From Sticks to Speech: Stick Puppet As An Alternative Media to Improve Seventh Graders' Speaking Skill

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Abstract

The focus of teaching English as a foreign language has primarily revolved around the importance of speaking skills. However, it has been observed that many students face challenges in improving their ability to speak. These challenges can be categorized into five main issues: linguistic aspects, psychological aspects, teaching strategies employed by teachers, inadequate media resources, and students' speaking performance. In light of these issues, the researcher proposed stick puppets as an alternative media that aligns well with the targeted aspects and strategies for improvement. This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) to enhance the speaking skills of seventh-grade students in SMPN 1 Bantaran during the academic year 2021/2022. Collaborative classroom action research was conducted, consisting of a single cycle spanning three meetings and one post-test. Data collection techniques included a speaking test to assess students' speaking scores, as well as teacher's field notes, interviews, students' questionnaires, and classroom observation sheets as secondary data. After implementing stick puppets as a media tool, the research findings revealed a significant improvement in the speaking skills of seventh-grade students. Out of 22 students, 95.65% achieved the minimum passing score, and the mean score increased from 16.08 in the preliminary speaking test to 90.86. The data indicated that the utilization of stick puppets contributed to enhancing students' vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and content in speaking. Additionally, stick puppets fostered increased participation and engagement among students in the classroom. Students displayed interest, motivation, and confidence, particularly when describing physical appearances using stick puppets.

Keywords: Classroom Action Research; Stick Puppet; Students' Speaking Skill.

Speaking is a vital aspect of language as it facilitates communication, interaction, and the exchange of ideas and thoughts. However, acquiring proficiency in speaking a new language can be a challenging endeavor (Pollard, 2008). Many students face difficulties in enhancing their speaking skills, which is recognized as one of the most challenging aspects of language learning (Brown & Yule, 1983). Speaking ability holds great significance in real-life situations, as it plays a crucial role in daily interactions and shapes initial

impressions based on comprehensive and fluent communication (Brown & Yule, 1983).

In the context of SMPN 1 Bantaran's seventh-grade students, similar challenges persist. A preliminary research conducted during the academic year 2021/2022 identified five key issues affecting students' speaking skills: linguistic aspects, psychological aspects, teaching strategies, limited media resources, and speaking performance. Linguistically, students struggle with vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Psychologically, they lack confidence in practicing English speaking in the classroom, despite being more comfortable with Bahasa (Subandowo, 2017). Furthermore, the employed teaching strategies, such as role-play, guided conversation, and discussion, have not yielded significant improvements in speaking skills. The shift to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic has further restricted access to media resources, leaving teachers with limited options like emoticon expressions and professional flashcards. Moreover, students' speaking achievements fall below the minimum passing score, indicating a need for improvement (Subandowo, 2017).

To address these challenges, the researcher proposes the use of stick puppets as a suitable and creative teaching and learning tool. Stick puppets have been proven effective in enhancing students' speaking skills in previous studies (Ningtyas, 2018; Hasanah, 2021; Andriani, 2018). They offer an engaging and enjoyable way to practice speaking, particularly in describing physical appearances (Hasanah, 2021). Stick puppets provide visual and interactive opportunities for students to engage with the language, fostering motivation and interest (Marilyn Lohnes, 2002).

In conclusion, to overcome the difficulties faced by students in developing their speaking skills, it is crucial for teachers to employ effective teaching strategies and utilize appropriate media resources. Stick puppets align well with the targeted improvements and have demonstrated positive effects in enhancing students' speaking abilities. By incorporating stick puppets in the classroom, teachers can create an enjoyable and interactive atmosphere, encouraging increased student participation and active communication (Ningtyas, 2018; Hasanah, 2021; Andriani, 2018).

Method

The chosen methodology for this study was Classroom Action Research (CAR), following Kemmis and Mc Taggart's framework (2014: 107). CAR is a form of classroom investigation conducted by teachers to address specific problems or seek solutions within a particular context. The present study aimed to describe the process and enhancement of students' oral communication abilities when describing physical appearances of individuals using stick puppets. The research was conducted with seventh-grade A students at SMPN 1 Bantaran during the Academic Year 2021/2022, involving a total of 23 students (15 males and 8 females).

The research followed a four-stage cycle, which included Planning, Acting, Observing, and Reflecting, as outlined by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988). Each cycle involved careful planning of activities, implementation of stick puppet interventions, observation of students' performance, and reflection on the outcomes.

The main objective of the research was to determine the improvement in students' speaking skills through the use of stick puppets. Data collection involved the gathering of both primary and secondary data. The primary data consisted of a speaking test conducted at the end of each cycle to assess students' oral communication performance and their level of achievement. Secondary data were collected through teacher's field notes, teacher's interviews, students' questionnaires, and classroom observation sheets, providing additional insights from the English teacher and students.

To analyze the students' speaking improvement based on mean scores, the following formula was utilized (Sudjana, 2002,

p. 67):

$$Mx = \frac{\Sigma x}{n}$$

Mx : Mean
X : Individual Score
N : Number of Students

To calculate the percentage of students who passed the passing grade (KKM), the formula used was (Sudjono, 2008):

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P : The percentage of class
F : Percentage of total score
N : Number of students

For the questionnaire data (closed-ended questions), the responses were counted and converted into percentages using the following formula:

$$\% = n/(N) \times 100$$

n: Number of students who answered the question
N: Total number of students in the class

These data analysis methods were applied to examine students' speaking performance and to determine the effectiveness of the stick puppet intervention.

Results and Discussion

The research was conducted over one cycle, consisting of three sessions and a post-test, with the aim of assessing the progress of seventh-grade A students in their speaking skills when utilizing stick puppets. The implementation of the research is described as follows:

1. Planning

During the planning phase, the researcher and the English teacher collaborated to select a relevant topic, choose stick puppets as teaching aids, design lesson plans, create learning materials, and establish success criteria. They carefully aligned the research activities with the syllabus and curriculum objectives, ensuring the effective integration of stick puppets in teaching. The planning phase laid the foundation for the subsequent actions, providing a clear roadmap for implementing the research and assessing the improvement in students' speaking skills.

2. Acting

In this phase, the researcher implemented the planned activities, including developing the lesson plan and research instruments using the stick puppets. The researcher played the role of a teacher carrying out the actions, while the English teacher served as a collaborator who observed the implementation of the action research. The steps involved: (1) stimulating students' interest with the stick puppets, (2) introducing vocabulary, (3) practicing pronunciation of the learned vocabulary, (4) explaining the basic grammatical forms, (5) providing examples of describing physical appearance using the stick puppets, and (6) guiding students in practicing using stick puppets.

Meeting 1

The initial session took place on Monday, March 21st, 2022, from 08.00 am to 09.00 am. During the first meeting, the research aimed to provide students with a basic understanding of how to describe people's physical appearance using stick puppets in Bahasa, so they could directly practice in the second meeting. The theme of the first meeting was Indonesian motivator artists. Some of the Indonesian motivator artists used in the first meeting included Najwa Shihab, Arnold Poernomo, Dadie Combuzier, Raffi Ahmad, Nagita Slavina, Baim Wong, Cinta Laura, Prilly Latuconsina, and others.

The initial stage of the research focused on introducing the concept and setting the foundation for students to engage in describing physical appearances using stick puppets. The subsequent sessions and post-test will provide further insights into the students' progress in their speaking skills.

Meeting 2

The second meeting took place on

Monday, March 28, 2022, from 08.00 – 09.00 a.m. It followed a similar teaching approach as the previous session, introducing new materials and utilizing different stick puppets. During this meeting, students learned specific vocabulary and grammar related to describing people's physical appearance using the "Nominal Form of Simple Present Tense." The vocabulary included words such as beautiful, handsome, tall, short, fat, thin, young, middle-aged, and old. The stick puppets used in this session represented Indonesian Commedia artists, including Nunung, Ruben Onsu, Kiki Saputri, Soimah, Sule, and others. The researcher provided examples using the stick puppets to facilitate students' comprehension.

Meeting 3

The third meeting took place on Wednesday, May 11, 2022, from 09.30 – 10.30 a.m. The teaching procedures of this meeting closely resembled those of the second meeting, with a focus on different vocabulary, grammar, and stick puppet theme. Students learned vocabulary related to describing hairstyles, such as long hair, short hair, bald, straight hair, wavy hair, curly hair, dark hair, brown hair, and blonde hair. The grammar lesson involved using the verbal form of the Simple Present tense with the learned vocabulary. The stick puppets in this session represented Indonesian singers, including Yuni Shara, Tiara Andini, Giring Nidji, Novita Bachmid, Ziva Magnolia, Ahmad Dhani, Rossa, Inul, and others.

3. Observing

The speaking test was conducted on Wednesday, May 18, 2022, following the implementation of classroom action research in the first cycle. The purpose of the speaking test was to evaluate the students' progress in using stick puppets as a medium for communication. The test aimed to answer the research question of this study. During the test, students were instructed to choose a stick puppet and individually describe at least five physical attributes associated with their chosen puppet. The speaking test assessed four aspects: content, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Each aspect was evaluated with a maximum of five points.

4. Reflecting

The final stage of each cycle was reflection, which aimed to evaluate the outcomes and progress achieved in the first cycle. To supplement the data, the researcher incorporated notes derived from secondary sources. Based on the English teacher's field notes from the 1st to 3rd meetings, it was observed that students displayed increased enthusiasm, activeness, focus, and confidence when learning with stick puppets. They showed relative ease in memorizing and articulating vocabulary, as well as practicing the description of people's physical appearance using stick puppets.

The English teacher's observation sheet, used as a collaborative tool, indicated notable improvements in teaching procedures from the beginning to the end of each meeting. These improvements encompassed the researcher's explanations of the subject matter, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and the demonstration of using stick puppets to describe physical appearances. Consistent progress was observed. Similarly, students' observation sheets revealed enhancements in their engagement during the teaching and learning process. They exhibited increased participation, motivation, confidence, and overall active involvement.

A total of 22 students, accounting for 95.65%, successfully passed the KKM requirement with an average score of 90.87. Only 1 student, representing 4.35% of the class, did not meet the KKM requirement. The speaking scores met the success criteria defined in this research, marking the successful completion of the first cycle. The success criteria were met when at least 60% of students achieved a score equal to or higher than 70, which served as the minimal mastery level criterion (KKM). The results of the speaking test demonstrated the effectiveness of stick

puppets in improving students' speaking skills and successfully addressing the speaking issues identified in the initial study.

Discussion

The utilization of stick puppets in the classroom generated a highly positive response from the students. They actively engaged in learning by enthusiastically responding to the researcher's questions. This positive engagement was supported by the post-questionnaire results, which indicated that 91.30% or 21 students actively participated in learning through stick puppets. The students demonstrated their eagerness and enthusiasm by memorizing the vocabulary learned and actively using stick puppets to stimulate their understanding. They also showed mutual interest in each other's stick puppets, highlighting their genuine interest and enthusiasm for using stick puppets. The students appeared joyful and delighted while learning with stick puppets, which aligns with Mardiana's (2019) research findings on the effectiveness of puppet play in teaching speaking skills to tenth-grade students, where students were active, happy, interested, and enjoyed learning to speak through puppet play.

Furthermore, the students exhibited a positive impact on their psychological aspect. They displayed confidence in practicing their speaking abilities by confidently describing people's physical appearances using stick puppets. This observation is supported by the post-questionnaire results, which indicated that 86.95% or 20 students felt confident in learning using stick puppets. This finding is consistent with Astuti's (2021) research, emphasizing the positive effect of stick puppets on students' confidence, enthusiasm, and excitement.

The utilization of stick puppets greatly facilitated students in describing the physical appearance of individuals. The visual and physical interaction with the actual objects provided by stick puppets helped students think creatively when describing people's physical appearances, as indicated by 91.30% or 21 students in the post-questionnaire. Stick puppets also aided students in generating ideas for describing physical appearances since they could observe and hold the real objects. These findings align with a previous study by Hasanah, affirming the positive effect of stick puppets in generating ideas when describing people's physical appearances.

Regarding their speaking abilities, the use of stick puppets significantly improved students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical understanding when describing people's physical appearances. Stick puppets helped students learn vocabulary related to adjectives used in describing physical appearances, and the random display of stick puppets stimulated their memorization. Furthermore, students were tasked with choosing a stick puppet and describing its physical appearance, providing them with opportunities to practice and correct each other's presentations. This practice improved students' pronunciation and grammar skills, as they consistently practiced these aspects in the classroom. As a result, stick puppets not only contributed to improvements in students' speaking skills but also had a positive impact on their psychological well-being, making the learning process enjoyable, motivating, active, and boosting their confidence.

Overall, the utilization of stick puppets proved to be highly effective in enhancing students' speaking skills, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and psychological engagement. The findings of this research highlight the benefits and positive outcomes associated with the use of stick puppets in language learning contexts.

Conclusion

The findings of this research have important theoretical and practical implications. The use of stick puppets as a teaching tool aligns with the principles of Classroom Action Research and contributes to the existing knowledge on the effectiveness

of visual aids in language instruction. The results demonstrate that stick puppets can significantly improve students' speaking skills, including vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and content. From a practical standpoint, English language teachers can incorporate stick puppets into their lessons to create an engaging and interactive learning environment. The positive response and enthusiasm shown by the students in this study highlight the potential of stick puppets to enhance student participation and learning outcomes. Moreover, the practical implications extend beyond the English language classroom, as stick puppets can be adapted and utilized in various educational contexts and subjects. They promote student-centered approaches, foster creativity, and boost students' confidence in oral expression. In conclusion, the findings emphasize the effectiveness of stick puppets as a valuable resource for improving students' speaking abilities. English teachers and educators in other disciplines can consider integrating stick puppets into their teaching practices to enhance student engagement and language proficiency. The practicality and versatility of stick puppets make them a promising tool for promoting interactive and experiential learning experiences.

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