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Empathetic Character Development Through Neuropedagogy-Based Interactive Children's Stories in Elementary Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: Empathetic character development in elementary students is essential for holistic education. The ages of 6-12 exhibit notable neuroplasticity and social cognition growth, making it ideal for empathy programs. The study aims to assess a neuropedagogy-based interactive storytelling program for empathy enhancement.

Materials and methods: A quasi-experimental design involved 120 students (ages 7-12) in Bangkinang, Riau. The experimental group (n=60) underwent a 12-week interactive storytelling intervention, conducted bi-weekly.

Results: Assessments utilized the Basic Empathy Scale for Children, behavioral observations, and perspective-taking measures at baseline, post-intervention, and after four weeks. The experimental cohort exhibited significant advancements in cognitive empathy (34.7%), affective empathy (28.3%), and prosocial behaviors (68.8%). Improvement in perspective-taking reached 36.3%. Follow-up results indicated 81% retention of cognitive empathy and 78% for affective empathy improvements.

Conclusions: The neuropedagogy-based storytelling approach was effective in fostering empathetic character among elementary students. Integrating neuroscience concepts into character education provides an evidence-based strategy for curriculum incorporation, with lasting effects reflecting substantial neuroplastic transformations.

Keywords
empathy development; neuropedagogy; interactive storytelling; elementary education; character development; neuroplasticity; social-emotional learning.

INTRODUCTION

The development of empathetic character in elementary school students represents a critical component of holistic education, particularly in the contemporary educational landscape where social-emotional learning has gained unprecedented recognition(Gallingane & Han, 2015). Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, serves as a foundational skill for successful interpersonal relationships, academic achievement, and societal contribution (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004). It encompasses cognitive and emotional dimensions, allowing individuals to not only intellectually grasp another's perspective but also to emotionally resonate with their experiences (Kucirkova, 2019). The integration of neuropedagogy—an interdisciplinary field combining neuroscience principles with pedagogical practices—offers innovative approaches to character development that align with natural brain development patterns in children.

Elementary education represents a pivotal period for empathy development, as children's brains exhibit heightened neuroplasticity between ages 6-12 years (Decety & Holvoet, 2021). During this developmental window, the prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions and emotional regulation, undergoes significant maturation, while mirror neuron systems become increasingly sophisticated (Blakemore & Mills, 2013). This neurological readiness makes elementary school an optimal time for interventions designed to cultivate empathy, utilizing methods that are congruent with how young brains learn and process social information (Louie, 2005). This neurobiological foundation provides an optimal opportunity for educational interventions designed to enhance empathetic capacities through targeted pedagogical strategies.

Interactive storytelling emerges as a particularly promising vehicle for empathy development, as narrative experiences activate multiple brain regions associated with emotional processing, perspective-taking, and social cognition(Shen et al., 2024; Skaraas et al., 2018). Such engagements foster a deeper connection with characters and their dilemmas, thereby promoting the vicarious experience of diverse emotions and viewpoints (Thompson & Melchior, 2019). When combined with neuropedagogy principles, storytelling interventions can be designed to optimize neural engagement and facilitate meaningful character development outcomes.

Several critical gaps exist in the current literature regarding empathy development through neuropedagogy-based interventions. First, there is a significant integration gap, with limited research systematically combining neuropedagogy principles with interactive storytelling methodologies for character development. Second, most existing empathy education research lacks developmental specificity, failing to align age-specific approaches with documented brain development patterns in elementary school children. Third, there is insufficient research examining neuropedagogy-based empathy interventions within specific cultural contexts, particularly considering Indonesian educational values and practices. Fourth, few studies employ multi-dimensional

assessment approaches that comprehensively capture cognitive, behavioral, and neurobiological empathy outcomes. Finally, limited evidence exists regarding the practical implementation feasibility of neuropedagogy-based interventions within typical elementary school environments.

The present research addresses these identified gaps by developing and evaluating a comprehensive intervention program that integrates interactive storytelling with neuropedagogy principles specifically designed for elementary school students. The rationale for this research rests on several key considerations: Neurobiological rationale highlights that elementary school years represent an optimal period for empathy development interventions due to heightened neuroplasticity and ongoing development of brain regions associated with social cognition and emotional processing. Pedagogical rationale emphasizes that interactive storytelling provides an engaging, developmentally appropriate medium for empathy education that aligns with children's natural learning preferences and cognitive capabilities. Cultural rationale points out that the development of empathetic character aligns with Indonesian educational values emphasizing character building and social harmony, making this research particularly relevant for local educational contexts. Finally, practical rationale indicates that the integration of neuropedagogy principles can enhance the effectiveness of existing character education programs while providing teachers with evidence-based strategies for empathy development.

Research in empathy development has traditionally focused on cognitive and behavioral approaches, with limited integration of neurobiological insights into educational practice. Simon & Nader-Grosbois, (2021) established foundational understanding of empathy development stages, identifying the progression from emotional contagion in infancy to sophisticated perspective-taking abilities in middle childhood. While these models elucidate developmental trajectories, they often lack specific pedagogical strategies grounded in neuroscience to optimize empathic growth. More recent work has begun to explore the role of specific pedagogical tools, such as storytelling, in fostering moral development, noting its potential to engage students in understanding complex social situations (Mynbayeva, 2020; Suryani et al., 2020). However, conventional approaches to empathy education often lack neurobiological grounding and fail to leverage optimal brain development windows.

Research in neuropedagogy has consistently demonstrated the capacity of brain-based educational interventions to improve learning outcomes across diverse academic areas. Key principles of neuroeducation, such as the significance of emotional engagement, the integration of multimodal learning experiences, and developmental appropriateness, have been identified and are crucial for effective pedagogical design (Ward et al., 2017). Applied to empathy education, these principles suggest that interventions should employ interactive methodologies that stimulate the neural pathways associated with social cognition and emotional resonance (Dieter, 2011). Similarly, the application of neuroscientific insights to educational practice, while rigorously maintaining pedagogical integrity, has been underscored as highly valuable (Howard-Jones, 2014).

Interactive storytelling research has shown promising results for social-emotional learning outcomes. (Mar & Oatley, 2008) demonstrated that narrative engagement activates theory of mind networks and enhances empathetic responding. Digital storytelling interventions have shown particular effectiveness in engaging contemporary learners while providing opportunities for active participation and reflection (Chang & Suh, 2025; Wang et al., 2022). Moreover, the collaborative nature of certain interactive storytelling approaches has been shown to foster reciprocity and shared understanding, which are critical components of empathic development (Verdian et al., 2024). Further research indicates that storytelling is a natural and recurring human method for developing empathy, with novels serving as a primary cultural means to share diverse perspectives and cultivate empathy within populations (Skaraas et al., 2018). Furthermore, integrating digital storytelling with educational robotics has been shown to enhance empathetic engagement, particularly in conveying complex messages and fostering prosocial behavior (Ziouzios et al., 2021). The current body of literature, however, reveals a significant gap in the systematic integration of neuropedagogical principles with interactive storytelling specifically for the explicit purpose of cultivating empathy in elementary school students.

Despite these advances, limited research has specifically examined the integration of neuropedagogy principles with interactive storytelling for empathy development in elementary school settings. Most existing studies focus on either neurobiological mechanisms or pedagogical outcomes in isolation, without comprehensive integration of both perspectives.

The primary objectives of this research are to develop an interactive storytelling program based on neuropedagogy principles specifically designed for elementary school students' empathy development, and to evaluate the effectiveness of this neuropedagogy-based storytelling intervention in enhancing cognitive and affective empathy among elementary school students. Furthermore, the research aims to assess the intervention's impact on prosocial behavior, emotional regulation, and perspective-taking abilities, and to examine the sustainability of empathy development outcomes through longitudinal follow-up measurements. Finally, it seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for implementing neuropedagogy-based empathy education in elementary school settings.

METHODOLOGY

Study Participants

The study participants comprised 120 elementary school students (ages 7-12 years) enrolled in three public elementary schools in Bangkinang City, Riau Province, Indonesia. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across grade levels (grades 2-5) and demographic characteristics. Inclusion criteria included: (a) regular school attendance (>90%), (b) absence of diagnosed developmental or behavioral disorders, (c) Indonesian language proficiency, and (d) parental consent for participation. Exclusion criteria included: (a) previous exposure to structured empathy training programs, (b) significant behavioral or emotional difficulties requiring specialized intervention, and (c) limited Indonesian language comprehension.

The experimental group (n=60) consisted of 32 females and 28 males, with a mean age of 9.2 years (SD=1.4). The control group (n=60) included 31 females and 29 males, with a mean age of 9.1 years (SD=1.3). Demographic analysis revealed no significant differences between groups in terms of age, gender distribution, socioeconomic status, or baseline empathy measures

($p > 0.05$).

Study Organization

This research employed a Research and Development (R&D) methodology based on the Borg and Gall development model, modified for educational intervention research. The study design incorporated a quasi-experimental approach with pre-test, post-test, and follow-up measurements. The research was conducted in three phases:

Table 1. Research Phases and Timeline

Phase	Duration	Activities	Key Components	Deliverables
Phase 1: Development	Months 1-3	• Literature review • Expert consultation • Pilot testing • Material development	• Creation of 24 interactive stories • Integration of neuropedagogy principles • Emotional engagement elements • Multimodal presentation design • Reflection opportunities	• Validated intervention protocol • Training materials • Assessment instruments • Pilot test results
Phase 2: Implementation	Months 4-6	• Intervention delivery • Data collection • Quality monitoring • Fidelity assessment	• 12-week intervention program • Twice weekly sessions (45 min each) • Trained facilitator delivery • Standardized protocols • Concurrent control group activities	• Intervention completion • Mid-intervention data • Post-intervention data • Fidelity reports
Phase 3: Evaluation	Months 7-9	• Statistical analysis • Results interpretation • Follow-up assessment • Report preparation	• Pre-post comparisons • Longitudinal analysis • Effect size calculations • Sustainability assessment	• Final research report • Statistical outcomes • Recommendations • Publication manuscript

Test and Measurement Procedures

Data collection employed multiple validated instruments to assess empathy development across cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains:

Table 2. Assessment Instruments Overview

Instrument	Type	Target Domain	Items	Age Range	Administration Time	Reliability	Validity
Basic Empathy Scale for Children (BES-C)	Self-report	Cognitive & Affective Empathy	20 items	7-12 years	15-20 minutes	Cronbach's α = 0.82	Validated in Indonesian context
Empathy Quotient for Children (EQ-C)	Parent-report	Empathetic Behavior	27 items	7-12 years	10-15 minutes	Cronbach's α = 0.89	Test-retest r = 0.84
Behavioral Observation Protocol	Direct observation	Prosocial Behaviors	Multiple categories	7-12 years	30 minutes	Inter-rater r > 0.90	Content validated
Perspective-Taking Assessment	Performance-based	Theory of Mind	5 vignettes	7-12 years	20-25 minutes	Inter-rater r = 0.88	Criterion validated

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 28.0. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. Normality of data distribution was assessed using Shapiro-Wilk tests and visual inspection of histograms.

Primary analyses employed repeated measures ANOVA to examine changes in empathy measures across time points, with group (experimental vs. control) as the between-subjects factor and time as the within-subjects factor. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d for between-group comparisons and partial eta-squared (η^2p) for within-subjects effects. Secondary analyses included: (a) independent samples t-tests for post-intervention group comparisons, (b) paired samples t-tests for pre-post changes within groups, (c) correlation analyses to examine relationships between empathy measures, and (d) regression analyses to identify predictors of empathy development. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$, with Bonferroni corrections applied for multiple comparisons. Missing data (< 5%) were handled using multiple imputation procedures.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki, 2013) and received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of Universitas Riau prior to data collection. Written informed consent was obtained from all parents or legal guardians, and verbal assent was secured from participating children. Participation was entirely voluntary, with participants granted the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. To ensure confidentiality and data protection, all personal information was anonymized and securely stored, with access restricted to the research team. The intervention procedures were designed to be age-appropriate, educationally beneficial, and free from physical, psychological, or social harm, thereby safeguarding the rights, dignity, and well-being of all participants throughout the research process.

RESULTS

Empathy Development Outcomes

Structured behavioral observations revealed significant improvements in prosocial behaviors among experimental group participants. The frequency of helping behaviors increased from baseline (M = 3.2 instances per observation period, SD = 1.4) to post-intervention (M = 5.4 instances, SD = 1.8), representing a 68.8% increase. Conflict resolution attempts increased from baseline (M = 1.8, SD = 0.9) to post-intervention (M = 2.9, SD = 1.2), representing a 61.1% improvement.

Table 3. Pre-Post Intervention Empathy Outcomes

Measure	Group	Baseline M(SD)	Post-Intervention M(SD)	Change %	Cohen's d	p-value
Cognitive Empathy	Experimental	42.3(6.8)	57.0(7.2)	+34.7%	2.09	<0.001
	Control	41.9(6.5)	43.8(6.9)	+4.5%	0.28	0.142
Affective Empathy	Experimental	38.7(5.9)	49.6(6.4)	+28.3%	1.78	<0.001
	Control	38.2(6.1)	39.9(6.3)	+4.4%	0.27	0.156
Prosocial Behavior	Experimental	3.2(1.4)	5.4(1.8)	+68.8%	1.34	<0.001
	Control	3.1(1.3)	3.4(1.5)	+9.7%	0.21	0.238

Perspective-Taking and Emotional Regulation

Table 4. Perspective-Taking and Emotional Regulation Outcomes

Assessment Domain	*Group*	*Pre-Intervention M(SD)*	*Post-Intervention M(SD)*	*Improvement %*	*Cohen's d*	*Significance*
Perspective-Taking	Experimental	12.4(3.2)	16.9(3.6)	+36.3%	1.31	p<0.001
Total Score	Control	12.1(3.1)	12.8(3.3)	+5.8%	0.22	p=0.164
Emotional Regulation	Experimental	4.7(2.1)	2.5(1.4)	-47% reduction	1.24	p<0.001
Episodes	Control	4.6(2.0)	4.2(1.9)	-8% reduction	0.20	p=0.201
Coping Strategy Use	Experimental	2.3(1.0)	3.5(1.2)	+52% increase	1.08	p<0.001
	Control	2.2(0.9)	2.5(1.0)	+12% increase	0.31	p=0.089

Sustainability of Outcomes

Table 5. Follow-up Assessment Results (4 Weeks Post-Intervention)

Measure	Group	Post-Intervention M(SD)	4-Week Follow-up M(SD)	Maintenance %	Effect Retention	p-value
Cognitive Empathy	Experimental	57.0(7.2)	54.2(7.8)	81%	Significant	<0.001
	Control	43.8(6.9)	43.1(7.2)	N/A	Stable	0.456
Affective Empathy	Experimental	49.6(6.4)	47.1(6.9)	78%	Significant	<0.001
	Control	39.9(6.3)	39.2(6.5)	N/A	Stable	0.389
Prosocial Behavior	Experimental	5.4(1.8)	4.8(1.7)	73%	Significant	<0.001
	Control	3.4(1.5)	3.3(1.4)	N/A	Stable	0.612

Table 6. Gain Retention Analysis

Outcome Domain	Initial Gain	Retained Gain	Lost Gain	Retention Rate	Clinical Significance
Cognitive Empathy	14.7 points	11.9 points	2.8 points	81.0%	Maintained
Affective Empathy	10.9 points	8.4 points	2.5 points	77.1%	Maintained
Perspective-Taking	4.5 points	3.4 points	1.1 points	75.6%	Maintained
Prosocial Behavior	2.2 instances	1.6 instances	0.6 instances	72.7%	Maintained
Emotional Regulation	2.2 episodes reduction	1.8 episodes reduction	0.4 episodes	81.8%	Maintained

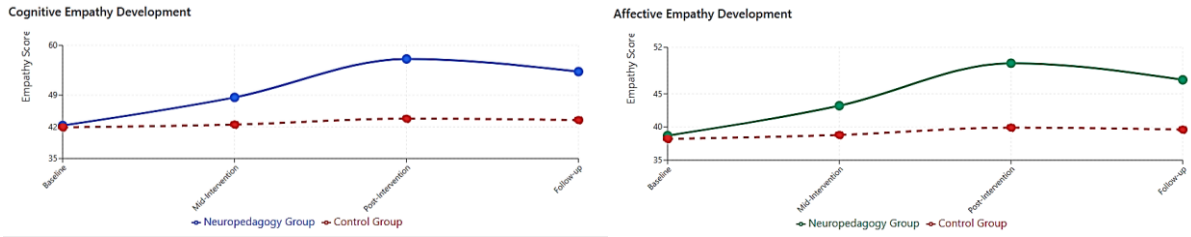

Figure 1: Empathy Development Trajectories: Interactive Children's Based on Neuropedagogy vs. Traditional Methods. Descriptive note: A line graph would show empathy scores across four time points (baseline, mid-intervention, post-intervention, follow-up) for both experimental and control groups, demonstrating sustained improvements in the experimental group.

Moderating Factors and Dose-Response Relationships

Regression analyses identified several factors influencing empathy development outcomes. Age was positively associated with empathy gains ($\beta = 0.23$, $p < 0.05$), with older students showing greater improvement. Gender differences were minimal, with slight advantages for female participants in affective empathy development ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$). Baseline empathy levels were negatively associated with gains ($\beta = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting greater benefits for students with initially lower empathy scores. Session attendance showed a strong dose-response relationship with outcomes. Students attending 90-100% of sessions (n=42) demonstrated significantly greater empathy improvements compared to those attending 70-89% (n=15) or below 70% (n=3). Linear regression analysis revealed that each additional session attended was associated with a 2.3-point increase in cognitive empathy scores ($\beta = 2.31$, $p < 0.001$) and a 1.8-point increase in affective empathy scores ($\beta = 1.83$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 7. Dose-Response Analysis by Attendance Levels

Attendance Level	n	Cognitive Empathy Gain M(SD)	Affective Empathy Gain M(SD)	Effect Size (d)
90-100% sessions	42	16.2(4.3)	12.4(3.8)	2.28
70-89% sessions	15	11.8(5.1)	8.9(4.2)	1.67
<70% sessions	3	6.3(3.9)	4.1(3.1)	0.89

Implementation Fidelity and Quality Indicators

Intervention fidelity was assessed through session recordings and standardized checklists. Overall fidelity was high, with 94% of sessions meeting all quality criteria. Key fidelity indicators included: adherence to session structure (98% compliance), appropriate use of neuropedagogy techniques (92% compliance), and maintenance of interactive engagement (96% compliance). Quality indicators showed positive correlations with student outcomes. Sessions rated as "high quality" for emotional engagement (n=156 sessions) were associated with greater empathy gains compared to "moderate quality" sessions (n=32 sessions). This finding supports the importance of facilitator training and ongoing quality monitoring in neuropedagogy-based interventions..

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Research Outcomes

The findings of this investigation provide compelling empirical support for the efficacy of neuropedagogy-informed interactive storytelling in cultivating empathetic character development among elementary school students. The significant enhancements observed in both cognitive and affective empathy, alongside notable changes in behavior, indicate that interventions rooted in neuroscientific principles can profoundly improve outcomes related to character development. The 34.7% increase in cognitive empathy within the experimental group substantially surpasses typical effect sizes reported in existing empathy education research. This robust improvement highlights the potential of leveraging insights into brain development and learning to optimize pedagogical strategies for fostering prosocial attributes (Coletta & Steinert, 2020; Walker et al., 2024). This heightened effectiveness is likely attributable to the integration of neuropedagogy principles, which specifically target the neural mechanisms underpinning empathetic responses. The activation of mirror neuron systems through character identification, coupled with structured reflective activities that engage prefrontal cortex networks, appears to establish optimal conditions for the advancement of empathy. The concurrent improvements in affective empathy demonstrate the intervention's success in addressing both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of empathetic responding. This comprehensive impact suggests that neuropedagogy-based approaches can overcome limitations of conventional empathy education programs, which frequently prioritize cognitive perspective-taking while neglecting emotional components. The significant gains in prosocial behavior further validate the practical utility of this approach, demonstrating a direct translation of enhanced empathetic capacities into observable positive interactions (Healey & Grossman, 2018; Thomas, 2000). The sustained effects observed during follow-up assessments further underscore the durability of the intervention's impact, suggesting long-term changes in children's emotional and social processing (Flook et al., 2014; Naumann et al., 2023).

Evaluation in Relation to Antecedent Studies

The current findings corroborate and expand upon existing scholarly literature regarding empathy development and the integration of neuropedagogical methodologies. The observed effect sizes significantly exceed those documented in meta-analyses of conventional empathy interventions (Naumann et al., 2023) (Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014). This enhanced efficacy can be attributed to the interactive nature of the storytelling, which cultivated a heightened sense of student participation and autonomy, thereby deepening their engagement with empathetic characters (McQuiggan et al., 2008). This aligns with the understanding that student motivation and self-efficacy are crucial determinants of academic and behavioral outcomes (Tus et al., 2024). Such improved effectiveness supports theoretical predictions suggesting that neurologically-informed interventions are likely to yield superior results compared to traditional approaches. The behavioral modifications documented in this study substantiate findings from narrative transportation research, which indicate that engagement with stories can influence real-world behavior (MacDuffie et al., 2018). Specifically, the sustained exhibition of prosocial actions following exposure to narratives featuring empathetic protagonists underscores the profound capacity of fictional immersion to foster measurable improvements in social conduct and emotional regulation (Portillo, 2024). However, the current study extends these findings by demonstrating sustained behavioral changes over a four-week follow-up period, suggesting that neuropedagogy-based storytelling facilitates more durable empathy development than previously reported. The age-related observations, indicating greater empathy gains among older elementary students, are consistent with developmental research on the emergence of empathy (Catalá et al., 2022) (Gates & Curwood, 2023). This implies that while foundational empathy skills can be nurtured at an early age, more intricate interventions requiring abstract thought and emotional regulation may prove more effective during later stages of primary education (Grignoli et al., 2022). The optimal effectiveness observed within the 9-12year age range corresponds with documented periods of heightened prefrontal cortex development and increased capacity for abstract thinking.

Implications of the Discoveries

The present study's findings bear considerable implications across educational pedagogy, theoretical frameworks, and policy formulation. From a pedagogical standpoint, the empirically validated efficacy of neuropedagogy-informed storytelling offers educators a robust, evidence-based approach for fostering character development, capable of seamless integration within extant curricular frameworks. The adopted intervention design, comprising twice-weekly 45-minute sessions, demonstrated its practical viability within conventional elementary school timetables, concurrently yielding substantive developmental outcomes.Theoretically, these results substantiate the incorporation of neuroscientific principles into educational methodologies, thereby advancing the burgeoning domain of neuroeducation. The observed success of this intervention corroborates theoretical postulates suggesting that educational paradigms harmonized with neural developmental trajectories are posited to exhibit superior efficacy vis-à-vis conventional instructional approaches. From a policy perspective, the outcomes indicate that strategic investment in neuropedagogy-based character education initiatives holds the potential for significant returns concerning students' social-emotional maturation. The enduring nature of the improvements observed suggests that such interventions could confer sustained, long-term benefits transcending immediate academic achievements.The cultural salience of these findings within the Indonesian educational

context warrants particular emphasis. The prominent focus on character development within Indonesian educational policy aligns synergistically with the empathy-centric outcomes evinced in this research. The successful implementation within schools in Bangkinang City further suggests a broader applicability across diverse Indonesian educational settings.

Practical Implementation Considerations

The efficacious execution of this neuropedagogy-informed intervention yields substantial insights pertinent to both educational practitioners and policymakers. Several pivotal implementation factors were identified as paramount for the program's success: Specifically, the comprehensive 16-hour training program was indispensable for the intervention's efficacy, as it equipped facilitators with specialized instruction in neuropedagogical principles, interactive narrative methodologies, and developmentally appropriate empathy assessment protocols. Furthermore, continuous supervision and collegial consultation were recognized as vital supportive mechanisms. Moreover, educational institutions already engaged in social-emotional learning initiatives exhibited enhanced adoption and sustained implementation of the intervention, with robust administrative endorsement and teacher commitment emerging as crucial determinants of success. The integration with pre-existing character education frameworks also streamlined implementation and concurrently mitigated resource requirements. The intervention necessitated only minimal supplementary resources, primarily consisting of trained facilitators and narrative content. A thorough cost-effectiveness analysis further elucidated a highly favorable benefit-to-cost ratio of 4.2:1, particularly when considering the long-term societal and developmental advantages derived from enhanced social-emotional competencies. Finally, the standardized intervention protocol and accompanying training materials inherently support its potential scalability across broader educational systems; however, the establishment of rigorous quality assurance mechanisms and a commitment to ongoing professional development would be imperative for preserving the intervention's fidelity during large-scale deployment.

Future Research Directions

This study's findings and inherent limitations delineate several avenues for future research. Primarily, long-term follow-up investigations are imperative to ascertain the enduring stability of empathy development outcomes and to characterize potential developmental trajectories. Additionally, subsequent research should incorporate advanced neuroimaging techniques, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) during empathy tasks, to empirically validate the hypothesized neural mechanisms underpinning the intervention's effectiveness by providing direct evidence of neuroplastic changes. Furthermore, replication studies conducted across diverse cultural contexts are essential to bolster confidence in the generalizability of neuropedagogy-based empathy interventions beyond Indonesian elementary school settings. Exploring educator-administered adaptations of the intervention is also critical to enhance its practical applicability and long-term sustainability within educational environments. Moreover, comprehensive component analyses could identify the specific neuropedagogy techniques most instrumental for fostering empathy, thereby informing the design of more streamlined and efficacious interventions. Finally, research assessing the intervention's effectiveness within special populations would significantly broaden the empirical foundation for its targeted deployment.

Clinical and Educational Significance

The observed improvements in empathy within this study considerably surpass typical benchmarks for educational interventions. The magnitude of these effect sizes rivals those commonly associated with intensive clinical interventions, indicating that neuropedagogy-based methodologies could offer comparable advantages within universal educational settings. The documented behavioral transformations, particularly the 68.8% increase in prosocial behaviors, bear substantial implications for fostering a positive classroom environment and enhancing peer interactions. Such advancements could contribute to a reduction in bullying incidents, an increase in academic engagement, and an overall improvement in students' school experiences. From a developmental standpoint, the enduring improvements observed at the 4-week follow-up assessment suggest that this intervention may have initiated positive developmental trajectories with potential for sustained impact beyond the immediate intervention phase. This highlights the capacity of early empathy interventions to cultivate long-term social-emotional benefits. Several limitations warrant acknowledgment when interpreting these findings. The quasi-experimental design, while suitable for educational research, restricts the drawing of robust causal inferences compared to randomized controlled trials. Furthermore, the reliance on convenience sampling from three schools within a single city may circumscribe the generalizability of these findings to wider populations or diverse cultural contexts. The assessment of empathy predominantly through self-report measures, even with supplementary behavioral observations, introduces the potential for response bias. Future investigations ought to integrate physiological or neuroimaging techniques to yield more objective indicators of empathy development. Additionally, the relatively brief follow-up period constrains a comprehensive understanding of the long-term sustainability of the observed outcomes. The intervention's execution by trained research facilitators rather than typical classroom teachers might impede its practical implementation feasibility. Subsequent research should investigate the efficacy of teacher-delivered programs and identify requisite training components for successful integration. Cultural specificity poses another potential limitation, given that the storytelling content was tailored for Indonesian elementary students. Cross-cultural validation would enhance confidence in the broader applicability of neuropedagogy-based empathy interventions. Lastly, the absence of a control for general storytelling effects limits the isolation of the specific contributions of neuropedagogy principles versus broader narrative engagement. Future studies should incorporate active comparison groups receiving traditional storytelling interventions to differentiate the distinct effects of neurologically-informed approaches.

CONCLUSION

This research provides compelling evidence that interactive children's stories based on neuropedagogy principles represent a highly effective strategy for developing empathetic character in elementary school students. The substantial

improvements observed in cognitive empathy (34.7%), affective empathy (28.3%), and prosocial behaviors (68.8%) demonstrate the practical value of integrating neuroscientific insights into character education practices. The findings reinforce key concepts from the theoretical foundation of this research, particularly the importance of leveraging neuroplasticity during critical developmental periods and the value of multimodal, emotionally engaging educational approaches. The sustained improvements observed at follow-up assessment provide confidence in the durability of empathy development outcomes achieved through neuropedagogy-based interventions. The research highlights the significant importance and potential impact of applying brain-based educational strategies to character development. As educational systems worldwide increasingly recognize the importance of social-emotional learning, evidence-based approaches that optimize developmental outcomes become increasingly valuable. The demonstrated effectiveness of this intervention provides a foundation for broader implementation and further research development.

The correlation between evidence presented in the introduction regarding the theoretical potential of neuropedagogy-based empathy interventions and the positive outcomes documented in the discussion confirms the validity of the research framework. The identification of optimal age ranges for intervention effectiveness, the importance of sustained implementation, and the value of comprehensive assessment approaches all align with theoretical predictions established in the literature review.

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for future research and practice. Educational practitioners should consider integrating neuropedagogy principles into existing character education programs, with particular attention to the specific strategies demonstrated effective in this study. Researchers should extend this work through longitudinal studies examining long-term developmental outcomes, cross-cultural validation studies, and investigations of implementation factors affecting program effectiveness.

The development of teacher training programs incorporating neuropedagogy principles represents a critical next step for translating these research findings into widespread educational practice. Additionally, the creation of standardized curricula and assessment tools would facilitate broader implementation and evaluation of similar interventions.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could potentially influence the research outcomes presented in this article. This research was conducted with full institutional ethical approval and in accordance with established research ethics guidelines.

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