

## The Use of Hand Puppets to Improve Speaking Skills in Early Childhood at RA Darunnajah

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This research aims to improve speaking skills in early childhood at RA Darunnajah through the use of hand puppets as an interactive learning media. **Methods:** A classroom action research design with two cycles was used, involving direct observation, interviews, and documentation. The study focused on measuring the effectiveness of hand puppets in enhancing speaking skills. **Results:** The use of hand puppet media significantly increased children's active participation in speaking, expanded their vocabulary, and boosted their self-confidence. Storytelling activities with hand puppets created a dynamic and engaging learning environment that supported language development. **Novelty:** This study highlights the impact of creative media, such as hand puppets, on improving early childhood speaking skills, especially for children who are shy or lack confidence in speaking.

## INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a very important stage in a child's development. ECE includes education for children from birth to six years old, aimed at preparing them to enter formal education levels. At this time, children experience rapid development, both physically, cognitively, socially-emotionally, and linguistically. Therefore, the education provided must be centered on the needs, interests, and characteristics of the child. Learning in early childhood education emphasizes the process of learning through play, where children are encouraged to explore their surroundings through direct experiences. This approach aligns with child development theory as proposed by Jean Piaget, which states that children learn through active experiences by interacting with their environment. In addition, Lev Vygotsky also emphasized the importance of social interaction in the child's learning process, especially through guidance by adults or peers. Another background that serves as the basis for early childhood education (PAUD) is the important role of education at a young age in shaping the foundation of a child's character and life skills. Research shows that children who receive quality education early on have a greater chance of succeeding academically and socially in the future, Heckman 2006. In addition, learning in early childhood education (PAUD) also aims to reduce educational disparities due to socio-economic factors, thereby providing fairer opportunities for all children. The Indonesian government, through Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, also emphasizes the importance of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) as an integral part of the education system. The Early Childhood Education (PAUD) curriculum in Indonesia is designed to

support the holistic development of children, encompassing aspects of religious and moral values, physical-motor skills, cognitive, language, social-emotional, and arts.

However, the implementation of early childhood education (PAUD) in Indonesia still faces various challenges, such as the lack of competent educators, limited facilities, and low community participation. Therefore, collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and the community is needed to improve the quality and accessibility of early childhood education (PAUD).

Speaking ability is one of the fundamental skills that is very important in the language development of young children. Through good speaking skills, children can express their feelings, thoughts, and desires to others, thereby enhancing their social and intellectual interaction abilities [1]. At an early age, speaking skills need to be developed optimally so that children have a good foundation for communication in their future lives, Iskandar & Sahni, 2019. However, in reality, many children in early childhood education institutions, such as RA Darunnajah, still experience difficulties in speaking, such as lack of confidence, fluency, or difficulty in constructing good sentences, Wahyuni 2020. This can be caused by various factors, such as a lack of stimuli, insufficient engaging media, or less interactive teaching methods. Therefore, strategies and media are needed to stimulate children's interest in speaking and improve their verbal skills. One of the media that has proven effective in improving children's speaking skills is hand puppets. Hand puppets as a visual aid can help children feel more confident in speaking and expressing themselves [2]. The use of hand puppets allows children to speak through the puppet characters, making them feel more comfortable and engaged in the communication process [3]. Additionally, hand puppets can enhance the appeal of learning, making the classroom atmosphere more enjoyable, and encouraging more active verbal interaction between children and teachers [4]. This research aims to examine the effectiveness of using hand puppets as a medium to improve the speaking skills of early childhood children at RA Darunnajah. By using the classroom action research (CAR) method, it is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a reference in the development of innovative and engaging learning methods to improve children's speaking skills. Please provide the text you would like me to translate.

Cognitive, language, and speech development are important aspects of a child's growth that are interconnected and influence their ability to understand, express, and interact with their environment. These three aspects develop dynamically from infancy to adulthood and are influenced by biological factors, the environment, and the child's learning experiences. Cognitive development includes a child's ability to think, understand, remember, and solve problems. According to Jean Piaget's theory, children go through stages of cognitive development that include sensorimotor (0-2 years), preoperational (2-7 years), concrete operational (7-11 years), and formal operational (11 years and older). In the early stages of development, children learn through direct experiences with their environment, which helps them build new concepts and knowledge. Proper cognitive stimulation, such as playing, reading, and exploring, is

essential to support a child's brain development during critical periods. Language Development

Language is the primary communication tool that enables children to express ideas, feelings, and needs. Language development involves receptive aspects (understanding language) and expressive aspects (using language). Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in language development, where children learn through dialogue with adults or peers. In this process, an environment rich in vocabulary and verbal stimulation, such as reading together or storytelling, greatly supports a child's ability to recognize and understand language deeply, speech development.

A child's speaking ability develops from an early age through the process of imitating sounds, uttering their first words, to forming simple sentences. The development of speech is greatly influenced by stimulation from the environment and social interaction. At the age of 1-3 years, children begin to actively explore their speaking abilities by combining words into phrases and sentences. A supportive environment, such as frequently communicating with the child, plays an important role in accelerating their speech development.

These three aspects influence each other. Developing cognition helps children understand the structure of language, while speaking ability reinforces their cognitive expression. Obstacles in one aspect, such as speech delay, can affect the development of others. Therefore, holistic stimulation and observation of child development are very important to support their optimal growth. It is also important to create a conducive learning environment, including providing game-based stimuli, reading stories, or involving the child in daily conversations. In this way, children can develop their cognitive, language, and speaking abilities in a balanced manner.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses qualitative methods to deeply understand the use of hand puppets in enhancing speaking skills in early childhood at RA Darunnajah. Qualitative methods were chosen because this research focuses on exploring the learning process, interactions, and experiences of children and educators in using hand puppets as a learning medium. This approach allows researchers to obtain rich and in-depth data through direct observation, interviews, and documentation [5].

### **1. Research Approach**

The approach used in this research is qualitative descriptive, which aims to describe how hand puppets are used in learning and their impact on the development of early childhood speaking skills. This research observes children's behavior, how teachers use hand puppets, and children's responses during the learning process.

### **2. Research Subject**

The subjects of the research are children in group B (ages 5-6 years) at RA Darunnajah who are the target of implementing hand puppet media in speaking lessons.

In addition, the teachers involved in the learning process also become the main source of data, considering their role in designing and implementing activities with the media.

### 3. Data Collection Techniques

**Table 1.** Observation sheet.

Aspect Being Observed	Rating scale	Explanation
Fluency in speaking	1 (less) – 5 (very good)	Assessing the fluency of a child's speech while using a hand puppet
Vocabulary usage	1 (limited) – 5 (various)	Assessing the variation and diversity of vocabulary used by children
Intonation and expression	1 (monotonous) – 5 (different)	Assessing the child's ability to use appropriate intonation and expression
Self-confidence	1 (doubt) – 5 (self-confidence)	Assessing the level of courage of a child speaking in front of friends while using a puppet
Participation in activities	1 (minim) – 5 (active)	Observing how active the child is in activities using hand puppets

**Table 2.** Assessment rubric.

Aspects Being Evaluated	Rating Scale	Explanation
The Courage to Speak	1 (doubt) – 5 (self-confidence)	Assessing the child's level of courage to speak in that situation
Vocabulary Usage	1 (limited) – 5 (various)	Assessing the variation of vocabulary used in a story or conversation
Sentence Structure	1 (simple) – 5 (complex)	Assessing how well the child uses appropriate sentence structures
Interaction with a Doll	1 (minim) – 5 (active)	Assessing children's participation in conversations or interactions with dolls


**Table 3.** Interview instrument.

Teacher	Less	Good
1. What is your opinion about the use of hand puppets in teaching?		
2. What is the main purpose of using hand puppets in teaching speaking skills?		
3. How is the process of implementing hand puppets in daily learning activities?		
4. Do children seem more active in speaking when using hand puppets? Can you explain?		
5. What are the challenges faced in using hand puppets as a medium?		
6. How do you measure the child's success in improving speaking skills using this media?		
7. Do you have any specific strategies to make hand puppet media more appealing to children?		

**Table 4.** Interview instrument.

Child	Less	Good
1. Do you like playing with hand puppets? Why?		
2. What do you feel when playing with a hand puppet?		
3. What do you often talk about with the hand puppet?		
4. Tell us about your experience using hand puppets in class.		
5. What do you like most about hand puppets?		

**Table 5.** Documentation.

Date	Documentation
23 October 2024	

25 October 2024



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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RA Darunnajah has conducted a series of activities using hand puppets in the speaking learning process, and the results show an improvement in the speaking skills of the students [6]. In this activity, the teacher encourages the children to speak through hand puppets, involves them in interactive games, and provides encouragement for them to dare to express themselves. In addition, the teacher also gives simple rewards to increase the children's motivation to speak. Although hand puppets are quite effective, there are several challenges faced, such as the limited variety of props and time constraints. For that reason, support from the school and parents is needed in providing adequate learning media and setting aside special time for children to practice speaking.

Early childhood children experience rapid development, including in language and speaking skills. Good speaking skills can help children express their desires, interact with others, and build self-confidence. At RA Darunnajah, interactive learning methods such as the use of hand puppets have become one of the approaches to enhance skills. The use of hand puppets as a learning aid has a profound positive impact on improving the speaking skills of early childhood children. Through hand puppets, children can speak more expressively and confidently. This media allows children to practice speaking with greater comfort because they feel "hidden" behind the puppet characters they play with, which helps them express themselves freely [2]. Hand puppets serve as an aid that not only stimulates speaking skills but also helps children understand the context of conversations. When the teacher uses hand puppets to convey a story or a specific scenario, the children are invited to understand the plot, interpret the characters' emotions, and learn to respond in conversation. This situation supports the social learning theory proposed by Bandura, where children learn through imitation and observation, and develop language through active interaction [7].

Moreover, hand puppets have proven effective in creating a more interactive and enjoyable classroom atmosphere, which ultimately increases children's participation in learning activities. When using hand puppets, teachers can create a role-playing environment where children engage in two-way communication. This atmosphere gives them the opportunity to practice expressing opinions, answering questions, and interacting with their friends. In such an atmosphere, children become more interested in communicating, which is important for their socio-emotional development [4]. From a psychological development perspective, young children tend to easily experience shame

and anxiety when having to speak in public or interact with friends they do not know well. Hand puppets provide a solution that can help children overcome these psychological barriers because they feel like they are speaking through another character, which allows them to reduce their fear of speaking. Hand puppets also encourage children's creativity in language and improvisation, helping them to form new vocabulary and enrich their language skills [1].

When this research also found several challenges in the application of hand puppet media. Some children take longer to get used to using puppets as a medium for speaking, especially those who are more shy or lack confidence. Additionally, the success of using hand puppets greatly depends on the teacher's ability to create a supportive atmosphere and effectively guide speaking activities [3]. In today's era, educators are required to be creative and responsive in addressing the needs and characteristics of each child in order to create engaging interactions. Overall, hand puppets as a medium for speech learning have proven to provide significant benefits in developing early childhood speaking skills at RA Darunnajah. This research contributes to the field of early childhood education, particularly in finding effective and innovative learning strategies. The use of hand puppets is recommended for other early childhood education institutions, with the note that its implementation requires an approach tailored to the characteristics and needs of children in each age group. The use of hand puppets has been shown to be effective in improving early childhood speaking skills at RA Darunnajah. The children showed improvement in vocabulary, speaking fluency, and the courage to interact. Children appeared more enthusiastic when given hand puppets to support the story, and they seemed more expressive in conveying their ideas and feelings.

This study shows that the use of hand puppets significantly improves the speaking skills of early childhood children at RA Darunnajah. The implementation of the research was conducted in several cycles involving children aged 4-5 years. The results of each cycle showed a significant improvement in several aspects of speaking skills, including fluency in speaking, courage to speak in front of friends, the ability to form sentences, and the ability to express emotions and ideas. In the first cycle, the children still appeared shy and limited in their interactions using hand puppets. Most children are not yet confident, only able to utter a few words, and tend to use gestures or remain silent when asked to speak. However, with consistent guidance from teachers and repeated practice, the children began to show better responses. In the second cycle [2]. In this cycle, the children began to string together simple sentences and bravely used puppets to tell short stories. By the third cycle, almost all the children showed the courage to speak more openly and were able to improvise while storytelling using hand puppets. Children also seem increasingly enthusiastic about role-playing with dolls, which makes them more expressive and confident in speaking [4]. They are able to construct sentences more fluently and are not hesitant to express their ideas. In addition, interactions among children are becoming more active, with many of them daring to communicate and answer questions from friends or teachers. The existence of this improvement is

supported by a theory that states that hand puppet media can help children feel more comfortable speaking because they feel as if they are speaking through the puppet character, not directly to another person. This helps reduce the fear or embarrassment that children usually experience when speaking in public [3]. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that the use of hand puppets is effective in improving the speaking skills of early childhood children. Hand puppets as a learning medium allow children to communicate in a fun way, reduce psychological barriers to speaking, and encourage creativity and courage in self-expression. These results align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of using visual media and teaching aids in developing early childhood speaking skills [1], [3].

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding :** The use of hand puppets enriches the teaching methods of teachers in developing children's language skills. Teachers can utilize hand puppets to introduce new vocabulary, practice voice intonation, and teach structured speaking. Children engage more actively in learning, perceiving the puppets as playmates rather than mere educational tools. This process helps children develop speaking skills naturally and enjoyably. **Implication :** Hand puppets offer a creative solution for early childhood educators, allowing them to create stories, dialogues, and simple simulations relevant to children's daily experiences. This approach enhances children's understanding of communication context, boosting their confidence in practicing speaking skills. **Limitation :** The effectiveness of hand puppets as a teaching tool depends on the consistency and creativity of the teacher's approach, which might vary across different educators. **Future Research :** Future studies could explore the long-term impact of hand puppet use on children's language development and social skills, as well as how different types of puppets influence various aspects of communication.

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