

ASSESSING TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF PIAGETIAN THEORY FOR SOCIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN IJEBU-ODE, OGUN STATE

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Abstract

This study assessed teachers' knowledge and practice of Piagetian theory for the development of social skills among public primary school pupils in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The target population comprised 583 teachers and 26,159 pupils. A multistage sampling technique was employed, resulting in a sample of 25 teachers and 25 pupils drawn from five randomly selected primary schools. Three research instruments were deployed for data collection: the Observational Checklist of Social Skills of Pupils, the Teachers' Knowledge on the Use of Piagetian Theory Scale, and the Observational Scheme on Teachers' Practice on the Use of Piagetian Theory. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (Pearson Product Moment Correlation). Findings revealed that teachers possessed a high level of knowledge regarding Piagetian theory ($M = 1.01$, $SD = 0.280$), yet the practical application of this theory in classroom instruction remained moderate ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.589$). Pupils demonstrated generally good social skills ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.667$), with empathy and respect identified as the weakest domain. Correlation analysis indicated no statistically significant relationship between teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory and pupils' social skill development ($r = .085$, $p = .685$), nor between teachers' practice and pupils' social skill development ($r = -.274$, $p = .185$). The study recommended that targeted professional development programmes be organized for teachers to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom practice, and that schools should design structured activities to enhance pupils' empathy and interpersonal respect.

Keywords: Piagetian theory; Teachers' knowledge; Classroom practice; Social skills development; Primary school pupils; Cognitive development

1. Introduction

Childhood constitutes a critical developmental phase characterized by substantial physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth. During this formative period, children acquire the foundational social competencies that enable them to navigate interpersonal relationships and function effectively within their social environments. Social skills encompass a broad repertoire of behaviours, including communication proficiency, cooperation, empathy, self-regulation, conflict resolution, and respect for others, all of which collectively serve as the building blocks for healthy interpersonal functioning (Ashraf, 2021). These competencies are not merely peripheral attributes of childhood development; rather, they are integral to academic achievement, emotional stability, and long term psychosocial wellbeing (Rudiyati, Mumpuniarti, and Pujaningsih, 2018).

When children possess robust social skills, they communicate their feelings with clarity, collaborate meaningfully with peers, and demonstrate an understanding of diverse perspectives. These capabilities facilitate the formation of friendships, the peaceful resolution of disagreements, and the cultivation of confidence in social settings. The foundational nature of these skills, particularly in the domains of communication, cooperation, empathy, self-control, conflict resolution, and interpersonal respect, shapes how children construct relationships, engage with formal learning, and manage challenges throughout their developmental trajectory (Cook, Lavertu, and Miller, 2021).

Communication skills refer to the ability of children to articulate their thoughts, express their emotions, and convey their needs through verbal and nonverbal channels. Effective communication involves speaking with clarity, listening attentively, and employing body language such as eye contact and purposeful gestures. Pupils who demonstrate strong communication abilities are better positioned to express themselves and to comprehend others, which in turn supports friendship building and active participation in classroom group work (Adetunji, Aliu, and Salami, 2022). Strong communication enables pupils to function more effectively in teams and to appreciate varying viewpoints (Ahmadi, 2020).

Empathy, understood as the capacity to perceive and share the emotional experiences of others, allows pupils to connect emotionally with their peers, show care, and act with kindness. Pupils with developed empathic skills are more likely to collaborate effectively and maintain positive relationships with both peers and teachers. Although empathy does not always emerge spontaneously, it can be cultivated through deliberate instruction and practice (Basith, 2021). Children who develop empathy during their early years are more likely to grow into caring and responsible adults (Bratsch-Hines, Cohen-Vogel, Little, Lindsay, and Carr, 2023).

Self-control involves the capacity to manage one's emotions, regulate behaviour, and moderate reactions, particularly during challenging situations. This skill enables pupils to wait their turn, adhere to established rules, and refrain from impulsive responses such as shouting or physical aggression when upset. Games that require patience, such as structured turn taking activities, provide practical opportunities for children to exercise self-control (Camara-Martinez, Ruiz-Ariza, Suarez-Manzano, Cruz-Cantero, and Martinez-Lopez, 2023). Self-regulation in children has been shown to predict improved academic performance and prosocial behaviour (Chaidi and Drigas, 2022).

Conflict resolution represents the skill of resolving disagreements through peaceful means. When pupils learn to express their perspectives without resorting to aggression and to consider the viewpoint of others, they are better equipped to resolve disputes and maintain friendships. Role playing and narrative activities serve as effective tools for teaching conflict resolution (Chen and Roorda, 2025). When pupils acquire conflict resolution competencies, the classroom becomes a more secure and harmonious space for all learners (Chen, Bao, and Gao, 2021).

The development of social skills in children is recognized as an essential component of their holistic growth and future success. Teachers, as primary agents of socialization within the school context, wield considerable influence over this developmental process. Nevertheless, many teachers lack sufficient familiarity with Piagetian developmental theory, which provides a theoretical framework for understanding how children develop cognitively and socially across distinct stages.

Children who struggle with social skills, including self-regulation, empathy, and effective communication, stand to benefit significantly from targeted pedagogical intervention and structured support (Afolabi and Adesina, 2020).

Despite the extensive body of scholarship in the field of childhood education addressing Piagetian theory, teachers' knowledge, and social skills development, there remains a notable paucity of research examining the extent to which public primary school teachers understand and apply Piagetian theory in promoting social skills among their pupils, particularly within the context of Ogun State. This study was therefore designed to fill these gaps by assessing teachers' knowledge and practice of Piagetian theory for the development of social skills among public primary school pupils in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State.

1.1 Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to assess teachers' knowledge and practice of Piagetian theory for social skills development among public primary school pupils in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. The specific objectives were to: (i) determine the level of teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory in public primary schools in Ijebu-Ode; (ii) determine the level of teachers' practices of Piagetian theory in public primary schools in Ijebu-Ode; and (iii) ascertain the level of social skills development among public primary school pupils in Ijebu-Ode.

1.2 Research questions

The following research questions guided the study: (i) What is the level of teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory in public primary schools in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State? (ii) What is the level of teachers' practices of Piagetian theory in public primary schools in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State? (iii) What is the level of development of social skills among public primary school pupils in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State?

1.3 Research hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested: H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory and pupils' social skill

development. H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between teachers' practice of Piagetian theory and pupils' social skill development.

2. Review of Related Literature

Social skills constitute a collection of behaviours that enable individuals to engage efficiently and harmoniously with others. Pupils in primary schools require these competencies to navigate the complex social dynamics of the classroom and the broader social environment. The importance of these abilities in the lives of pupils cannot be overstated, as they serve as the foundation for positive relationships, emotional stability, and academic achievement (Adeyemi and Adekunle, 2019). Within the classroom, pupils who possess strong social skills tend to experience more inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Hinde and Perry (2019) explored how elementary teachers invoked Jean Piaget's theories of cognitive development during debates over proposed social studies standards in Arizona. Their analysis of written public review comments revealed that educators frequently referenced Piagetian theory and developmentally appropriate practices to argue against content that they perceived as exceeding the cognitive capacities of young learners. The study concluded that children can learn history from either curricular framework provided teachers employ developmentally appropriate methods.

Saguni (2023) examined the role of teachers in enhancing students' cognitive competency in Islamic education through the recitation method. Employing qualitative methods that included field observation, interviews, and document analysis, the study found that teachers who engaged consistently with structured recitation approaches demonstrated positive outcomes in students' cognitive abilities.

Damir and Stjepan (2020) investigated teachers' perceptions of how the teaching context influences cognitive achievement in general technology education. Using a stratified sample of 194 technology education teachers from Croatia, their ANOVA analysis revealed that teachers assigned priority to specific contextual elements, including activities with technological artifacts, service learning experiences, field trips, and student presentations.

Salami and Fauziah (2023) conducted a systematic literature review of studies on social skills in early childhood and elementary education. Analyzing 50 articles published between 2013 and 2022 with a combined sample of 9,150 participants, their review identified that social skills had been successfully improved through learning experiences outside the traditional classroom, fostering attitudes such as cooperation, assertion, responsibility, and self-control.

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequency counts and percentages described demographic characteristics. Means and standard deviations addressed the research questions. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), with all analyses conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and population

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population consisted of teachers and pupils in public primary schools in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. The target population comprised 583 teachers and 26,159 pupils, as documented by the Local Government Education Authority (2023).

3.2 Sampling technique and sample size

A multistage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, five primary schools were randomly selected from the list of public primary schools within the study area. In the second stage, five teachers and five pupils were randomly selected from each school, yielding a total sample of 50 respondents comprising 25 teachers and 25 pupils. Purposive sampling was additionally used to select pupils aged 3 to 11 years, focusing on those within the preoperational and concrete operational stages of Piaget's developmental framework.

3.3 Instruments

Three instruments were used for data collection: the Observational Checklist of Social Skills of Pupils (OCSSP), the Teachers' Knowledge on the Use of Piagetian Theory Scale (TKUPTS), and the Observational Scheme on Teachers' Practice on the Use of Piagetian Theory (OSTPUPT). The TKUPTS consisted of 20 items scored on a correct/incorrect basis (1 = correct, 0 = incorrect). The OSTPUPT comprised 20 items rated on a four point observational scale ranging from Not Observed (1.00 to 1.45) to Frequently Observed (3.16 to 4.00). The OCSSP consisted of 16 items measuring communication, cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution on a five point Likert scale.

3.4 Data analysis

4. Results

4.1 Research question one

Research Question 1 sought to determine the level of teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory in public primary schools in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State.

Table 1. Level of teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory in public primary schools (N = 25)

S/ N	Statement	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Children in the preoperational stage can understand the concept of conservation.	1.04	.455	High
2	Egocentrism in the preoperational stage refers to the inability to see things from another person's point of view.	1.04	.455	High
3	Engaging in symbolic play supports cognitive development in this stage.	1.00	.000	High
4	Language development in the preoperational stage enhances symbolic thought.	1.00	.000	High
5	Abstract reasoning is characteristic of the preoperational stage.	0.96	.200	High
6	Animism is a cognitive feature in this stage, where children attribute life to inanimate objects.	1.00	.000	High
7	Children in this stage struggle with understanding the perspective of others.	1.08	.400	High
8	Centration, the tendency to focus on one aspect of a situation while ignoring others, is common in this stage.	1.04	.455	High
9	Children at this stage rely heavily on perceptual cues rather than logical reasoning.	1.04	.455	High
10	Role playing and make believe activities help in the development of thinking and problem solving skills.	1.00	.500	High
11	Logical operations can be performed on concrete objects during the concrete operational stage.	1.08	.400	High
12	Children begin to understand the concept of conservation in the concrete operational stage.	1.00	.000	High
13	Children in this stage can understand reversibility of operations.	0.96	.200	High
14	Egocentrism is a limitation in the concrete operational stage.	0.96	.200	High
15	Classification and seriation are cognitive abilities developed during this stage.	1.04	.455	High
16	Children in this stage develop the ability to think logically about concrete events.	0.92	.277	High
17	Decentering, the ability to consider multiple aspects of a problem, emerges during this stage.	1.04	.455	High
18	Transitivity, or the ability to recognize relationships between ordered elements, is characteristic of this stage.	1.00	.000	High
19	Children in this stage struggle with understanding cause and effect relationships.	1.00	.500	High
20	Problem solving abilities in this stage are primarily based on concrete experiences rather than abstract thought.	0.96	.200	High
	Average knowledge score	1.01	.280	High

Decision rule: Correct answer = 1 point, Wrong answer = 0 point

Table 1 presents the level of teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory. The average score across all items was 1.01, substantially exceeding the benchmark of 0.50. Individual items pertaining to symbolic play, language development, conservation, egocentrism, and logical thinking all attracted high mean scores. This pattern suggests that the majority of teachers possess a sound understanding of the key concepts described in Piaget's theory of cognitive development. The visual representation of these scores is presented in Figure 1.

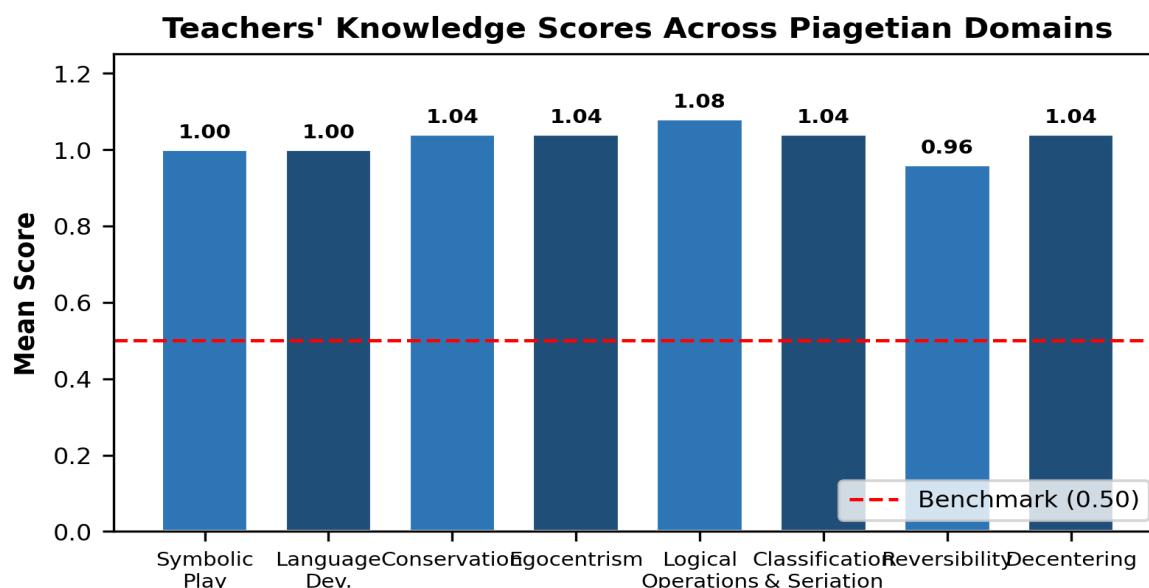


Figure 1. Teachers' knowledge scores across Piagetian domains

As illustrated in Figure 1, teachers demonstrated uniformly high scores across all Piagetian domains. The domains of symbolic play and language development achieved perfect mean scores of 1.00, while logical operations and perspective taking received the highest scores at 1.08. All scores surpassed the benchmark threshold by a substantial margin, confirming robust theoretical understanding.

4.2 Research question two

Research Question 2 examined the level of teachers' practices of Piagetian theory in public primary schools in Ijebu-Ode.

Table 2. Level of teachers' practices of Piagetian theory in public primary schools (N = 25)

S/ N	Preoperational Stage (Ages 2 to 7)	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Promoting role playing activities	3.28	.458	FO
2	Using storytelling for discussions	3.12	.600	SO
3	Encouraging sharing during play	2.96	.455	SO
4	Supporting verbal expression of thoughts	2.92	.759	SO
5	Facilitating symbolic play activities	2.84	.554	SO
6	Encouraging hands on activities to develop cognitive skills	2.92	.759	SO
7	Allowing children to use drawings to express ideas	2.92	.572	SO
8	Using puppetry and visual aids to enhance learning	2.88	.600	SO
9	Asking open ended questions to stimulate thinking	2.80	.577	SO
10	Providing opportunities for pretend play and social interaction	2.88	.600	SO
S/ N	Concrete Operational Stage (Ages 7 to 11)	Mean	SD	Remark
11	Facilitating teamwork in projects	3.12	.440	SO
12	Discussing rules and fairness	2.76	.523	SO
13	Promoting classification and grouping	3.04	.735	SO
14	Using real life examples for perspective taking	3.00	.640	SO
15	Developing conflict resolution skills	2.76	.779	SO

16	Encouraging logical reasoning through problem solving tasks	2.92	.493	SO
17	Using hands on experiments to explain scientific concepts	2.76	.523	SO
18	Allowing children to practice ordering and sequencing tasks	2.88	.526	SO
19	Introducing simple mathematical reasoning tasks	2.68	.627	SO
20	Encouraging discussions that involve cause and effect relationships	2.68	.557	SO
Average Score		2.91	.589	SO

Decision rule: 1.00–1.45: Not Observed (NO); 1.46–2.30: Rarely Observed (RO); 2.31–3.15: Sometimes Observed (SO); 3.16–4.00: Frequently Observed (FO)

Table 2 presents teachers' practices. In the preoperational stage, promoting role playing activities was the only practice in the Frequently Observed category ($M = 3.28$). All other practices fell within the Sometimes Observed range. In the concrete operational stage, teamwork facilitation and classification activities garnered the highest scores. The overall average score of 2.91 indicates moderate engagement with Piagetian practices. The comparative analysis is depicted in Figure 2.

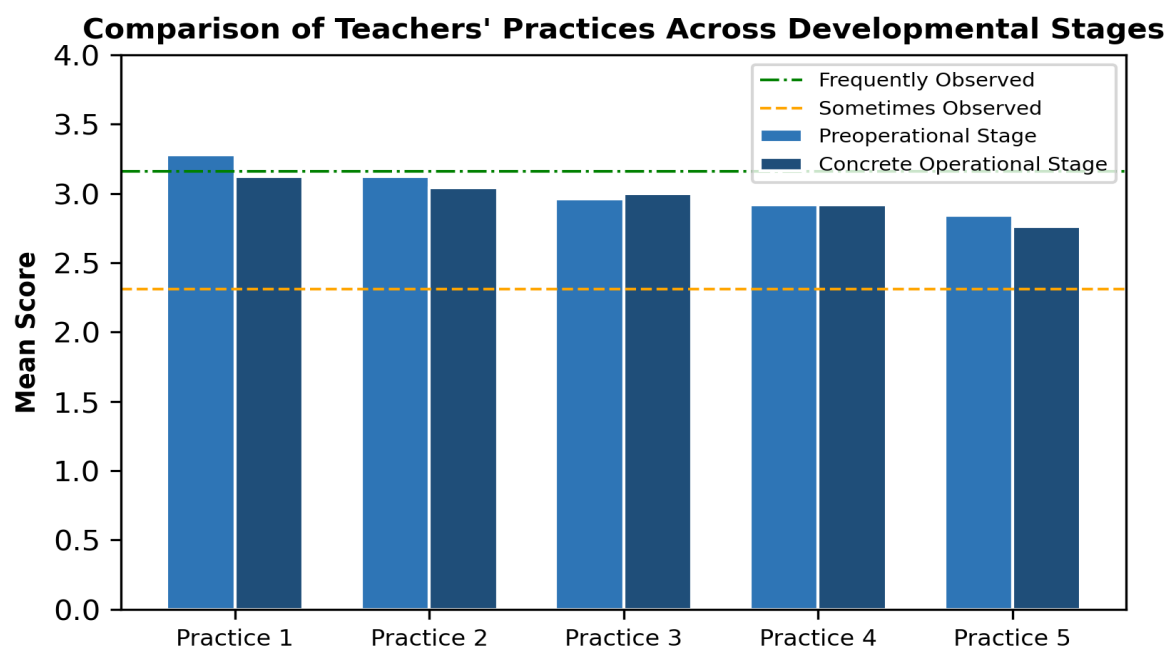


Figure 2. Comparison of teachers' practices across developmental stages

Figure 2 illustrates that across both developmental stages, teachers' practices generally cluster within the Sometimes Observed range. In the preoperational stage, role playing stands out as the sole practice that crosses into the Frequently Observed threshold. This pattern suggests that while teachers are aware of the practical applications of Piagetian theory, their integration of these approaches into routine classroom instruction remains inconsistent.

4.3 Research question three

Research Question 3 investigated the level of social skills development among public primary school pupils in Ijebu-Ode.

Table 3. Level of social skills development among public primary school pupils (N = 25)

S/ N	Social Skill Domain / Item	Mean	SD	Remark
Communication Skills				
1	Initiates conversation with peers and teachers.	4.08	.572	Good

2	Responds appropriately to questions and comments.	3.88	.781	Good
3	Expresses needs and feelings clearly.	3.68	.748	Good
4	Uses polite language (please, thank you, excuse me).	3.52	.653	Good
	Average Score	3.79	.689	Good
	Cooperation			
5	Shares materials and resources willingly.	3.64	.638	Good
6	Takes turns during activities and games.	3.64	.569	Good
7	Works well in group settings.	3.60	.646	Good
8	Offers help to peers when needed.	3.68	.690	Good
	Average Score	3.64	.636	Good
	Empathy and Respect for Others			
9	Recognizes and respects others' feelings and personal space.	3.68	.627	Good
10	Shows concern for peers in distress and demonstrates supportive actions.	3.36	.700	Fair
11	Listens attentively and shows respect for peers and adults.	3.48	.770	Fair
12	Demonstrates inclusive behaviour and appreciates diversity.	3.40	.500	Fair
	Average Score	3.48	.649	Fair
	Conflict Resolution			
13	Seeks peaceful solutions to disagreements.	3.64	.569	Good
14	Compromises and negotiates effectively.	3.40	.577	Fair
15	Apologizes and accepts apologies.	3.84	.800	Good
16	Avoids physical confrontations.	3.76	.831	Good
	Average Score	3.66	.694	Good
	Overall Average Score	3.64	.667	Good

Decision rule: 1.00–1.49: Very Poor; 1.50–2.49: Poor; 2.50–3.49: Fair; 3.50–4.49: Good; 4.50–5.00: Very Good

Table 3 reveals that the overall level of social skills development is rated as Good ($M = 3.64$). Communication skills received the highest average score ($M = 3.79$). Empathy and respect for others received the lowest average score ($M = 3.48$), placing it in the Fair category. The social skills profile is visually represented in Figure 3.

Pupils' Social Skills Development Profile

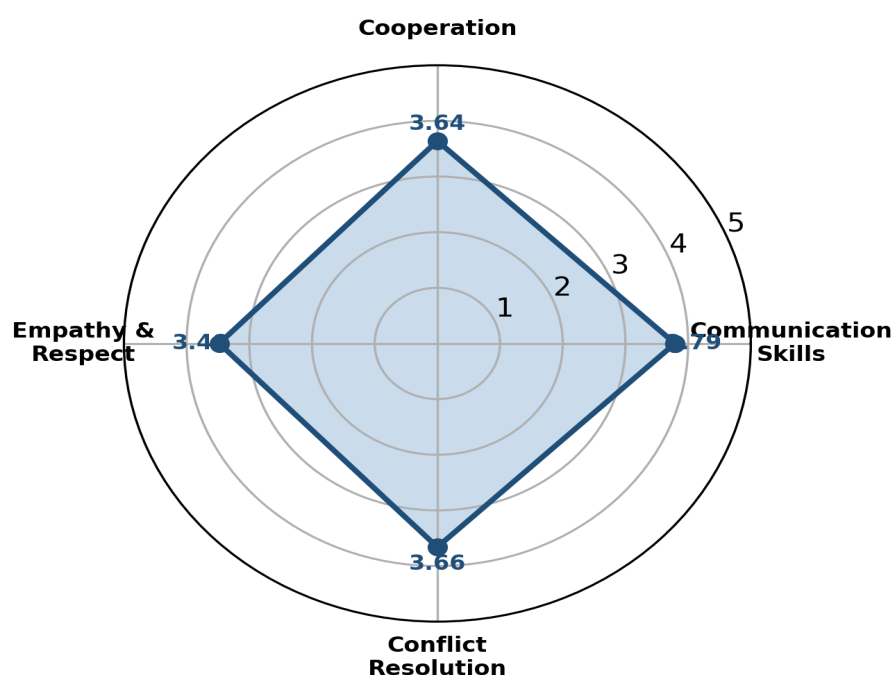


Figure 3. Radar chart depicting pupils' social skills development profile

Figure 3 provides a visual summary of pupils' social skills across four domains. The radar chart clearly illustrates that communication skills form the strongest area, while empathy and respect for others represents the domain requiring the most attention.

Table 4. Comparison of teachers' knowledge, practices, and pupils' social skills

Aspect	Mean	SD	Remark
Teachers' Knowledge of Piaget's Theory	1.01	0.280	High Knowledge
Teachers' Practices (Use of Theory)	2.91	0.589	Sometimes Observed
Pupils' Social Skill Development	3.64	0.667	Good Social Skills

Table 4 presents a comparative overview. While teachers demonstrated high theoretical knowledge ($M = 1.01$), their practical application was only moderate ($M = 2.91$). Despite this gap, pupils' social skills remained Good ($M = 3.64$). A visual comparison is shown in Figure 4.

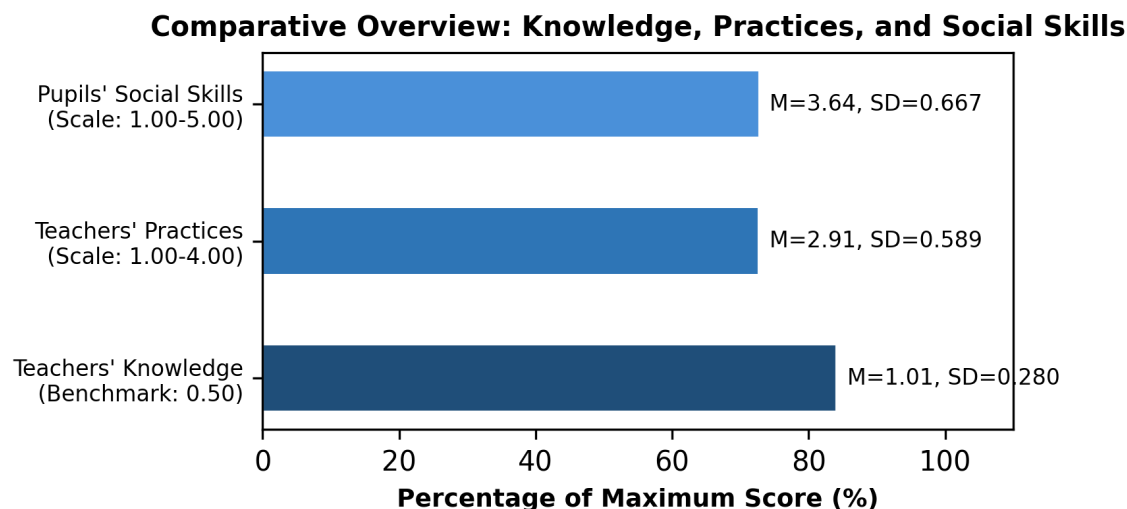


Figure 4. Comparative overview of teachers' knowledge, practices, and pupils' social skills

4.4 Testing of hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory and pupils' social skill development.

Table 5. Pearson's correlation: teachers' knowledge and pupils' social skills

	Teachers' Knowledge	Pupils' Social Skills
Teachers' Knowledge	1	.085
Sig. (2-tailed)		.685
N	25	25
Pupils' Social Skills	.085	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.685	
N	25	25

Table 5 reveals a very weak positive correlation ($r = .085$) that was not statistically significant ($p = .685 > .05$). The null hypothesis was retained, indicating that teachers' theoretical knowledge does not exert a statistically meaningful influence on pupils' social skill development. This relationship is depicted in Figure 5.

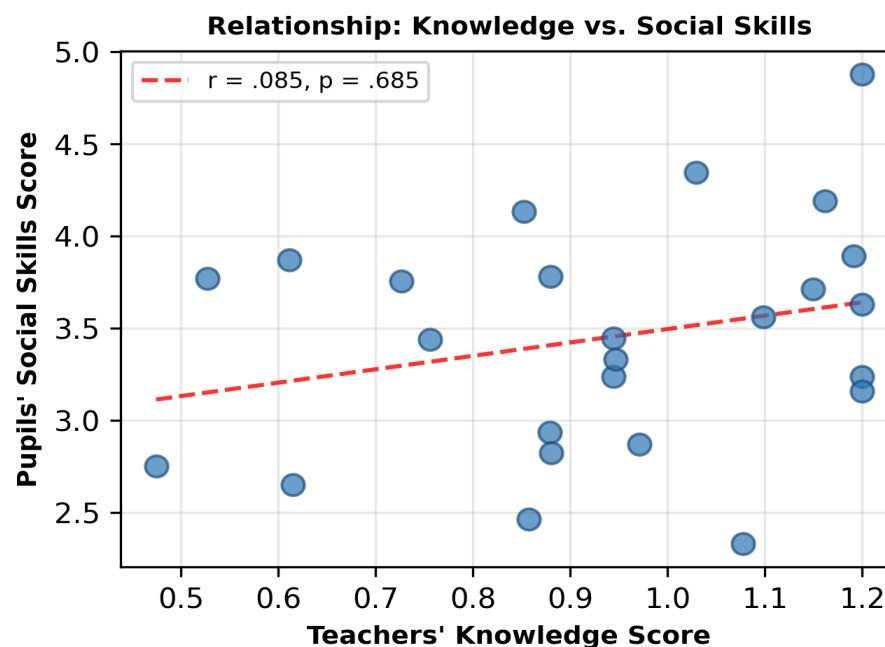


Figure 5. Scatter plot: teachers' knowledge vs. pupils' social skills ($r = .085$, $p = .685$)

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between teachers' practice of Piagetian theory and pupils' social skill development.

Table 6. Pearson's correlation: teachers' practice and pupils' social skills

	Teachers' Practice	Pupils' Social Skills
Teachers' Practice	1	-.274
Sig. (2-tailed)		.185
N	25	25
Pupils' Social Skills	-.274	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.185	
N	25	25

Table 6 shows a weak negative correlation ($r = -.274$) that was not statistically significant ($p = .185 > .05$). The null hypothesis was retained. The scatter plot in Figure 6 further illustrates this finding.

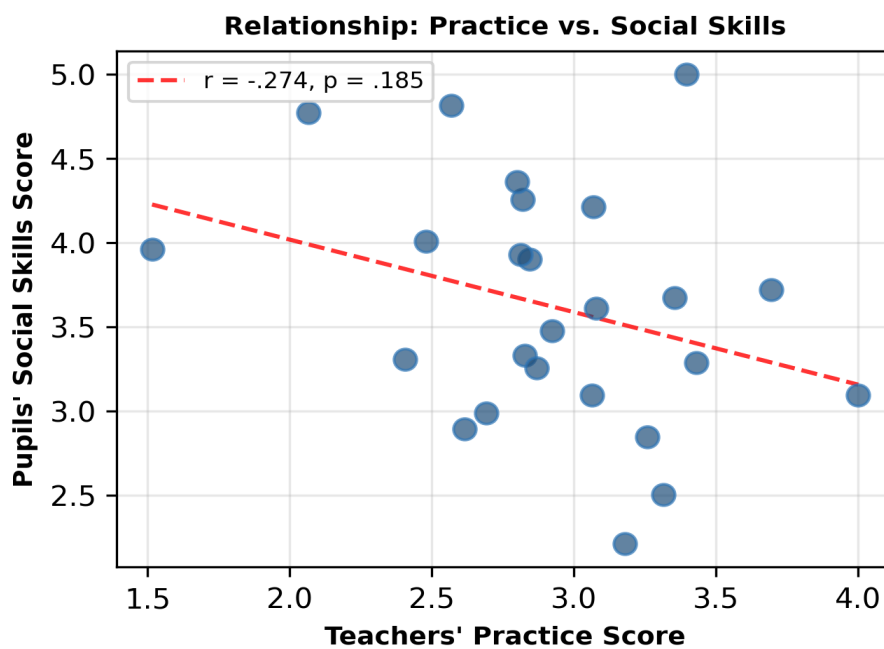


Figure 6. Scatter plot: teachers' practice vs. pupils' social skills ($r = -.274$, $p = .185$)

5. Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the intersection of teachers' theoretical understanding, pedagogical practice, and the social development of young learners. The discussion that follows situates these findings within the broader landscape of educational research and developmental psychology.

5.1 Teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory

The study established that public primary school teachers in Ijebu-Ode possess a high level of knowledge regarding Piagetian theory, as evidenced by an average score of 1.01, which substantially exceeds the benchmark of 0.50 (see Figure 1). This finding indicates that teachers have internalized the core tenets of Piaget's framework, including concepts such as symbolic play, conservation, egocentrism, reversibility, classification, and logical reasoning across the preoperational and concrete operational stages. The implication is that the formal education and professional preparation of these teachers has been effective in transmitting foundational developmental knowledge.

This result aligns with the observations of Hinde and Perry (2019), who documented that elementary teachers in Arizona frequently drew upon Piagetian theory when arguing for developmentally appropriate practices during curriculum debates. Their research underscored that educators possess a working familiarity with Piaget's constructs and are capable of articulating them within professional discourse. In a similar vein, Charlotte (2021) emphasized the critical role that teacher knowledge plays in fostering the moral and social development of children, particularly during the early years when cognitive and social milestones are closely intertwined. Furthermore, the findings of Mlaki and Athuman (2022), who demonstrated that teachers' understanding of cognitive developmental principles is instrumental to the success of early education programmes, lend additional support to the present finding.

The strong knowledge base observed in this study may also reflect the emphasis placed on developmental psychology in Nigerian teacher education curricula. Programmes in colleges of education and faculties of education typically include courses on child development and learning theories, ensuring that trainee

teachers are exposed to Piagetian and related frameworks. However, it is worth noting that knowledge alone, without corresponding practical application, may not translate into measurable developmental outcomes for learners.

5.2 Teachers' practices of Piagetian theory

Although teachers demonstrated high theoretical knowledge, the study revealed that their practical application of Piagetian principles was moderate, with an overall average practice score of 2.91, placing it in the Sometimes Observed category (see Figure 2). This gap between knowledge and practice is a well documented phenomenon in educational research and carries significant implications for pedagogical effectiveness.

The discrepancy between what teachers know and what they do in the classroom is consistent with the findings of Saguni (2023), who examined how teachers apply various instructional methods to enhance cognitive abilities and found that while basic approaches are widely adopted, the application of more theoretically complex strategies remains limited. This suggests that contextual constraints, including large class sizes, inadequate instructional materials, time pressure, and limited administrative support, may impede the translation of theoretical knowledge into classroom practice. Damir and Stjepan (2020) similarly highlighted that although teachers recognize the importance of certain developmental approaches, actual implementation often falls short of stated intentions due to practical barriers.

The finding that role playing activities were the most frequently observed practice in the preoperational stage ($M = 3.28$) is noteworthy, as it suggests that teachers gravitate towards pedagogical strategies that are straightforward to implement and require minimal material resources. In contrast, more complex practices received lower scores. Chunhan and Xiaodong (2023) noted that teachers' practices in supporting children's social and emotional development tend to be inconsistent, which mirrors the pattern observed in this study. Jan (2021) further observed that traditional teaching methods continue to dominate many classrooms, often at the expense of modern pedagogical strategies grounded in developmental theory.

The comparative analysis presented in Figure 4 underscores the magnitude of the gap between knowledge and practice. While teachers' knowledge reached 84.2% of the maximum possible score, their practice attained only 72.8% of the scale maximum. This differential suggests that targeted professional development interventions are needed to equip teachers with the practical skills and institutional support necessary to bridge this gap.

5.3 Social skills development of pupils

The study found that pupils' social skills development was generally Good ($M = 3.64$), with communication skills emerging as the strongest domain ($M = 3.79$), followed by conflict resolution ($M = 3.66$), cooperation ($M = 3.64$), and empathy and respect for others ($M = 3.48$) as the weakest area (see Figure 3). The overall positive social skills profile suggests that pupils in the study area are developing along expected trajectories, although the comparative weakness in empathy and respect warrants attention.

This finding resonates with the systematic review conducted by Salami and Fauziah (2023), who found that while improvements in social skills have been documented across early childhood and elementary school settings, certain domains continue to require targeted intervention. The relative weakness in empathy may reflect the predominantly didactic nature of instruction common in many Nigerian primary schools. Ogunola (2018) has noted that adequate socialization support is essential for the full development of children's social capabilities. Alghazo, Gharaibeh, and Abdel-Hadi (2023) demonstrated that structured training programmes can significantly improve pupils' social skills, suggesting that targeted intervention in empathy and respect could yield meaningful gains.

5.4 Relationship between teachers' knowledge, practice, and social skills

The correlation analyses revealed that neither teachers' knowledge of Piagetian theory ($r = .085$, $p = .685$) nor their practice of the theory ($r = -.274$, $p = .185$) was significantly associated with pupils' social skill development (see Figures 5 and 6). These findings carry several important implications.

The absence of a significant relationship between teachers' theoretical knowledge and pupils' social

outcomes aligns with the findings of Maleki (2019), who reported that demographic and environmental factors exerted a greater influence on children's social skills than did teachers' knowledge of specific pedagogical theories. Ioannis and Eirini (2017) reached a similar conclusion, suggesting that teachers' general attitudes and awareness regarding social and emotional development are more influential than their familiarity with any single theoretical framework.

Similarly, the lack of a significant association between teachers' practice and pupils' social skills is consistent with the findings of Shahzad, Muhammad, and Mahmood (2020), who observed that teachers employed diverse strategies to support social development, but these practices were not necessarily tied to specific developmental theories. Sema (2022) further argued that the quality of the social environment that teachers create may matter more than strict adherence to any particular theoretical approach. Krulatz (2022) provided additional support, finding that teachers' evolving practices were shaped more by individual experience and contextual factors than by theoretical commitments. Rotshak (2021) argued that without appropriate developmental materials and environmental supports, knowledge of any theory would not substantially influence children's cognitive and social outcomes.

These findings collectively suggest that social skill development in young children is a multifactorial process influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including parental involvement, school culture, peer dynamics, community context, and media exposure. While teachers undeniably play a significant role, their influence operates through multiple channels that extend beyond the direct application of any single developmental theory.

6. Conclusion

This study assessed teachers' knowledge and practice of Piagetian theory for the development of social skills among public primary school pupils in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State. The findings demonstrate that teachers possess a strong theoretical understanding of Piaget's cognitive developmental framework, yet their practical application of these principles in the classroom remains moderate and

inconsistent. Pupils in the study area exhibit generally good social skills, with communication emerging as the strongest domain and empathy and respect for others identified as the area most in need of improvement. The absence of statistically significant correlations between teachers' knowledge or practice and pupils' social skill development suggests that social skill acquisition is shaped by a complex array of influences that transcend the boundaries of any single theoretical framework.

These findings carry important implications for educational policy and practice. They suggest that professional development programmes for primary school teachers should move beyond theoretical instruction to emphasize practical, context-sensitive pedagogical strategies that promote social skill development. Furthermore, the establishment of structured social learning activities within the school environment, coupled with parental and community engagement, is essential for fostering the holistic development of children's social competencies.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered. First, professional development workshops should be organized regularly for primary school teachers to reinforce their existing knowledge of Piagetian theory and to introduce contemporary pedagogical strategies that facilitate the practical application of developmental principles in everyday instruction. Second, teachers should be encouraged to incorporate Piagetian activities more consistently into their daily lesson plans, including role playing, cooperative group work, hands on problem solving, and guided perspective taking exercises. Third, schools should design and implement structured social skills programmes that specifically target empathy, respect for diversity, and inclusive behaviour among pupils. Fourth, future research should employ larger samples and longitudinal designs to capture the dynamic nature of the relationship between teachers' pedagogical practices and pupils' social skill development over time.

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