

PUPPETRY ACTIVITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMMES

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Received: 15 March 2021; **Accepted:** 16 April 2021; **Published:** 06 May 2021

To cite this article (APA): Luen, L. C. (2021). Puppetry activities in early childhood programmes. *Southeast Asia Early Childhood Journal*, 10, 89-96. <https://doi.org/10.37134/saecj.vol10.sp.8.2021>

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.37134/saecj.vol10.sp.8.2021>

ABSTRACT

Puppetry plays an edutainment role in playing and learning activities for nursery and kindergarten children. This qualitative study was aimed to investigate the benefits of puppetry activities for children who were enrolled in early childhood programs. In-depth interviews were conducted with four respondents, two of whom were child care providers from the nursery and two teachers were from kindergarten. Based on the thematic analysis, it was found that the inclusion of puppetry activities in an early childhood program can boost intellect and memory; enhance creative thinking and imagination; more manageable of self-control and emotions; ensure social and interaction; allow practice in focusing; language and communication; improve physical and mental health; connected spirituality and moral values. Most importantly, the daily living skills embedded in the puppetry activities can be translated into their lives. In sum, this study proved that puppetry activities help to enhance life skills, learning experience development, and widen knowledge among nursery and kindergarten children. The study implied that puppetry activities should be integrated into early childhood education can sustain children's overall development.

Keywords: children, puppetry, early childhood

INTRODUCTION

Puppetry is one of the learning tools that can provide new and fun experiences for children in early childhood programmes (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017; Prime Minister's Department, 2013; Rumi Gupta, 2020). Past literature supports that puppetry activities are an effective pedagogical tool to enhance children's experiences, skills, and knowledge in the process of early childhood education. Puppetry activities also encourage teacher-children interaction encompasses verbal and non-verbal interactions in learning activities (Loy et al., 2015; Loy, et al., 2020; Nordin et al. 2020). Puppetry activities encompasses puppet performance, storytelling with puppet, an integrated puppet in sensory activity, routine and transition, art and craft, language and communication, social and emotion, physical and health, cognitive and moral plays an edutainment role and brings benefits to children in playing and learning activities in early childhood education programs (Kroflin, 2012; Majaron, 2012; Compton, 2016; Kroger & Nupponen, 2019).

Literature Review

The study of Remer and Tzuriel (2015) states that researchers and educators strive to find teaching methods that are tailored to the developmental aspects of early childhood. Findings of the study show that puppetry activities are one of the teaching methods that can stimulate children's motivation, interest, and enjoyment in playing and learning activities. Puppetry activities in teaching are proven to enhance communication, increase engagement, and change children's attitudes. Findings also show that puppetry activities can help children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Besides, the level of cooperation, interest, attention, and involvement of children in learning interactions also increase. The findings of this study have proven the effectiveness of puppets as a medium of learning and playing for early childhood education as well as special needs education.

Caganaga and Kalmis (2015) who investigated the role of puppets in early childhood education have found that puppetry can be used as an effective teaching tool in early childhood education for children's language learning. Study data show that puppetry activities can attract children to learn. Besides, puppetry activities motivate children in the learning process. The research team also suggested that puppets be used for learning art, science, and other subjects.

Through an experimental study conducted by Loy et al. (2020) found that the use of puppetry in the EduWebTV Program introduced by the Education Technology Division, The Ministry of Education Malaysia can improve children's National Language speaking skills in terms of words, phrases, and sentences. Children's speaking skills help them communicate and interact verbally effectively in the learning process. Besides, the researchers also suggested the use of puppetry in children's language learning in terms of listening, reading, and writing skills.

Research Loy (2017) examines the teacher's perception of the use of puppets in children's social and emotional development proves that puppets as a pedagogical tool can help children's social and emotional development. Research results have reached the research hypothesis that there is no significant difference between teachers' perceptions of the use of puppets as teaching tools in children's social and emotional development based on kindergarten status and teaching period in preschool. This shows that kindergarten teachers have a positive perception of the use of puppets in children's social and emotional development.

The research of Cvetkova and Andonovska-Trajkovska (2012) carry out the use of puppets in the early childhood programme and children's development. Through learning and playing activities implemented for children, it was found that puppetry activities are a very effective pedagogy tool to help the children's overall development. Findings show that puppets can help children's cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and personality development.

Overall, the studies conducted by Remer and Tzuriel (2015), Caganaga and Kalmis (2015), Loy (2017), Loy et al. (2020), Cvetkova and Andonovska-Trajkovska (2012) have shown that puppetry activities bring benefits to enhance children's holistic development especially children in nursery and kindergarten. Additionally, puppetry plays also change children's behavior, train them to be more mature, and have fun in playing and learning activities.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this study was to determine the benefits of puppetry activities that integrated into pedagogies process, playing, and learning activities for children who were enrolled in early childhood programmes.

METHODOLOGY

Puppetry activities in early childhood programmes study use a qualitative method. Data were obtained through interviews and analysed by theme. The researcher chose the data analysis based on the theme to avoid repetition in the discussion of the study data. In-depth interviews were conducted on four respondents. Respondent A (RN1) was a 50-year-old female nursery child care provider, Respondent B (RN2) a 32-year-old female nursery child care provider, Respondent C (RK1) a 46-year-old kindergarten teacher, and Respondent D (RK2) a 26-year-old male kindergarten teacher. The interview data was then analysed thematically according to the benefits of puppetry activities in nurseries and kindergartens. To determine the theme, the researcher ensures that the theme be realized can achieve the objective and related to the scope of the study. In compliance with the ethics of research, the nursery, kindergartens, and respondents' actual names were kept confidential.

FINDING

The results of the investigation into the benefits of puppetry activities for children in early childhood programs are presented and discussed in this section. The benefits of such puppetry activities are categorized into the following age groups: (i) nursery for babies, infants, and toddlers and (ii) kindergarten children.

The benefits of Puppetry Activities in Nursery

Through child care provider interviews in nursey, themes gained regarding the benefits of puppets include (i) Creative thinking and imagination, (ii) Manageable self-control and emotions, (iii) Social interaction, and communication and (iv) Daily living skills.

(i) Creative thinking and imagination.

Children use their creativity to come up with something new in puppetry activities. Through the puppets, they can express their creative thoughts which may be difficult for them to convey through other mediums. In terms of imagination, children are willing to play with puppets, explore, and build their imaginations. They can imagine an idea in their mind through a fantasy puppet. The following are interview data from respondents:

*Puppets meet the instincts of babies, infants, and toddlers who love to play.
Puppet actions can brighten up the playing and pedagogy atmosphere.
Puppet activities can generate creative ideas and stimulate young children's
imagination. (RNI)*

Playing puppets... puppet art and craft activities gives children the opportunity to be creative and fantastic. (RN2)

(ii) Manageable self-control and emotions.

Playing puppets trains children to control their actions, share, and control negative emotions. The action taken is not according to one's instincts and imitates the actions of other friends. The learning process that uses puppets to train children has its stand and decision-making. They are allowed to make choices about the types of puppets and their favorite stories in puppet play activities. The following are interview data from respondents:

Puppets activities create a cheerful atmosphere and increase children's emotions... give their stand and decision-making. (RN1)

Express feelings, control own actions, handle situations correctly, share, and control negative emotions... calm down in overcoming difficulties ... in the puppet performance, their make choices about the types of puppets and their favorite stories. (RN2)

(iii) Social interaction and communication.

Puppetry activities train children's social skills and roles in the real world. Train children how to interact and communicate effectively with others. Puppetry activities also train children to work with other children through discussion, understanding others, give and take. The following are interview data from a respondent:

For children's social development, the use of puppets provides an opportunity for children to work collaboratively in pairs or groups... they can play with known or unknown friends in role-playing, and story reading with puppet activities ... in a social context, children play puppets in groups, they interact with other friends. Puppets can stimulate children's minds to understand a learning activity more effectively, especially in oral skills, comprehension and to interact and communicate effectively with others. (RN1)

(iv) Daily living skills.

Acting and stories in puppet performance allow children to make simulations, assumptions, and problem-solving skills in their daily lives. Situations and lessons in stories help children to overcome the problems, challenges, and struggles of life in their way. The following are interview data from a respondent:

Stories in puppet performance train children to master problem-solving skills... simulations and assumptions in their daily lives... situations and conflicts in stories show the problems, challenges, and struggles... children learn challenges and solutions. (RN1)

The benefits of Puppetry Activities in Kindergarten

Through the interviews with kindergarten's teachers, the themes obtained regarding the benefits of puppets include (i) Creativity, intellect, and memory, (ii) Social and emotional, (iii) Physical and mental health, (iv) Practice in focusing, language, and communication and (v) Spirituality and moral values.

(i) Creativity, intellect, and memory.

Children like to imitate the movements in puppet performances shown by the teacher. Children use their creativity, thinking skills, and problem-solving skills in the process of puppet activities involving movement, music, drama, visuals, shapes, and colours. Children's intellectual and can be traced through the skills, knowledge, experience, and motivation in puppetry activities. The following are interview data from respondents:

Children love to imitate the puppet movements shown by the teacher. Puppetry activities stimulate their brain cells.... These puppets can enhance children's imagination through the use of puppets during storytelling activities. (RK1)

Making simple and easy puppets to give new experiences... train them to recognize visuals, shapes, and colors... Their story activities for presentations give experience and can train creativity, memory, and motivate children to learn... They can perform the movement, music, drama in puppet performances.... their skills and knowledge increase. (RK2)

(ii) Social and emotional.

Children learn to think about the feelings, abilities, and desires of others. Through the puppetry activities, they can express their feelings and thoughts which may be difficult for them to convey to adults directly. Puppetry activities also train children's social interactions and socializing with others children. While playing puppets together, they learn to work together and follow the rules. The following are interview data from respondents:

Helps to achieve positive social skills with peers.... Children's social activities begin to increase and strive to work together, follow the rules, and socialize with other children... learn self-concept and control social behavior well.... can understand themselves, understand the feelings, abilities, desires of others, and achieve positive emotions. (RK1)

Children express feelings and interact with other children. In other words, the use of puppets can improve children's social and emotional skills.... they express their feelings through puppets they may be difficult for them to convey to adults directly. (RK2)

(iii) Physical and mental health.

Puppetry activities that involve physical activity improve children's fine motor skills, gross motor skills, and eye coordination. They can master the strength and endurance that can benefit physical health. Mentally, puppetry activities train children to respond appropriately using appropriate methods in problem-solving. The following are interview data from a respondent:

Puppet performance ... singing and movement with puppet...puppet art and craft... involve fine motor movement, gross motor, eye coordination, and balance can train children's physical skills... motor skills mastered by children when making and using the puppet.... mentally, puppetry activities train children are resilient, resilient, and able to solve problems. (RK1)

(iv) Practice in focusing, language, and communication.

Children can focus on and actively engage in puppetry activities. Puppets encourage children to talk. Hand puppets along with the mouth and tongue design can be used for teaching phonics, syllables, words, sentences in the language, and children's communication. The following are interview data from respondents:

Storytelling with puppets... question and answer with puppets activities can attract the attention and focus of children to continue to learn enthusiastically ... master language skills well when they use puppets with the mouth and tongue to play roles, storytelling, talking and question and answer.... this activity adds vocabulary and fluency to speak using the right tone and intonation. (RK1)

Puppets can build and strengthen students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills through real experiences and enjoyable activities. (RK2)

(v) Spirituality and moral values.

Puppets can be used to liven up children's stories with high moral values. The story of a puppet performance educates children to have perseverance and patience, right and wrong, right and wrong. Train them to be loving, patriotic people willing to face adversity, overcome the challenges of daily life with wisdom, confidence, tolerance, and empathy. The following are interview data from a respondent:

Tell a story to inculcate good values such as wisdom, confidence, tolerance, and empathy in children... teach children good and bad things, right and right through puppet performance... children are more confident in themselves and tolerate and understanding other children... cultivate the nature of empathy and wisdom in children in daily life. (RK1)

Based on the thematic analysis, it was found that the inclusion of puppetry activities in an early childhood program can (i) boost intellect and memory; (ii) enhance creative thinking and imagination; (iii) more manageable of self-control and emotions; (iv) ensure

social and interaction; (v) allow practice in focusing; language and communication; (vi) improve children's physical and mental health; (vii) connected spirituality and moral values (viii) reveal the daily living skills which embedded in the puppetry activities can be translated into their life's.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

All in all, the findings of the study have shown that the use of puppetry activities encompasses puppet performance, storytelling with puppet, singing and movement with puppet, puppet art and craft, question and answer with puppet, role-playing, and story reading with puppet, an integrated puppet in playing and learning activities in early childhood programmes puppetry activities helps children's overall development.

These study findings were consistent with the research report by the study of Remer and Tzuriel (2015), Caganaga and Kalmis (2015), Loy (2017), Loy et al. (2020), Cvetkova and Andonovska-Trajkovska (2012) states that puppetry activities are a great medium of learning and playing for children and enhance their life skills, knowledge and learning experiences.

According to the child care provider and teacher, puppetry activities bring benefits to children's development, liven up the playing and learning environment. Additionally, puppet plays are an important part of edutainment in early childhood care and education. Accordingly, this paper has provided a clearer picture of the benefits of puppetry activities in early childhood programs. Child care providers, teachers, early childhood center managers, curriculum planners, parents, guardians, and the community should advocate the use of puppet plays as a means to develop children's holistic development. Following the use of puppets as pedagogical tools, puppet performance in theater can be employed as an aesthetic appreciation for children to appreciate the value of puppetry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This part of the research "Development of a comprehensive and integrated model of quality Malaysian early childhood care and education-project 3/Teaching Learning and Assessment (TLA): determining contributing factors of quality ecce" (2015-0024-106-04-3) is funded by the Ministry of Finance through the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Special appreciation is also dedicated to the National Child Development Research Centre, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, Malaysia for giving us the opportunity to carry out this research project.

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