learning disabilities are learners who face persistent difficulties in acquiring academic skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics despite adequate intellectual potential and instructional opportunity; these difficulties often coexist with challenges in understanding social cues, expressing themselves clearly, and interacting appropriately with peers (Adesokan, 2022; Hallahan et al., 2019).

Social skills, comprising communication, cooperation, turn-taking, empathy, and conflict resolution, are essential for pupils with learning disabilities because they influence peer relationships, classroom participation, and emotional well-being. Deficits in these skills can lead to social withdrawal, peer rejection, and reduced engagement in collaborative learning, which in turn limit both academic and social development (Gresham & Elliott, 2020; Daniel, 2023). Conventional classroom instruction, which tends to emphasise individual performance and teacher-led delivery, often provides pupils with learning disabilities limited opportunity to practise these skills in authentic, low-pressure contexts.

Outdoor storytelling has emerged as a promising experiential strategy for addressing this gap. It refers to the deliberate use of narrative-based activities conducted in open or natural settings, in which a storyteller and listeners engage in interactive recounting, dramatization, or co-construction of stories to promote language, imagination, and social interaction (Spencer et al., 2022; Stead, 2023). By requiring pupils to listen attentively, interpret narratives, express their thoughts, and respond to peers' ideas, storytelling develops communication and collaborative skills in a setting that reduces the performance pressure typical of conventional classrooms. Studies have associated outdoor storytelling with improved verbal communication, increased collaboration, and greater confidence in social interaction among learners with learning disabilities (Spencer et al., 2022; Fan et al., 2023).

Gender has also been identified as a factor relevant to how pupils engage with instructional strategies of this kind. Existing research suggests that boys and girls with learning disabilities may exhibit distinct patterns of social engagement, particularly in activities involving verbal interaction and collaborative narrative (Yang et al., 2024; Daniel, 2023). Examining whether outdoor storytelling benefits both genders equally is therefore necessary for designing interventions that are genuinely inclusive.

Despite its promise, the effectiveness of outdoor storytelling as a strategy for social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disabilities in the Nigerian context, and the extent to which gender moderates this effectiveness, remains underexplored. This study therefore investigated the effect of outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disabilities in Ogbomoso, Oyo State.

Statement of the Problem

Pupils with learning disabilities frequently experience deficits in social skills that limit their participation in classroom and peer activities, yet conventional instruction rarely provides structured opportunities for these pupils to practise communication and cooperation in authentic contexts. While outdoor storytelling has been proposed as an experiential strategy capable of addressing this gap, empirical evidence on its effectiveness among pupils with learning disabilities in Nigeria, and on whether its benefits are consistent across gender, remains limited. This gap in the literature constitutes the problem this study sought to address.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disabilities in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, and to determine whether gender moderates this effect.

Research Hypotheses

The study tested the following null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance:

H01: There is no significant main effect of outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disabilities in Ogbomoso, Oyo State.

H02: There is no significant interaction effect of outdoor storytelling and gender on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disabilities in Ogbomoso, Oyo State.

Methodology

This study adopted a non-randomized pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design, chosen because random assignment of pupils was not feasible within the school setting. One experimental group received the outdoor storytelling intervention while a control group continued with conventional classroom-based instruction on the same content; both groups completed identical pretest and posttest measures.

The target population comprised pupils with learning disabilities drawn from public primary schools in Ogbomoso, Oyo State. Participants were selected through a four-stage sampling procedure. Two Local Government Areas, Ogbomoso North and Ogbomoso South, were purposively selected for their geographic contiguity and administrative distinctness. Within each LGA, two public primary schools were then selected at random by balloting, yielding four schools in total. School records in each of the four schools were reviewed to identify pupils with a documented history of academic difficulty, learning-support referral, or teacher-noted behavioural and learning challenges; this records-based screening narrowed the candidate pool ahead of clinical assessment. Candidates identified at this stage were administered the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Rating Scale Student Form (Gresham & Elliott, 2008), adapted in language and phrasing to suit the comprehension level and cultural context of Nigerian primary school pupils and reviewed by two special education experts for construct fidelity. Pupils who scored below the normative benchmark on the SSIS and met the operational criteria for learning disabilities were confirmed as participants. A final sample of 20 pupils was drawn in this way, with 10 assigned to the outdoor storytelling group and 10 to the control group.

Three instruments supported data collection. The adapted SSIS Rating Scale Student Form was used solely for screening and sample selection. The Social Skills Acquisition Scale (SSAS), constructed by the researcher, served as the pretest and posttest instrument; it comprises a demographic section and a 20-item section spanning five domains of social skills — communication, cooperation, emotional regulation, empathy, and peer interaction — and was validated by four lecturers across the Faculty of Education and the Department of Special Education. Its reliability, established via Cronbach's Alpha through a two-week test-retest administration to pupils outside the sampled schools, was 0.79, indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency for research use. The Instructional Guide for Outdoor Storytelling Strategy (IGOSS), also researcher-constructed, guided the delivery of the intervention across six stages — introduction, story presentation, role play/dramatization, clarification, evaluation, and summary/assignment — over four lessons; the guide was validated by two lecturers in the Faculty of Education and one lecturer in the Department of Special Education.

Data collection spanned six weeks. Screening using school records and the adapted SSIS occurred in Week 1. Research assistants, comprising primary-school class teachers, were trained in Week 2, during which the SSAS pretest was also administered. Weeks 3 to 5 were devoted to intervention delivery, with the control group receiving conventional instruction on equivalent content. The SSAS posttest was administered to both groups in Week 6. Ethical clearance was obtained through a letter of introduction from the Department of Special Education, and pupils were briefed on the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw, and the confidentiality of their responses.

Data were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at the 0.05 level of significance, with pretest scores entered as a covariate to control for pre-existing group differences while comparing adjusted posttest means.

Results

Demographic profile of the respondents was presented using frequency count and percentage. Demographic data was analysed using percentage while the formulated research hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Groups

Groups	No of pupils	Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Experimental 1	10	Male	5	16.67
		Female	5	16.67
Experimental 2	10	Male	3	10.0
		Female	7	23.33
Control	10	Male	6	20.0
		Female	4	13.33
Total	30		30	100.00

Table 1 shows the demographic information of the group (outdoor). There were ten (10) pupils in experimental group 1 in which 5 were male (16.67%) and 5 were female (16.67%), experimental group 2 had ten (10) pupils in which 3 were male (10.0%), and 7 were female (23.33%) while the control group had ten (10) pupils in which 6 were male (20.0%) and 4 were female (13.33%). There were Thirty (30) pupils altogether

Hypothesis one: There is no significant main effect of outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability in Ogbomoso Oyo State.

Table 2: Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of the main effect of outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability in Ogbomoso Oyo State

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	53.783 ^a	4	13.446	7.161	.000	.450
Intercept	322.116	1	322.116	171.555	.000	.831
Pretest	9.571	1	9.571	5.097	.030	.127
Outdoor storytelling	47.341	1	47.341	25.213	.000	.419
Gender	.619	1	.619	.329	.570	.009
Outdoor storytelling* gender	.008	1	.008	.004	.947	.000
Error	65.717	35	1.878			
Total	11342.000	30				
Corrected Total	119.500	39				

a. R Squared = .450 (Adjusted R Squared = .387)

Table 2 shows the effect of outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability. There was a significant main effect of treatments (outdoor storytelling) on social skills of pupils with hearing impairment ($F_{(28)} = 25.213$; $P < 0.05$). Therefore, hypothesis that state that there is no significant main effect of outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability was rejected in the light of the result since the significant value is less than 0.05. This implies that there was a significant main effect in outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability.

Table 2 revealed the sources of the difference in pupils' social skills acquisition in outdoor storytelling

Table 3: Summary of estimated marginal means with the Groups

Outdoor Storytelling	Mean	Std. Error
TREATMENT	17.80	.951
CONTROL	15.70	1.750

Table 3 revealed that the significant main effect exposed by table 3 is as a result of the significant difference among:

- i. Outdoor Storytelling
- ii. Conventional method

This implies that those exposed to outdoor storytelling (Mean = 17.80) performed significantly better than those exposed to conventional method (Mean = 15.70).

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant interaction effect of Outdoor storytelling and gender on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability.

Table 4: Summary of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) of the main effect of Outdoor storytelling and gender on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	53.783 ^a	4	13.446	7.161	.000	.450
Intercept	322.116	1	322.116	171.555	.000	.831
Pretest	9.571	1	9.571	5.097	.030	.127
Outdoor storytelling	47.341	1	47.341	25.213	.000	.419
Gender	.619	1	.619	.329	.570	.009
Outdoor storytelling* gender	.008	1	.008	.004	.947	.000
Error	65.717	35	1.878			
Total	11342.000	30				
Corrected Total	119.500	39				

a. R Squared = .450 (Adjusted R Squared = .387)

Table 4: reveals effect of outdoor storytelling and gender on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability ($F_{(28)} = 0.004$; $P > 0.05$). The hypothesis was therefore not rejected in the light of the result since the significant value (0.947) is greater than 0.05. This implies that there was no significant effect of outdoor storytelling and gender on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability.

Summary of Findings

1. There was a significant main effect in outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability ($F_{(28)} = 25.213$; $P < 0.05$).
2. There was no significant effect of outdoor storytelling and gender on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability ($F_{(28)} = 0.004$; $P > 0.05$).

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of the study revealed that there was a significant main effect in outdoor storytelling on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability in Ogbomoso, Oyo State ($F_{(28)} = 25.213$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that outdoor storytelling is an effective approach in improving social skills for pupils with learning disability. The reason for this is that Outdoor storytelling improved social skills acquisition of pupils with learning disabilities because it creates an engaging, interactive environment for pupils with learning disabilities where pupils practice communication in a low-pressure setting and understand social cues and roles better. This is line with the findings of Spencer et al. (2022), who found that classroom-based oral storytelling significantly improved social communication, cooperation, and self-expression among pupils with learning disabilities, with pupils in the storytelling group outperforming those in the control condition on all measured social skills subscales. It is also in line with study conducted by Onuorah (2020), who revealed that storytelling significantly improved social skills acquisition among primary school children in Nigeria, demonstrating that storytelling provides structured social learning opportunities that pupils with learning disabilities can leverage to develop and consolidate key interpersonal competencies, a finding that aligns with the pattern of social skills improvement observed in the present study.

The second finding of the study revealed that there was no significant effect of outdoor storytelling and gender on social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disability in Ogbomoso, Oyo State ($F_{(28)} = 0.004$; $P > 0.05$). This implies that outdoor storytelling improves social skills acquisition of both male and female pupils with learning disabilities equally. This is because

outdoor storytelling gives room for both male and female pupils with learning disability participate in it. This is in line with the work conducted by Abdulrahman et al. (2022), who explored how storytelling interacts with gender in relation to the socio-emotional development of primary school pupils in Northern Nigeria and assessed whether there was any interaction effect based on gender. The findings revealed that there was no notable interaction between storytelling and gender, indicating that the effectiveness of storytelling as an instructional method was uniform for both male and female pupils.

Conclusion

Outdoor storytelling significantly enhanced social skills acquisition among pupils with learning disabilities in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, and did so equitably across gender. The strategy's structured, low-pressure format appears well suited to helping pupils with learning disabilities practise communication, cooperation, and self-expression in authentic contexts.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Special education teachers should integrate outdoor storytelling into instructional programmes designed to build social skills among pupils with learning disabilities.
2. Curriculum planners should consider embedding structured storytelling activities, delivered in outdoor or open settings, within the primary school curriculum for learners with special needs.

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