

IMPROVING CHILDREN'S SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH HAND PUPPET MEDIA FOR 4-5-YEAR-OLDS AT TK MUTIARA INSANI

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Abstract:

This classroom action research aims to improve children's speaking skills through the use of hand puppet media for children aged 4-5 years at TK Mutiara Insani. The subjects of this study were 16 children, consisting of 8 boys and 8 girls. The research was conducted in two cycles, with each cycle including the stages of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection. Data were collected through observation, documentation, and field notes, then analysed descriptively and qualitatively by calculating the percentage of achievement of children's speaking skill indicators. The results showed that children's speaking skills improved after the implementation of hand puppet media. In the initial condition, most children were still reluctant to express their opinions and had limited vocabulary. After the first cycle, their speaking skills began to improve, as indicated by their increasing courage to tell stories and answer simple questions. More significant progress was observed in the second cycle, where children were able to use simple sentences, tell stories with expression, and interact more actively with peers and teachers. It can be concluded that the use of hand puppet media can improve the speaking skills of children aged 4-5 years at TK Mutiara Insani. This medium is effective because it captures children's attention, builds self-confidence, and provides an enjoyable learning experience.

Keywords: *speaking skills, hand puppet media, early childhood*

Abstrak:

Penelitian tindakan kelas ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara anak melalui penggunaan media boneka tangan pada anak usia 4-5 tahun di TK Mutiara Insani. Subjek penelitian adalah 16 anak yang terdiri dari 4 anak laki-laki dan 12 anak perempuan. Penelitian dilaksanakan dalam dua siklus, di mana setiap siklus terdiri dari tahap perencanaan, pelaksanaan, observasi, dan refleksi. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, dokumentasi, dan catatan lapangan. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif kualitatif dengan menghitung persentase ketercapaian indikator kemampuan berbicara anak. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan kemampuan berbicara anak setelah diterapkannya media boneka tangan. Pada kondisi awal, sebagian besar anak masih kurang berani mengungkapkan pendapat dan menggunakan kosakata yang terbatas. Setelah dilakukan tindakan pada siklus I, kemampuan berbicara anak mulai meningkat, ditandai dengan anak lebih berani bercerita dan menjawab pertanyaan sederhana. Peningkatan yang lebih signifikan terlihat pada siklus II, di mana anak mampu menggunakan kalimat sederhana, bercerita dengan ekspresi, serta berinteraksi secara lebih aktif dengan teman maupun guru. Dengan demikian dapat disimpulkan bahwa penggunaan media boneka tangan dapat meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara anak usia 4-5 tahun di TK Mutiara Insani. Media ini efektif digunakan karena mampu menarik perhatian, membangkitkan rasa percaya diri, serta memberikan pengalaman belajar yang menyenangkan bagi anak.

Kata Kunci: *kemampuan berbicara, media boneka tangan, anak usia dini*

INTRODUCTION

Language is the main tool humans use to communicate, convey ideas, feelings, and thoughts to others. According to Vygotsky (in Santrock, 2018), language plays an important role in children's cognitive development because through language, children can think, remember, and regulate their behaviour. In early childhood, language ability is not only a means of communication but also serves as a foundation for the development of other aspects such as social, emotional, and cognitive growth. One of the most important language skills is speaking. Through speaking skills, children learn to express their opinions, interact with peers and adults, and develop confidence in conveying ideas verbally.

Early childhood is often referred to as the golden age, a period when children are able to absorb information very quickly. At the age range of 4–5 years, children begin to understand simple instructions, use a wider variety of vocabulary, and attempt to construct sentences to express their thoughts. According to Hurlock (2013), children's language development is greatly influenced by their environment and the stimulation provided. Therefore, teachers in early childhood education institutions play a crucial role in creating learning activities that can optimally stimulate children's speaking abilities.

However, the reality in the field shows that not all children develop according to their developmental stages. Preliminary observations at TK Mutiara Insani revealed that many children aged 4–5 years still experience difficulties in speaking. The children appeared reluctant to express their opinions, answered questions briefly, used limited vocabulary, and some preferred to remain silent when asked by the teacher or when interacting with peers. This condition becomes an obstacle in language development because, according to Piaget (2008), early childhood is at the preoperational stage, which is characterized by the development of symbolic abilities. If speaking skills are not properly developed, children will struggle to express their symbolic ideas verbally.

The issue of limited speaking ability in early childhood needs to be addressed immediately through appropriate strategies and learning media that suit the characteristics of children. Learning media for young children should be concrete, engaging, and capable of creating an enjoyable atmosphere. One of the media believed to overcome speaking barriers is the hand puppet. According to Arsyad (2019), puppet media is a form of visual media that can be used to convey messages in an engaging and interactive way. Hand puppets not only serve as play tools but also as communication intermediaries that can attract children's attention, spark curiosity, and reduce shyness when speaking.

The use of hand puppets in early childhood learning aligns with Parten's theory of play (1932), which states that play activities encourage children to interact, communicate, and learn through social experiences. With hand puppets, children do not merely watch or listen; they can actively participate in conversations, role-playing, and storytelling. This allows children to use spoken language more actively while training their confidence in expressing ideas. According to Bruner (in Sugiono, 2017), the use of concrete media in learning helps children understand concepts more easily because they learn through direct experiences.

Several previous studies have also demonstrated the effectiveness of hand puppets in improving children's speaking abilities. Research conducted by Rahmawati (2019) showed that children who learned using hand puppets were

braver in speaking, more active in answering questions, and able to expand their vocabulary. Another study by Sari (2021) found that hand puppets created a joyful learning atmosphere, motivating children to communicate with peers and teachers. Similarly, Kurniawati (2020) concluded that hand puppets serve as an effective tool for training children in storytelling and self-expression.

Nevertheless, research on the use of hand puppets to improve speaking skills among 4–5-year-old children is still rarely conducted at TK Mutiara Insani. The children in this school have distinctive characteristics-most are shy, lack confidence, and tend to remain silent when asked to speak. This creates a knowledge gap, as there has been limited research describing in detail the effectiveness of hand puppets in this specific learning context. Through this classroom action research, it is expected that a clearer understanding will be obtained regarding how hand puppets can be used as a learning medium to overcome speaking difficulties in early childhood.

This research aims not only to identify the initial condition of children's speaking abilities but also to describe the process of implementing hand puppets in learning activities and to evaluate the improvement in children's speaking skills after the intervention. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the body of knowledge in early childhood education, particularly regarding language learning strategies. Practically, it provides valuable insights for teachers as a reference in selecting creative and engaging learning media suited to children's needs. For the children, this study offers opportunities to learn to speak in a fun way, build self-confidence, and develop communication skills from an early age.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a quantitative approach with a classroom action research (CAR) design. The choice of this design is based on the objective of the study, which is to determine the improvement of children's speaking skills after the implementation of hand puppet media in learning activities at TK Mutiara Insani. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (in Arikunto, 2019), classroom action research is a reflective form of inquiry conducted by teachers to improve the quality of teaching in their own classrooms through cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. With this design, the researcher, who also serves as the teacher, plays an active role in the teaching process, while the results are systematically observed and analysed to examine the changes in children's speaking abilities from one cycle to the next.

The population of this research consists of all children aged 4–5 years enrolled at TK Mutiara Insani during the current academic year. The total number of children in this group is 16, comprising 4 boys and 12 girls. Since the population size is relatively small, the study uses a saturated sampling or total sampling technique, meaning all members of the population are included as research subjects. This technique was chosen to ensure that the results accurately represent the actual classroom conditions while avoiding bias in sample selection. Thus, the sample of this study consists of the same 16 children as the population.

The objectives of this study are to describe the initial condition of the speaking ability of 4–5-year-old children at TK Mutiara Insani, to explain the implementation of hand puppet media in learning activities, and to determine the improvement in children's speaking abilities after the intervention through the research cycles. Using a quantitative approach, the study focuses on numerical data

in the form of children's speaking ability scores measured through assessment instruments.

Data collection techniques include observation and documentation. Observation is used to obtain data on children's speaking abilities during the learning process. The observation sheet is developed based on indicators of early childhood speaking skills, such as confidence in expressing opinions, fluency in speaking, vocabulary usage, and the ability to construct simple sentences. The teacher-researcher observes each child and assigns scores for each indicator according to predetermined criteria. Documentation includes photos of learning activities and field notes.

The data analysis technique used in this research is quantitative descriptive analysis with percentage calculations. The children's speaking ability scores are calculated in each cycle and then analysed to observe progress from the initial condition to Cycle I and Cycle II. The percentage formula used is:

$$P = \frac{\text{Total Score Obtained}}{\text{Maximum Score}} \times 100$$

The results of these calculations are then categorized according to the developmental assessment criteria:

- a. Not Yet Developed (NYD) if the percentage is < 50%,
- b. Beginning to Develop (BD) if 50–69%,
- c. Developing as Expected (DAE) if 70–84%, and
- d. Very Well Developed (VWD) if ≥ 85%.

Through this method, the researcher can quantitatively identify the improvement of children's speaking abilities from one cycle to the next. Data analysis is carried out in stages, beginning with calculating the individual scores of each child, followed by determining the class average, and then comparing the results across cycles. Based on this analysis, conclusions are drawn regarding the effectiveness of hand puppet media in enhancing the speaking skills of 4–5-year-old children at TK Mutiara Insani.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the initial stage of the research, which focused on improving early childhood language skills through the use of hand puppet media, the researcher first conducted a preliminary observation in Group A as the research subject. The observation was carried out to obtain a realistic overview of the ongoing learning process, particularly in the aspect of children's language development. The observation technique was considered the most appropriate method because it provided authentic data regarding children's activities and their responses during the learning process.

The implementation of the observation focused on role-playing activities, with the aim of identifying the extent of children's participation and their ability to express themselves verbally. The results of the observation revealed that the children's language abilities still faced several challenges. This was evident both from their learning outcomes and their level of participation in activities. In other words, the children's language skills were still at a developmental stage that had not yet reached the desired level of proficiency.

These findings then served as the basis for the researcher to reflect and design an improvement plan to be implemented in Cycle I. It was expected that through the application of role-playing activities using hand puppet media, children would gain more meaningful learning experiences, thereby enhancing their language skills more effectively.

Based on the data analysis obtained from 16 participants, the average percentage of children's language skill achievement in the initial condition was 45.45%. This figure indicates that the children's overall language ability was still within the Beginning to Develop (BD) category according to the indicators of early childhood developmental achievement. These initial findings confirmed the need for innovative learning strategies, one of which is the use of hand puppet media, to help children achieve more optimal language development.

The next stage of this research involved analysing and processing the data collected during the implementation of the actions. The data analysed consisted of the children's language skill development scores gathered from Cycle I and Cycle II. The analysis aimed to assess the effectiveness of role-playing activities using hand puppet media in improving children's speaking abilities.

After the actions in each cycle were completed, all collected data were processed systematically to produce accurate and reliable information. The results of the data processing were presented in the form of quantitative values reflecting the level of children's language development. These values then served as the basis for addressing the research problem statement, namely determining the effectiveness of hand puppet media in enhancing the language abilities of Group A children at TK Mutiara Insani.

1. Data Management of Cycle I

a. Planning

The planning stage in Cycle I was carefully designed to ensure that the learning activities using hand puppet media could be carried out in accordance with the research objective, namely to improve the speaking skills of children aged 4–5 years. At this stage, the researcher collaborated with the classroom teacher to develop a Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH) integrated with the use of hand puppet media in the core learning activities. The RPPH was designed by taking into account the basic competencies and language development indicators for early childhood as stated in the Early Childhood Education Curriculum. The selected indicators focused on speaking skills, including children's confidence in expressing opinions, their ability to construct simple sentences, fluency in speaking, and appropriate vocabulary use.

During the planning phase, the researcher determined a learning time allocation of 30 minutes per session, with three sessions in one cycle. Each activity began with an apperception activity such as singing or a light conversation, followed by an introduction to hand puppets through a story demonstrated by the researcher. The children were then given the opportunity to use the hand puppets in small groups, while the researcher conducted observations using the prepared assessment instruments. The observation sheet was designed to record children's speaking abilities based on the predetermined indicators.

b. Implementation

In the first meeting, the researcher began with a preliminary activity to prepare and condition the class. The children were invited to sing and engage in light conversation as a form of apperception. This stage aimed to create a pleasant atmosphere and help the children feel relaxed before moving on to the core activity. Afterward, the researcher introduced the hand puppets to the children by performing a short story using the puppets. The story chosen had simple themes close to the children's daily lives, such as friendship or playing together.

This approach was intended to attract the children's attention and spark their curiosity about the hand puppets. The core activity focused on role-playing using hand puppets. The researcher first demonstrated how to use the puppets to speak and interact, then the children were given the opportunity to try it themselves. To ensure that every child had an equal chance to participate, the activities were conducted in groups. The children were asked to move the puppets and say simple sentences, such as greetings, self-introductions, or short dialogues related to the story's theme. During this process, the researcher guided the children by providing direction, motivation, and additional examples when needed.

c. Observation

The results of the observation showed that out of 16 children who participated in the study, only about one-third of them were confident enough to use the hand puppets to speak loudly and clearly. The rest spoke softly, hesitantly, or still required teacher assistance. Their vocabulary was still limited, mostly consisting of simple and commonly used words such as "hello," "friend," or "let's play." In terms of fluency, the more active children showed better progress compared to those who were still passive.

In general, the findings from Cycle I indicated that the use of hand puppet media successfully increased children's interest and engagement in learning activities, although the improvement in fluency and sentence construction was not yet significant. Based on the assessment results, the average score of children's speaking ability increased from the initial condition of 45.45% to around 60%. According to the developmental achievement indicators for early childhood, this result still falls under the Beginning to Develop (BD) category.

These findings served as an important reflection for the researcher to design improvement steps for the next cycle. More varied and interactive learning strategies were needed to encourage passive children to participate actively. In addition, the teacher needed to provide more examples of vocabulary and simple sentences that children could imitate while using the hand puppets, so that in Cycle II, a more significant improvement in their speaking skills could be achieved.

Table 1: Results of Cycle I

No	Name	Speaking Skill Score	Category
1	Alizzan	80	BSH
2	Almi	60	MB
3	Azkia	65	MB
4	Bilal	75	BSH

5	Hamizan	80	BSH
6	Husna	80	BSH
7	Iora	65	MB
8	Khalisa	80	BSH
9	Nadhira	65	MB
10	Naura	65	MB
11	Navara	60	MB
12	Nazia	75	BSH
13	Saqueill	70	BSH
14	Shaloudy	70	BSH
15	Shana	70	BSH
16	Zeya	65	MB

d. Reflection

This reflection aims to review the implementation of the actions, identify the successes and challenges that arose during the learning process, and formulate improvement steps to be applied in the next cycle. Based on observation results and data analysis, it was found that the use of hand puppet media had a positive impact on children's interest and motivation to speak, although the improvement achieved was not yet optimal.

In general, the children showed great enthusiasm toward the use of hand puppets. They appeared happy, excited, and curious when the teacher demonstrated storytelling using the puppets. Hand puppets proved effective in capturing children's attention and creating a joyful learning atmosphere. However, several challenges were still encountered during the practice. Some children appeared shy, hesitant, or even reluctant to speak in front of their peers. They lacked confidence in expressing themselves through hand puppets. Another influencing factor was their limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with this type of learning media.

Based on this reflection, the researcher decided to make several improvements in Cycle II. First, the teacher needs to provide simpler yet engaging conversation examples so that children can easily imitate them. Second, the teacher should increase motivation and give appreciation to children who dare to speak in order to foster self-confidence. Third, the role-playing activities using hand puppets will be designed to be more interactive, for instance by involving children in pairs or small groups to have dialogues using the puppets. Through these strategies, it is expected that all children will have equal opportunities to practice speaking actively.

2. Data Management in Cycle II

a. Planning

The planning stage in Cycle II was carefully prepared so that the learning activities using hand puppet media could be implemented according to the research objective, which was to improve the speaking ability of children aged 4–5 years. In this stage, the researcher collaborated with the classroom teacher to design the Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH) integrated with the use of hand puppets during the main learning activities. The RPPH was developed with reference to the core competencies and language development indicators for early childhood as outlined in the PAUD Curriculum. The selected indicators focused on speaking skills, such

as children's courage to express opinions, ability to construct simple sentences, speaking fluency, and the use of appropriate vocabulary.

In this stage, the researcher allocated 30 minutes for each learning session, with three meetings in one cycle. Each session began with an introductory activity, such as singing or light question-and-answer activities, followed by the introduction of the hand puppets through a story demonstrated by the researcher. Children were given the opportunity to try using the hand puppets in small groups, while the researcher conducted observations using the prepared assessment instruments. The observation sheet was designed to record children's speaking skills based on the predetermined indicators.

b. Implementation

The implementation of actions in Cycle II was carried out based on the reflection results from Cycle I, which indicated that although the use of hand puppets had attracted children's attention, not all children actively participated, and the improvement in speaking fluency was not yet significant. Therefore, in this cycle, the researcher and teacher made several improvements in the learning strategy to make activities more interactive, enhance children's confidence, and encourage them to speak more actively.

All activities referred to the improved Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH). At the beginning of the session, the teacher conducted classroom conditioning and apperception activities through children's songs and light conversations. The teacher then reintroduced the hand puppets and told a short story using two puppets that interacted with each other. The stories used this time were based on familiar and relatable themes such as "playing in the park," "sharing food," and "making friends with pets." The aim was to make it easier for children to understand the story context and motivate them to imitate the dialogues.

During the main learning activity, the children were invited to engage in role-playing using hand puppets in pairs. The teacher provided simple dialogue examples and then encouraged the children to imitate or develop the conversation creatively. Each child was given the opportunity to speak using the hand puppets while interacting with their partner. The teacher provided direct assistance to children who were still hesitant or less fluent in speaking by approaching them and demonstrating correct pronunciation. The learning atmosphere was made relaxed and enjoyable so that the children felt safe and comfortable expressing themselves without fear of making mistakes.

c. Observation

The observation results showed that almost all children in Group A demonstrated significant improvement compared to the results from the previous cycle. Based on the assessment data using the observation instrument, the average percentage of children's speaking skill indicators increased to approximately 85%. Most children achieved the "Developing as Expected" (BSH) category, and some even reached the "Very Well Developed" (BSB) category. This improvement was evident in their increased confidence to express opinions, ability to interact using polite and communicative language, and more active participation throughout the learning process.

Table 2: Results of Cycle II

No	Name	Speaking Skill Score	Category
1	Alizzan	85	BSB
2	Almi	65	MB
3	Azkia	70	BSH
4	Bilal	80	BSH
5	Hamizan	85	BSB
6	Husna	85	BSB
7	Iora	70	BSH
8	Khalisa	85	BSB
9	Nadhira	70	BSH
10	Naura	75	BSH
11	Navara	65	MB
12	Nazia	80	BSH
13	Saqueill	75	BSH
14	Shaloudy	75	BSH
15	Shana	75	BSH
16	Zeya	75	BSH

d. Reflection

Reflection in Cycle II was conducted after the entire series of learning activities using hand puppet media had been completed and the observation data were thoroughly analysed. This stage aimed to assess the effectiveness of the implemented actions, evaluate the success of the learning process, and determine whether the research objectives had been achieved. Based on the observation results and both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, it can be concluded that the implementation of actions in Cycle II showed a significant improvement compared to the previous cycle, both in terms of learning outcomes and children's active engagement during the learning process.

The children in Group A at TK Mutiara Insani demonstrated rapid progress in their speaking abilities. Most of them were able to pronounce words and sentences more clearly, dared to speak in front of their peers, and were able to respond to the teacher's questions using simple yet appropriate language. In addition, the children began to construct their own sentences without much guidance from the teacher. Positive changes were also observed in the children's confidence, as reflected in their increased expressiveness when using hand puppets. They no longer merely imitated the teacher's dialogue but started to create spontaneous conversations that showcased their imagination and creativity.

The reflection results also indicated that the improvements made to the learning strategies in Cycle II—such as providing simple conversation examples, involving children in small groups, and giving praise to those who dared to perform—had a positive impact on enhancing their speaking abilities. The teacher became more skilled in managing enjoyable and interactive learning activities. The hand puppet media proved to be effective as a tool to help children express themselves verbally, as it created

a playful atmosphere that encouraged them to speak without fear or shyness.

Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of role-playing activities using hand puppet media successfully improved the speaking abilities of children aged 4–5 years at TK Mutiara Insani. Based on this reflection, the researcher concluded that the actions implemented were effective and there was no need to proceed to the next cycle, as the research objectives had been optimally achieved. Learning through hand puppet media can serve as an alternative teaching strategy for early childhood educators to develop children's language skills in a fun, creative, and meaningful way.



Figure 1: Learning Activities during Cycle I



Figure 2: Learning Activities during Cycle II

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the classroom action research conducted in two cycles at TK Mutiara Insani, it can be concluded that the use of hand puppet media in role-playing activities has proven effective in improving the speaking skills of children aged 4–5 years. Through the implementation of creative and enjoyable learning, the children showed a significant improvement in various aspects of language ability, such as pronunciation, speaking confidence, fluency in expressing sentences, and the ability to convey ideas verbally.

In the initial condition, most of the children were still in the Developing category, as indicated by their lack of confidence in speaking in front of peers, limited vocabulary, and inability to clearly express ideas. After the first cycle of applying hand puppet media, there was an increase in children's interest and participation in speaking activities, although the results were not yet optimal. However, in the second cycle—after improving learning strategies such as providing simple dialogue examples, forming small groups, and giving praise to active speakers—the learning outcomes showed a highly significant improvement. The average speaking ability of the children increased to 85%, with most of them categorized as Developing as Expected (BSH) and several reaching Very Well Developed (BSB). The children became more confident, more willing to speak, and were able to express their opinions using polite and communicative language. In addition to the improvement in language skills, the use of hand puppet media also contributed to the development of the children's social-emotional skills, as the activity encouraged cooperation, empathy, and respect among peers.

Thus, the findings of this research indicate that hand puppet media can serve as an effective alternative learning tool to enhance the speaking skills of young children. This medium creates an active, enjoyable, and meaningful learning atmosphere, making it highly relevant for use in early childhood education settings.

Based on the results of the study, it is suggested that early childhood education teachers should be more creative in using learning media, particularly hand puppets, as this medium has been proven effective in improving children's speaking skills. Teachers can use hand puppets in various and engaging ways to make children more active, confident, and expressive in using proper language. Educational institutions are encouraged to support the use of such media by providing facilities and training for teachers to develop innovative learning strategies. Moreover, parents at home are advised to give their children opportunities to practice speaking through simple activities such as storytelling or role-playing with hand puppets to further enhance their language development. Future researchers are expected to extend this study to other developmental aspects or different age groups to gain broader and deeper insights.

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