

## EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF CIRCLE TIME ON SOCIAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT OF PUPILS IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE

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### Abstract

*The study sought to explore the impact of circle time on the social skill development of pupils in Nsukka local government area, Enugu state. It posed two research questions and adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was 376 primary school teachers within Nsukka Local Government Education Authority (NLGEA, 2022/2023). The study sample size was 100 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-structured questionnaire titled "Circle Time on the Social Skill Development of Pupils Questionnaire" (CTSSDPQ). The instrument was trial tested with 20 primary school teachers in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area of Enugu State. Data was analysed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the items. Results of the analysis yielded 0.76 and 0.83. The overall reliability coefficient of the instrument obtained was 0.82 using the Cronbach Alpha correlation coefficient. The data was further analyzed using mean and standard deviation to address the research questions and yielded insights into the impact of circle time on pupils' social skills, and the roles of teachers in the effectiveness of circle time. The findings among others show that circle time has positive impact on the social skill development of pupils and the roles of teacher in the effectiveness of circle time was encouraged. The recommendations of the study included that government should provide funds for teachers training and resources, develop policies and guidelines that promote the integration of circle time in primary schools among others.*

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**Keywords:** Exploring Impact, Circle Time, Social Skill Development, Pupils.

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### Introduction

Primary education is an important learning phase that lays the foundation for futuristic academic success. Pupils develop essential skills in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies at this stage of their life (Russell III & Waters, 2021). On the other hand, primary education goes beyond academic achievement that focuses on social-emotional growth, character development, and citizenship skills. This holistic approach to learning where pupils' social, emotional, and cognitive development are interconnected and equally important, is perfectly embodied in the circle time methodology. This collaborative and inclusive practice fosters a supportive learning environment which enhances teaching and learning (Ferreira et al., 2020). Circle time is bedrock in primary education that gives pupils an opportunity to share their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Sitting in a circle allows the pupils to engage in open discussion, build empathy, and develop essential social-emotional skills. This implementation can greatly affect the pupil's academic achievement, social skills, and emotional well-being. It is a resourceful approach that aligns with the goals of primary education which supports safety, and inclusivity. It supports the environment that encourages socialization, communication, emotional intelligence, cooperation, and problem-solving. This shared space among pupils encourages relationships, friendships, and ensures a sense of belonging, that aids in developing essential life skills beyond the classroom. (Middleton, 2020).

Moreover, when pupils sit in a circle, this inculcates a positive classroom culture and in turn will experience a sense of equality and belonging, which is an important tool for building self-esteem and a strong sense of community. This culture also facilitates children to internalize classroom rules and routines which provide them with a secure and predictable environment

that fosters learning and growth in their understanding (Parker & Bickmore, 2020). It starts with a regular pattern which begins with a welcoming song or greeting to set the tone for the session. This engages pupils in various activities that cater to their developmental needs and learning objectives. The activities may include singing which helps children to develop language skills, phonemic awareness, and a sense of rhythm. It also encourages active participation and boosts mood, reading stories aloud promotes listening skills, comprehension, and vocabulary development (Ryder, 2023). Through group discussions, storytelling, and role-playing activities, children learn to express their thoughts and feelings, listen to others, and find common ground in the classroom.

Children can also engage in retelling stories or creating their own narratives and understanding. In this case, children are stimulated to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences, enhancing their communication skills, self-expression, and active listening. Interactive games and fun activities can help children develop social skills, such as cooperation, taking turn, and problem-solving. It also promotes physical development and fine motor skills, and reinforces academic concepts, such as numbers, letters, shapes, and colours, in a fun and engaging manner (Rifiyanti & Hidayat, 2024). This approach supports children in their different areas of learning as it promotes an environment where subjects are interconnected, children develop a deeper understanding of the curriculum, and their thinking skills are promoted. The effectiveness of this approach is further enhanced by thoughtful consideration of circle time's duration and frequency.

The span and incidence rate the circle time can vary depending on the age and attention span of the children. In early childhood settings, circle time lasts 10 to 20 minutes, while in primary schools, it can be prolonged for 30 to 50 minutes. It occurs at the beginning of the day or after they've settled in, allowing children to transform into a learning mindset. Research suggests that optimal learning occurs when circle time sessions are short and regular, allowing children to participate fully without feeling overwhelmed and tired (Koczela & Carver, 2023). Circle time has several benefits in primary education that allows learning to take place. It creates a positive teaching and learning environment which boosts the pupils' personal skills, heighten their academic achievement, cultivates a sense of community and belonging, and supports pupils' overall growth and development (Parker & Bickmore, 2020). When this is done, teachers can create a nurturing environment that supports the whole child and fosters academic performance, emotional well-being, and social skills.

Circle time in primary education is a great strategy for developing social skills in pupils, as it brings them together in a circle to create a safe space for interaction, sharing of ideas, and relationship building. This shared experience fosters essential social skills like communication, active listening, empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution. (Dyson et al., 2021). Social skills refer to the ability that enable children to interact and communicate effectively with others. These skills cover both verbal and non-verbal communication, including the ability to understand social cues, express themselves clearly, and engage in meaningful discussions. It is crucial for building relationships, fostering cooperation, and navigating various social contexts. Additionally, social skills act as a tool that facilitates interaction and communication among children, where social rules and relations are created, communicated, and modified. The development of social skills in primary education is vital for the building blocks for forming and maintaining relationships (Kingery et al., 2020). It was observed that children who possess strong social skills are better equipped to make friends, collaborate with peers, and engage in positive interactions, which are essential for their emotional well-being (Sørli et al., 2021). With the help of circle time, children develop social skills that can effectively help them communicate with their teachers and peers. This increases their likelihood of actively participating in class discussions, seeking help, and collaborating on group projects. These engagements can lead to improved academic performance, and emotional intelligence which will equip them to understand and manage their emotions such as empathy and self-regulation which are crucial for navigating social situations and responding

appropriately to various contexts (Kingery et al., 2020). Furthermore, the authors stated that children can handle conflicts constructively by learning to take turns, conflict resolution, reducing bullying, and creating a more harmonious classroom environment. All these features cannot be overemphasized, as they lay the framework for healthy relationships, academic success, and emotional regulation.

Despite all the benefits of circle time, it has been observed in Nsukka Local Government Areas, that many pupils struggled with social skills development seen in their poor communication skills, inadequate empathy, and ineffective conflict resolution strategies that led to conflicts, social exclusion, and emotional distress. However, the ineffective incorporation of circle time in primary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area can be attributed to teachers' lack of training, inadequate resources, and insufficient monitoring and evaluation. To address this gap, the researcher sought to explore the impact of circle time on the social skill development of pupils in Nsukka local government area, Enugu state.

### **Statement of Problem**

In an educational setting, pupils possess excellent social skills which enable them to form meaningful relationships, communicate effectively, and succeed academically. Having this helps pupil to demonstrate empathy, cooperation, and conflict-resolution skills, creating a harmonious and inclusive learning environment. This is achieved by using evidence-based strategies to support pupils' social skills development in a culture of respect, understanding, and mutual support. However, it often falls short in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria, where pupils struggle with poor social skills development. They exhibit poor communication skills, inadequate empathy, and ineffective conflict resolution strategies, leading to conflicts, social exclusion, and emotional distress. Additionally, the absence of circle time in the school timetable, coupled with inadequate teacher training, and insufficient resources to support social skills development, have led to an overemphasis on academic achievement at the expense of pupils' social-emotional growth.

To address these issues, circle time offers a promising solution that involves a pedagogical approach. This involves gathering pupils in a circle to discuss topics, share experiences, and engage in activities that enhance social skills development among pupils. Research evidence has shown that incorporating circle time into their school timetables can create a safe, supportive environment where pupils can develop essential social skills. However, in Nsukka local government area, Enugu state circle time sessions, are lagging because of poor communication, inadequate empathy, low cooperation, and poor conflict resolution skills, leading to poor relationships, poor academic performance, and the emotional well-being of pupils. Hence, the study sought to explore the impact of Circle Time on the social skill development of pupils in Nsukka Local Government area, Enugu state.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of circle time on the social skill development of pupils in Nsukka Local Government area, Enugu state. Specifically, the study sought to determine the:

1. impact of circle time on social skills development in pupils
2. the roles of teacher in the effectiveness of circle time

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the impact of circle time on social skills development in pupils?
2. What are the roles of teacher in the effectiveness of circle time?

### **Methods**

A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. This study was carried out in Nsukka Local Government Education Authority of Enugu State. The population of the study comprises 37 primary schools in Nsukka Local Government Area, with a total population of 376 qualified primary school teachers (male 20 and female 356) according to

Nsukka Local Government Education Authority (NLGEA, 2022/2023). The sample size of the study was 100 respondents. This was done using a simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-structured questionnaire titled 'Circle Time on the Social Skill Development of Pupils Questionnaire (CTSSDPQ)'. The questionnaire has two sections A and B. Section A contains demographic information of the respondent while section B contains two clusters that elicited information on the two research questions. The instrument that was used for the collection of data for this study was face-validated by three experts, one from the Measurement and Evaluation Unit in Science Education and two from the Department of Early Childhood and Primary Education, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The instrument was trial tested with 20 primary school teachers in Igbo-Eze South Local Government Area of Enugu State. Data was analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the items. Results of the analysis yielded 0.76, and 0.83. The overall reliability coefficient of the instrument obtained was 0.82 using the Cronbach Alpha correlation coefficient. The instrument was administered directly to teachers by the researcher with the help of three research assistants to determine the teachers' responses. Mean and standard deviation were used in the analysis of the collected data for answering the research questions. A mean score of 2.50 and above indicated agreement with the item question. The null hypothesis was analyzed using t-test statistics. To decide on the null hypothesis of no significant difference was accepted for any item its value is greater than 0.05 but will be rejected if the value is less than 0.05.

**Research Question One:** What is the impact of Circle Time on social skills development in pupils?

S/N	Items Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Pupils feel comfortable sharing their thoughts during Circle Time.	2.80	0.85	Accept
2.	Pupils listen to their classmates when they speak	2.50	0.98	Accept
3.	Pupils wait for their turn to speak during discussion.	3.64	0.60	Accept
4.	Pupils can express their opinions clearly during circle time.	3.52	0.67	Accept
5.	Pupils feel respected by their classmates when they share	3.46	0.78	Accept
6.	Pupils understand the importance of taking turns	3.02	0.79	Accept
7.	Pupils can ask questions to clarify what others say	3.14	0.67	Accept
8.	Pupils help others feel included during discussions	2.96	0.75	Accept
9.	Pupils can disagree with someone respectfully during circle time.	2.60	0.65	Accept
10.	Pupils feel more confident talking in front of the class after participating in circle time.	3.01	0.75	Accept
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.71</b>	<b>0.74</b>	

Table one above indicates the impact of circle time on social skills development in pupils. This indicates that above reveals that the mean scores of the respondents range from 2.61 to 3.64. This indicates that the mean scores are above the cut-off point of 2.50. The grand mean of this table is 2.71. Thus, the teachers agreed that the impact of circle time on social skills development in pupils includes, feeling comfortable sharing their thoughts during circle time; listening to their classmates when they speak during circle time; waiting for their turn to speak during discussions; expressing their opinions clearly during circle time; feeling respected by their classmates when they share; understanding the importance of taking turns; asking

questions to clarify what others say; helping others feel included during discussions; disagreeing with someone respectfully during circle time; feeling more confident talking in front of the class after participating in circle time.

1. **Research Question Two:** What are the roles teacher in the effectiveness of circle time?

S/N	Items Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
11.	I help them feel safe to express their feelings.	3.46	0.54	Accept
12.	I encourage everyone to participate during circle time.	3.40	0.53	Accept
13.	I listen attentively when they speak in circle time	3.26	0.69	Accept
14.	I set clear rules for respectful communication during discussions.	3.02	0.95	Accept
15.	I use activities that keep them engaged during circle time.	3.36	0.82	Accept
16.	I help resolve conflicts that arise during discussions.	3.38	0.60	Accept
17.	I encourage them to share their thoughts on various topics.	3.14	0.83	Accept
18.	I model good listening skills for them to follow.	3.14	0.75	Accept
19.	I create a positive atmosphere that makes them to participate.	3.27	0.68	Accept
<b>Grand Mean</b>		<b>2.93</b>	<b>0.71</b>	

The results revealed that items 11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18, and 19 had mean rating of 3.46,3.40,3.26,3.02,3.36,3.38,3.14,3.14 and 3.27 respectively. Since, the mean values of the items are greater than 2.50 bench mark mean for decision taking, it suggests that respondents agree that teachers play serious roles in the effectiveness of circle time in primary schools. The grand mean of this table is 2.93. From the analysis, it can be deduced that the roles of teacher in the effectiveness of circle time are: helping pupils feel safe to express their feelings; encouraging pupils to participate during circle time; listening attentively when pupils speak in circle time; setting clear rules for respectful communication during discussions; using activities that keep pupil engaged during circle time; helping resolve conflicts that arise during discussions; encouraging pupils to share their thoughts on various topics; modelling good listening skills for pupils to follow; creating a positive atmosphere that makes pupils' to participate.

## Discussions

The findings from research question one revealed the impact of circle time on social skills development in pupils; they feel comfortable sharing their thoughts during circle time; they listen to their classmates when they speak during circle time; they wait for their turn to speak during discussions; they express their opinions clearly during circle time; they feel respected by their classmates when they share; they understand the importance of taking turns; they ask questions to clarify what others say; they help others feel included during discussions; they disagree with someone respectfully during circle time; they feel more confident talking in front of the class after participating in circle time.

This finding is in line with (Santangelo, 2020) who agreed that circle time's impact on pupils' social skills development makes them feel comfortable while sharing their thoughts; and listening to their classmates when they speak during circle time. Also, this findings aligns with Camilleri & Bezzina (2022) who opined that circle time can empower pupils by teaching them to wait for their turn to speak during discussions. It is assumed that pupils social skills development can be achieved. This is in line with Javadian & Eqlidi (2022), who acknowledged that circle time is an intervention strategy which focuses on building pupils'



social skills, and communicative competence because of its suitability for channeling the energies of pupils with behavioral difficulties.

The findings in Table Two reveal the teacher's roles in the effectiveness of circle time. To ensure the effectiveness of circle time, the teacher's role involves: helping pupils feel safe to express their feelings; encouraging pupils to participate during circle time; listening attentively when pupils speak in circle time; setting clear rules for respectful communication during discussions; using activities that keep pupils engaged during circle time; helping resolve conflicts that arise during discussions; encouraging pupils to share their thoughts on various topics; modelling good listening skills for pupils to follow and creating a positive atmosphere that makes pupils want to participate. Mumcuoglu (2022) observed that circle time activity provides an opportunity for teaching effectively by the teachers. This can be done when following assessment of pupils' growth within a group. It is a lively and fun activity for instruction of teaching.

These findings conform with a study by (Koczela & Carver, 2023), which agreed with the above teacher roles. These roles will promote teaching and learning in primary schools if recognized. The researcher also perceived this to be true because if fully embedded, it will facilitate teaching and learning, resulting in teachers' productivity and increasing pupils' performance.

### **Conclusion**

The study explored the impact of circle time on the social skill development of pupils in Nsukka local government area, Enugu state. The findings show that there is a need for continuous integration and encouragement of circle time into primary school. The study found that circle time in primary schools will make pupils feel comfortable while sharing their thoughts; listen to their classmates when they speak; wait for their turn to speak during discussions; express their opinions clearly and feel respected by their classmates when they share. Moreover, circle time will help pupils understand the importance of taking turns; asking questions to clarify what others say; helping others feel included during discussions; disagreeing with someone respectfully, and feeling more confident talking in front of the class after participating in circle time.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The government should develop policies and guidelines that promote the integration of circle time in primary schools.
2. The government should provide funds for teacher training and resources.
3. Government should monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of circle time sessions in primary schools.
4. Teachers should incorporate circle time in the school timetable.
5. Teachers should attend in-service training, conferences, and workshops to develop skills in facilitating effective circle time sessions.

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