

Preschool Teachers' Perceptions of Puppets as a Pedagogical Tool to Promote Children's Language Development

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Abstract

Introduction: Puppetry activities play a crucial role in promoting language proficiency among preschool children. These activities provide opportunities for children to interact and communicate with both their peers and teachers, thus aiding in their preparation for future linguistic experiences. By incorporating puppets, children are able to expand their vocabulary and develop crucial conversational skills, enabling them to effectively express their thoughts and ideas.

Objectives: The study aims to examine teachers' perceptions of using puppets as pedagogical tools for enhancing children's language development. Additionally, it seeks to identify differences or similarities between government and private preschool teachers regarding the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool for language development. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate whether differences or similarities exist based on the duration of teaching experience in utilizing puppets as a pedagogical tool to support children's language development.

Methods: The study adopts a quantitative approach using questionnaire. The study comprised a sample of 100 preschool teachers. All participants were based in the Kuala Lumpur region. The collected data was subjected to statistical analyses, including Independent Samples T-test and One-way ANOVA. The Independent Samples T-test was employed to compare the means of preschool teachers from the Ministry of Education Malaysia and those from the private sector. On the other hand, One-way ANOVA was used to compare the means, which could have been employed to assess the various puppetry techniques employed by the teachers.

Results: The study's findings demonstrate that preschool teachers hold a positive perception of using puppets as a pedagogical tool to enhance children's language development. The majority of teachers agree that puppets are effective in promoting language skills in children. Importantly, the study shows that there are no significant differences in the perception of puppets between government and private preschool teachers, as well as among teachers with different levels of teaching experience. This suggests a consensus among teachers regarding the value of puppets in supporting language development regardless of their background or experience.

Conclusions: The use of puppets is an effective teaching tool for promoting language development in early childhood education. The utilization of puppets in language activities facilitates the expansion of children's language proficiency. The implications of the study that puppetry can be an effective tool for promoting language development among young children. Integrating puppets into language lessons can significantly enhance children's language and communication skills, enabling them to engage in more intricate conversations about their thoughts.

Keywords: puppets, pedagogical, children's development, language

1. Introduction

Puppets have long been recognized as effective pedagogical tools in early childhood education. These playful and engaging objects have a special charm that captures children's attention and motivates their learning. Puppetry activities have been found to assist children in developing language skills, particularly in listening and speaking abilities. Through puppetry activities, children interact and communicate with other teachers or children, which helps to prepare them for linguistic experiences in the future (Karaolis, 2023, Rukanah, Yuyun & Yunita, 2022). The Ministry of Education in Malaysia (2017) recognizes the importance of puppets in preschool education and has included them in the National Preschool Standard-Based Curriculum. Puppets are considered an effective teaching and learning tool that enhances children's learning and concentration. Loy (2021) study on puppetry activities in early childhood programs found that the use of puppets in preschool education can enhance children's language and communication skills. Researcher mentioned that puppetry activities can provide a fun and engaging way for children to learn and communicate, particularly for children who may struggle with traditional teaching methods. The use of puppets in the classroom can create a relaxed and non-threatening environment, encouraging children to participate and express themselves more freely. Moreover, puppetry activities can help to develop children's language and communication skills by promoting vocabulary development, improving listening and speaking skills. The study highlights the potential benefits of using puppets in preschool education and supports the growing interest in incorporating puppetry activities into early childhood programs.

Tarja Krogera and Anne-Maria Nupponen (2019) conducted a study on the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in Finnish preschools. The study found that the use of puppets can help to create a positive atmosphere for learning, increase children's participation in activities, and enhance their communication and language skills. Furthermore, Paulina and Cecilia (2020) examines the use of puppetry in teaching English to young learners. Due to the lack of specialized training programs, teaching English to primary and preschool students presents challenges. The study focuses on the development of young learners' speaking skills through the introduction of a puppet named Simon. By actively engaging with the students during English lessons, the puppet enhances their confidence, encourages English speaking, and facilitates teacher-student interaction. The findings demonstrate that puppetry effectively supports young learners in overcoming language learning barriers and creates an emotionally conducive environment for foreign language acquisition. In addition, Anders Rade (2021) discusses the theories supporting the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool with young children, citing the work of Vygotsky, Piaget, and Bruner. Rade emphasizes the importance of play in children's learning and development and explains how the use of puppets in play-based activities can support children's language and others development.

The use of puppets in teaching has been found to have positive impacts on the learning and behavior of children, including those with special needs. Karaolis (2023) highlights the use of puppets for children who experience disabilities. Puppets were found to facilitate connection, play, communication, and engagement among children. By incorporating puppets with drama approaches in group activities, teacher discovered effective ways to promote literacy development and support children's interests. Puppets served as engaging conversation partners, encouraging children's expression and fostering creativity. Teachers experienced a positive shift in their relationships with children, perceiving them in a more playful light. The presence of puppets also promoted communication, confidence, and meaningful interactions between children and adults in preschool settings. Puppets acted as a starting point for storytelling and imaginative play, similar to books. Importantly, puppets allowed children to communicate and understand their world, regardless of spoken language, respecting their diverse linguistic abilities.

Darja Pekolj (2017) found that the use of puppets in working with children with special educational needs can improve their motivation and participation in learning activities. Similarly, Karaolis (2020) highlights the potential of puppets for inclusive practice in early childhood settings, where they can be used to support children with diverse learning needs. Puppets can also assist in improving language and communication skills in children. Dhachaini Prabhakaran and Hamidah Yamat (2017) found that incorporating puppetry in the teaching and learning process provides advantages such as reducing anxiety, boosting confidence, and creating a stress-

free environment for learners to practice speaking English. The use of puppets allows learners to speak confidently as errors are attributed to the puppet rather than themselves.

Azadeh Aminimanesh, Zohreh Ghazavi, and Tayebah Mehrabi (2019) also found that puppet shows and storytelling methods can be effective in addressing behavioral problems in children. In the context of foreign language education, Habib Zanzana (2018) argues that puppets can be used as an integrated learning platform to improve language and literacy skills. Loy Chee Luen et al. (2020) similarly found that the use of puppets in Eduwebtv programs can improve children's national language speaking skills. In addition, puppets can also be used in preschool settings to support language and communication development. Roseanna Burns (2017) conducted a study on the use of puppets to encourage dialogue in the primary classroom and found that children responded positively to the use of puppets.

The use of puppets as pedagogical tools has the potential to enhance children's learning and behavior, particularly in the areas of language and communication skills. Previous research has explored the use of puppets as a tool to enhance children's language development. The study of Dwi Ristiyani and Rahmat Mulyono (2023) aimed to enhance expressive language skills in preschooler children using character hand puppets. The findings showed significant improvements in the children's expressive language indicators throughout the study. It was concluded that incorporating character puppet media is an effective method for improving expressive language skills in early childhood. Similarly, Nurul Mujahidah, Eka Damayanti, and Ahmad Afif (2021) investigated the effectiveness of storytelling methods using hand puppets in early children's language development. The study found that storytelling using hand puppets helped to improve children's vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Additionally, the use of puppets increased children's motivation to participate in the storytelling activity and created an engaging and enjoyable learning experience. Several studies have investigated the role of puppetry in supporting children's oral language development.

In another study, Hikmah Nur Insani (2018) investigated the use of puppets in teaching speaking to young learners. The findings revealed that the use of puppets helped to increase the children's motivation and engagement in the classroom. In addition, Primaningtyas, Jeanne Rahayu (2018) conducted a study on teaching vocabulary through puppets to kindergarten students. The study found that the use of puppets was an effective way to support children's vocabulary acquisition and oral language development. These studies suggest that puppets can be useful tools to assist children's language development. The use of puppets in educational settings can create an engaging and interactive learning experience, promote social interaction, and enhance children's communication skills. Puppetry can play an important role in supporting children's oral language development by improving their speaking skills, pronunciation, motivation, and vocabulary acquisition. Rukanah, Farihatin and Yunita (2022) investigate the effectiveness of puppet in enhancing language development among preschool children. The research highlights the lack of children's language skills, particularly in their ability to recall story contents. By utilizing puppets as a verbal skill stimulation tool, combined with storytelling methods, the study aims to address this issue. A pretest and posttest control group design is employed, with a sample of 66 participants divided into intervention and control groups. The results demonstrate that puppet stimulation significantly improves language development in the intervention group. The study concludes that consistent puppet in teaching enhances children's language skills by facilitating language acquisition and practice during communication. This highlights the importance of regular stimulation for optimal language development in children.

The studies mentioned present evidence of the effectiveness of using puppets in teaching and improving different aspects of language development and communication skills in children. However, there are still research gaps that need to be addressed in the field of puppetry in education. One of the gaps is the need for more research on the long-term effects of using puppets on children's language development. While some studies have shown positive results in the short term, the long-term effects are still uncertain. While the cited studies offer valuable insights into the use of puppets for language development and education, there are still research gaps that need to be addressed to fully understand the potential of puppetry as an educational tool. Specifically, it is important to explore preschool teachers' perceptions of puppets as a pedagogical tool for promoting children's language development. In this study, children's language development in puppet activities

refers to (i) children being able to hear and distinguish sounds and understand dialogue in the performance, (ii) children being able to correctly pronounce sounds and words in the puppet show, (iii) children being able to express their thoughts and feelings effectively after the puppet activity, (iv) children being given opportunities to speak what is written and understand the meaning of words or sentences read in the puppet show script, (v) children being given opportunities to write letters, words, and simple sentences after the puppet activity, and (vi) puppet performances and storytelling encourage children to master a second language.

2. Objectives

This study is to identify the perception of preschool teachers about puppets as a pedagogical tool that can help the preschool children's language. This is because the preschool teacher is the closest individual to the preschooler and they are able to see the progress of each child through every activity carried out. In particular, the objective of this study is to:

Objective 1: To identify teachers' perceptions of using puppets as pedagogical tools in helping children develop in language.

Objective 2: To identify whether there are differences or similarities between government preschool teachers and private preschool teachers on the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in helping children develop in language.

Objective 3: To identify whether there are differences or similarities based on the duration of teacher teaching experience on the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in assisting the development of children in terms of language.

Research question:

Question 1: What are the perceptions of preschool teachers on puppets used as a pedagogical tool in children's language?

Question 2: Are government and private preschool teachers having different perceptions of the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language?

Research hypothesis 1 states that there is no significant difference between the perception of government and private preschool teachers towards the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language.

Question 3: Is there a difference in perception between preschool teachers on the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language based on the teaching experience duration?

Research hypothesis 2 states that there is no significant difference between preschool teachers' perceptions of using puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language based on the duration of their teaching experience.

3. Methods

The study mentioned involves a sample of 100 preschool teachers from both the Ministry of Education Malaysia and the private sector, all located in the Kuala Lumpur region. The type of study conducted is quantitative, meaning that data is collected and analyzed using statistical methods.

In this case, the research data was collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of six sections and includes a total of 30 items focusing on puppetry and children's language development. The research team developed these questionnaires. Each item is rated on a 5-point according to likert scale, with the following scale: 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Not Sure, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree which was used to gather information from the preschool teachers about their use of puppetry in teaching language skills to children.

The statistical methods used to analyze the data included Independent Samples T-test and One-way ANOVA. An Independent Samples T-test is a statistical analysis used to compare the means of two groups, in this case, preschool teachers from the Ministry of Education Malaysia and the private sector. One-Way ANOVA, on the

other hand, is a statistical analysis used to compare the means in comparing the different types of puppetry techniques used by the teachers.

4. Results

Answer for research question 1: Descriptive analysis was used to identify the puppet as a pedagogical tool in children's language development.

Based on Table 1 below, statement section 1, 14 respondents (14%) strongly agreed while 70 respondents (70%) agreed with this statement. There were 15 respondents (15%) who were unsure and 1 respondent (1%) who disagreed with this statement. It can be said that the percentage of those who agreed or more than agreed is 84% (i.e., 70% agreed and 14% strongly agreed). Therefore, this indicates that the majority of the respondents agreed with section 1.

For statement section 2, 45 respondents (45%) agreed and 45 respondents (45%) were unsure about this statement. There were 4 respondents (4%) who disagreed and only one (1%) respondent strongly disagreed with this statement. It can be said that the percentage of those who agreed or more than agreed is 50% (i.e. 45% agreed and 5% strongly agreed). Therefore, this indicates that half of the respondents agreed with section 2.

For statement section 3, 8 respondents (8%) strongly agreed with statement item 3. 63 respondents (63%) agreed with this statement. 27 respondents (27%) were unsure and 2 (2%) respondents disagreed with this statement. It can be said that the percentage of those who agreed or more than agreed is 71% (i.e. 63% agreed and 8% strongly agreed). Therefore, this indicates that the majority of the respondents agreed with section 3.

For statement section 4, 2 respondents (2%) strongly agreed with statement item 4. 37 respondents (37%) agreed, 46 respondents (46%) were unsure, and 15 respondents (15%) disagreed with this statement. It can be said that the percentage of those who agreed or more than agreed is 39% (i.e. 37% agreed and 2% strongly agreed). Therefore, this indicates that less than half of the respondents agreed with section 4.

For statement section 5, it was found that 6 respondents (6%) strongly agreed, 49 respondents (49%) agreed with this statement. 34 respondents (34%) were unsure, 9 respondents (9%) disagreed, and 2 respondents (2%) strongly disagreed with this statement. It can be said that the percentage of those who agreed or more than agreed is 55% (i.e., 49% agreed and 6% strongly agreed). Therefore, this indicates that more than half of the respondents agreed with section 5.

For statement section 6, 12 respondents (12%) strongly agree with statement item 6. There were 67 respondents (67%) who agreed with this statement. 19 respondents (19%) were uncertain, and 2 (2%) disagreed with the statement. It can be said that the percentage who agreed or strongly agreed is 79% (67% agreed and 12% strongly agreed). This indicates that the majority of respondents agreed with section 6.

In summary, section 1 has the highest mean value, which is 3.97 with a standard deviation of 0.58. The highest minimum value indicates that children can hear and distinguish sounds and understand dialogue in performances. section 4 has the lowest mean value, which is 3.26 with a standard deviation of 0.73. However, respondents still believe that children are given opportunities to articulate what is written and understand the meaning of words or phrases in puppet show scripts. These findings indicate that puppets as a pedagogical tool can help the language development of preschool children based on the perception level of teachers in this study.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of preschool teachers' perceptions of puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language development

Section	Statement	Frequency (N=100)					Mean	Std. Deviation
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree		
1	Children can hear and distinguish sounds and	- (0%)	1 (1%)	15 (15%)	70 (70%)	14 (14%)	3.97	0.58

	understand the dialogue presented.								
2	Children can correctly pronounce sounds and words in puppet shows.	1 (1%)	4 (4%)	45 (45%)	45 (45%)	5 (5%)	3.49	0.70	
3	Children can express their thoughts and feelings effectively after a puppet activity.	- (0%)	2 (2%)	27 (27%)	63 (63%)	8 (8%)	3.77	0.62	
4	Children create opportunities to articulate what is written and understand the meaning of the words or sentences read in the puppet show script.	0 (0%)	15 (15%)	46 (46%)	37 (37%)	2 (2%)	3.26	0.73	
5	Children are given the opportunity to write letters, words, and simple sentences after a puppet activity.	2 (2%)	9 (9%)	34 (34%)	49 (49%)	6 (6%)	3.48	0.82	
6	Puppet shows and storytelling together encourage children to master a second language.	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	19 (19%)	67 (67%)	12 (12%)	3.89	0.62	

Answer for research question 2: The Independent Samples T-test is used to identify whether there is a significant difference between the perceptions of government and private preschool teachers towards the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language development.

Hypothesis 1

Research hypothesis 1 is constructed to identify whether there is a significant difference in the perceptions of government and private preschool teachers towards the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language development. Table 2 shows that the government group has a mean of 21.76 with a standard deviation of 2.702, while the Private group has a mean of 22.03 with a standard deviation of 2.331.

The t-test result shows that the t-value 0.613, which is not significant at the 0.05 significance level. This means that the null hypothesis is accepted, and the alternative hypothesis is rejected. The t-test result shows that there is no significant difference in the perceptions of government and private preschool teachers towards the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language development.

Table 2: T-test results of the perceptions of government and private preschool teachers towards puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language development based on preschool status.

Preschool status	N	Min	SP (Std.D)	Dk (df)	t	Sig
Government	62	21.76	2.702	98	0.613	0.445
Private	38	22.03	2.331			

N represents the number of respondents.

* Indicates significance at $p < 0.05$

Answer for research question 3: One-way ANOVA is used to identify the perceptions of government and private preschool teachers according to their teaching experience in preschool, towards the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in the development of children's language.

Hypothesis 2:

There is no significant difference in the perceptions of preschool teachers according to their teaching experience in preschool, i.e., 10 years and below, 11-20 years, and 21 years and above, regarding the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in helping children's language development.

The results show that there is no significant difference in the perceptions of preschool teachers according to their teaching experience in preschool regarding the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in the development of children's language, $F(2, 97) = 0.082$, $p > 0.05$. Therefore, the statement for this hypothesis that there is no significant difference in terms of perceptions of puppets as a pedagogical tool in children's language development between the teaching experience of preschool teachers is accepted.

Table 3: One-way ANOVA results of government and private preschool teachers according to their teaching experience in preschools regarding the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool in the development of children's language.

Variables	JKD (Sum of Square)	dk (df)	MKD (Mean Square)	F	Sig
Between Groups	1.090	2	0.545	0.082	0.922
In Group	645.950	97	6.70		
Total	648.040	99			

The results of the study indicate that the perception of preschool teachers towards puppets as a pedagogy in the development of children's language is positive. The following are the findings of this study:

5. Discussion

The aspect of puppets in the development of children's language:

a. Overall perception of preschool teachers: For items 1 to 6, it can be said that the percentage of those who agree or somewhat agree is 63% (i.e., 55.2% agree and 7.8% strongly agree). This indicates that the majority of respondents agree that puppets can help in the development of children's language.

It can be concluded that puppets as a pedagogical tool can help in the development of children's language in preschool based on teachers' perceptions.

b. Perception of government and private preschool teachers: The study results in show no significant difference between the perception of government and private preschool teachers in viewing puppets as a teaching aid to help the development of children's language. This indicates that government and private preschool teachers have the same perception of puppets as a pedagogical tool to help the development of children's language.

c. Perception of preschool teachers based on teaching experience: The study results also show no significant difference in the perception of preschool teachers based on their teaching experience in viewing puppets as a pedagogical tool to help the development of children's language. This indicates that both new and experienced teachers have the same perception of puppets as a pedagogical tool to help the development of children's language.

The present study is consistent with the findings of several previous studies, including Nurul Mujahidah et al. (2021), Prabakaran (2021), Hikmah Nur Insani (2018), Priningtyas (2018) and Rukanah et al. (2022) which

indicate that the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool can aid in the development of children's language. The study found that incorporating puppets into language lessons improved children's language development in several ways. The use of puppets as a pedagogical tool improved children's communication skill. Puppets provided a non-threatening way for children to express themselves and communicate their thoughts and ideas. By using puppets, children were able to overcome their shyness and express themselves more confidently. The study also found that the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool improved children's vocabulary. The puppet shows presented new words and concepts in a fun and engaging way, which helped children to retain and recall them more easily. The use of puppets also helped to contextualize new vocabulary, making it more relevant and understandable to children. Besides that, the study found that the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool improved children's comprehension skills. Puppets were used to present stories and scenarios that helped children to understand complex concepts and ideas. The use of puppets also helped to bring stories to life, making them more engaging and memorable for children.

The implications of the present study that puppetry can be an effective tool for promoting language development among young children. Incorporating puppets into language lessons can improve children's communication skills, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Since language development is critical for young children, the use of puppetry in early childhood education can help promote a strong foundation for language learning and future academic success. Puppetry can provide a fun and engaging way to teach children essential life skills beyond language development. Puppets can be used to teach social and emotional skills, such as empathy, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution. These skills are critical for young children's development and can benefit them in their personal and social lives. The use of puppets can provide opportunities for creativity, imagination, and self-expression among young children. Through puppetry, children can explore their creativity and imagination by creating their puppet shows and stories. This can be an effective way to encourage children's self-expression and develop their confidence in their abilities.

In conclusion, the results of the present study are consistent with the findings of previous studies that indicate the use of puppets as a pedagogical tool can aid in the development of children's language. The use of puppets in language lessons improved children's communication skills, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. Research findings suggest that the use of puppets can be an effective tool for language teachers to enhance the language development of their students. The use of puppets in early childhood education can promote language development, essential life skills, and creativity among young children. This study has significant implications for early childhood educators, who can incorporate puppetry into their teaching methodologies to promote child development holistically.

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