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The Influence of Finger Puppet Learning Media to Students' Speaking Skills and Self-Confidence in English Learning

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines the effect of finger puppet learning media on students' speaking skills and self-confidence in English learning. Conducted at Muslim Suksa School in Southern Thailand, the research employed a quantitative quasi-experimental method using a nonequivalent control group design. The sample comprised 30 second-grade high school students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through pretest and posttest instruments adapted from previous studies and analyzed using descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing. The findings reveal a significant improvement in students' speaking skills and self-confidence following the use of finger puppets. The mean score increased from 60.28 to 84.32, while the standard deviation decreased from 15.007 to 9.860. A paired samples t-test yielded a t-value of −10.635 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest results. These results suggest that finger puppet media effectively reduce students' psychological barriers by creating a sense of distance between speakers and their audience, supporting authentic task-based learning, and fostering a more relaxed classroom atmosphere. Moreover, in Muslim school contexts, finger puppets can be culturally adapted to align with students' religious values, thereby supporting learning while preserving local identity.
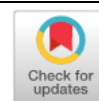
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INTRODUCTION

English has long been recognized as a global lingua franca that plays a pivotal role in education, science, technology, and international communication. In the context of secondary education, English learning is not merely aimed at fulfilling curriculum requirements but also at equipping students with essential communicative competencies needed for higher education and global participation (Masatoshi 2019). Among the four language skills, speaking is widely regarded as the most critical yet the most challenging for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as it requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, and psychological readiness in real-time communication. Despite years of formal instruction, many EFL students continue to demonstrate limited speaking proficiency. This issue is particularly evident in classroom settings where students tend to remain silent, avoid participation in oral activities, and show reluctance to express their ideas in English (Alghamdi 2019). Empirical studies suggest that these difficulties are not solely caused by inadequate vocabulary or grammatical competence, but are strongly associated with affective factors such as low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and speaking anxiety (Alwi et al., 2021). Learners who experience high levels of anxiety often perceive speaking activities as threatening, which subsequently hinders their willingness to communicate and negatively impacts their oral performance.

Self-confidence has been identified as a key psychological variable influencing students' speaking achievement. Learners with higher levels of self-confidence are more likely to take risks, actively engage in communicative tasks, and view errors as part of the learning process. Conversely, students with low self-confidence tend to be passive and overly cautious,

limiting their opportunities for meaningful language practice. Previous research has consistently reported a significant correlation between self-confidence and speaking performance in EFL contexts, indicating that affective readiness is as crucial as linguistic competence in developing oral communication skills (Kuncoro & Erlangga, 2021).

The challenge of developing speaking skills becomes more complex in multilingual and multicultural educational settings, such as Muslim schools in Southern Thailand. In this region, students are required to navigate multiple languages simultaneously: Thai as the national language, Malay as the dominant regional language, Arabic for religious instruction, and English as an international language. This multilingual environment often imposes additional cognitive and affective demands on learners, which may impede their ability to produce spoken English fluently and confidently (Hassan et al., 2020). Moreover, the limited exposure to English outside the classroom further restricts students' opportunities to practice speaking in authentic contexts.

Cultural and religious values also play a significant role in shaping students' attitudes toward speaking in a foreign language. Within Malay-Muslim communities, social norms emphasizing politeness, modesty, and careful speech may unintentionally discourage students from speaking spontaneously due to fear of making errors or losing face in front of peers and teachers. Several studies conducted in conservative and religious educational contexts have reported similar findings, highlighting that students often associate mistakes with personal failure rather than as a natural part of language learning (Nadia Oktaviani et al., 2023). As a result, students may develop a strong sense of apprehension toward speaking activities, which further undermines their self-confidence.

Preliminary observations at Muslim Suksa School in Southern Thailand indicate that many students experience considerable difficulty in expressing their ideas orally in English. Although students demonstrate relatively adequate receptive skills, such as reading and listening, their productive speaking skills remain underdeveloped. This imbalance suggests that psychological barriers, particularly low self-confidence and speaking anxiety, constitute the primary obstacles to effective oral communication. Such conditions are concerning, especially for high school students who are preparing for national examinations and future academic or professional pathways that increasingly demand English communicative competence.

Recent pedagogical research emphasizes the importance of implementing learner-centered and low-anxiety instructional strategies to address these challenges. Teaching approaches that promote active participation, authentic communication, and emotional safety have been shown to significantly enhance students' speaking performance and confidence (Alwi et al., 2021). In this regard, the integration of innovative learning media is considered an effective means of reducing students' affective filters and fostering a more supportive learning environment.

One instructional medium that has gained attention in recent studies is the use of finger puppets in language learning. Although finger puppets are traditionally associated with early childhood education, emerging research suggests that they are also pedagogically relevant for adolescent learners. Finger puppets provide symbolic representation and create psychological distance between learners and their audience, allowing students to express ideas through characters rather than themselves. This mechanism has been found to reduce fear of negative evaluation, encourage risk-taking in speaking, and promote more spontaneous oral interaction (Oktaviani et al., 2023). Furthermore, finger puppet activities support task-based learning and role-play, which are widely recognized as effective strategies for developing communicative competence.

In the context of Muslim schools, the use of finger puppet media can be carefully adapted to align with students' cultural and religious values. Characters, themes, and dialogues can be designed to reflect modesty, ethical behavior, and local identity, ensuring that pedagogical innovation does not conflict with institutional or community norms. Despite its potential benefits, empirical research examining the effectiveness of finger puppet media

in improving speaking skills and self-confidence among high school students in Muslim school settings, particularly in Southern Thailand, remains limited.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of finger puppet learning media on students' speaking skills and self-confidence in English learning at Muslim Suksa School, Southern Thailand. By addressing both linguistic and psychological dimensions of speaking development, this research is expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on innovative and culturally responsive EFL pedagogy, as well as provide practical implications for English teachers working in multilingual and religious educational contexts.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative method with a quasi-experimental design in the form of a nonequivalent control group design. Quantitative research is research that is used to research the conditions of natural objects, used to research certain populations or samples, data collection techniques use research instruments, data analysis is quantitative or statistical with the aim of testing the established hypothesis Sugiyono (2017). The study was conducted at Muslim Suksa School, Thailand, with the population consisting of all high school students at the school. The research sample was selected using purposive sampling techniques, consisting of two classes with a total of 30 students. The data collection method used in this study was pretest-posttest with measurements using measurement tools from a previous study by Fajriyah (2013) in the form of multiple choice and matching questions. The data analysis technique used descriptive statistics to calculate the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation, followed by hypothesis testing
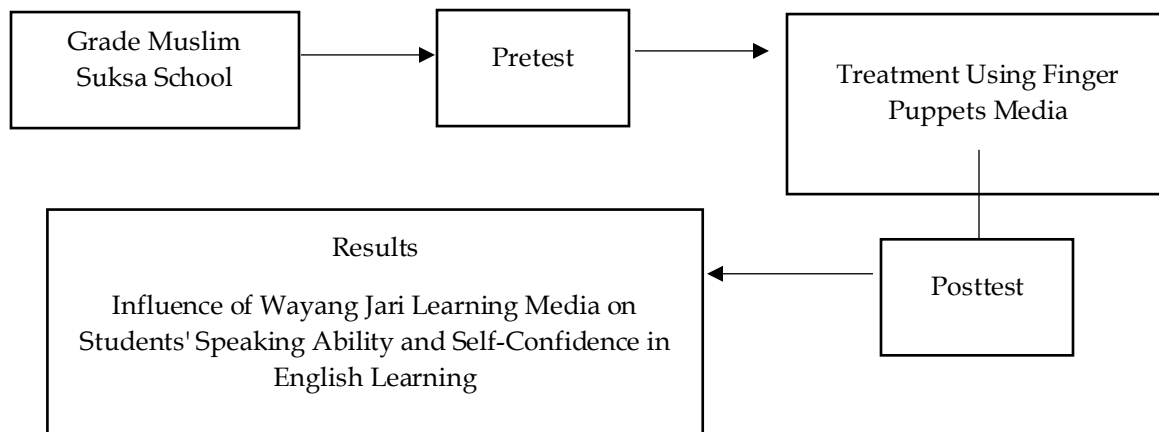

Figure 1. Research Flow

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Results

Table 1. Results Before treatment

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pra	30	33	87	60.28	15.007
Valid N (listwise)	30				

This study began by applying different treatments to one class. The research on students' speaking skills was conducted after the learning process using finger puppets as media. The results obtained during the study produced significant data before the treatment using finger puppets and after the treatment using finger puppets in the learning process. The results of the students' pre-treatment, as measured by the observation sheet, show that the average score is below the Minimum Classical Mastery (KKM) of < 75

The table above presents the descriptive data of students' speaking abilities and confidence prior to the intervention involving finger puppets. Among the 30 students in the sample, the lowest score recorded was 33, while the highest score was 87. The mean score attained by students was 59,47 with a standard deviation of 14.434. The results demonstrate

that the students' English speaking proficiency and confidence remain below the Minimum Classical Mastery (KKM) benchmark of 75. The substantial standard deviation signifies significant variability in student abilities, reflecting a notably uneven distribution of scores within the class.

After obtaining the results before the treatment of high school students at Muslim Suksa School by conducting the English learning process using conventional methods with discussions and lectures to 30 students, the results of language skills and student confidence obtained an average score below the Minimum Classical Mastery (KKM) of < 75. Next, the researcher conducted learning using finger puppets as a medium. From this, the researcher obtained the following results after the treatment, as shown in the table below :

Table 2. Results after treatment

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pra	30	53	99	84,32	9.860
Valid N (listwise)	30				

This table presents descriptive statistics of the measurement results after students received treatment in the form of learning using finger puppets. With the same number of students, namely 30, there was a significant increase in all indicators. The minimum score increased to 53 and the maximum score reached 99. The most striking was the increase in the mean score to 85,63, far exceeding the minimum passing grade set. The standard deviation decreased to 9.518, indicating that the distribution of student scores became more homogeneous and consistent after the treatment. This indicates that finger puppets are effective in improving students' speaking skills and confidence evenly.

Based on the treatment data obtained before and after treatment, hypothesis testing was then conducted using the SPSS 22 for Windows program. The results of the hypothesis testing are shown in the following table.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test Results

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Sebelum menggunakan media - Sesudah menggunakan media	-24.04000	11.28229	2.25646	-28.69710	-19.38290	-10.654	24	.000

The findings present the outcomes of hypothesis testing utilizing a paired samples test performed with SPSS 22. The test findings indicate a t-value of -10.635, a degree of freedom (df) of 24, and a significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000. A significance value substantially below 0.05 denotes a statistically significant difference between the outcomes prior to and following therapy. The utilization of finger puppets has been demonstrated to significantly enhance pupils' speaking abilities and confidence in acquiring English. The negative t-value signifies that the post-treatment score exceeds the pre-treatment score, hence validating the intervention's efficacy in this study.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate a significant improvement in students' speaking skills and self-confidence following the implementation of finger puppet learning media, as indicated by the increase in the average score from 60.28 to 84.32. This notable improvement suggests that finger puppets serve not only as instructional aids but also as effective pedagogical media that actively support students' oral language development and confidence in using English. The findings are consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, as discussed by Utami et al. (2023), which posits that psychological barriers such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence can hinder the language acquisition process by limiting learners' ability to process linguistic input. When these affective factors are reduced, learners are more likely to engage actively in speaking activities and demonstrate improved performance.

In this study, finger puppets proved effective in lowering students' affective filters by creating psychological distance between the learners and their audience. By speaking through a puppet character, students felt less personal exposure and pressure when performing in front of the class, which helped reduce anxiety and increase their willingness to communicate. This finding is supported by recent studies indicating that puppet-based learning media can significantly enhance students' confidence and motivation in EFL speaking activities (Jannah & Aulina, 2023; Puspita & Kurniawan, 2024). As a result, students became more comfortable expressing their ideas orally and more willing to participate in communicative interactions.

Furthermore, the decrease in the standard deviation from 15.007 to 9.860 indicates that the use of finger puppet learning media not only improved the overall class average but also reduced the gap in speaking ability among students. This suggests that finger puppets are effective for learners with diverse proficiency levels, benefiting both lower- and higher-achieving students. This result aligns with Tomlinson's (2014) theory of differentiated instruction, which emphasizes the importance of instructional strategies that accommodate students' varying abilities and learning needs. Through finger puppet activities, lower-proficiency learners experienced reduced anxiety and greater support, while higher-proficiency learners were able to develop more complex and creative oral expressions.

Moreover, the improvement in speaking skills found in this study is consistent with the findings of Sriyanti and Putri (2023), who emphasize the importance of creating authentic and meaningful communicative contexts in language learning. Finger puppets facilitate such contexts by enabling students to engage in role-playing, dialogue practice, and storytelling activities that resemble real-life communication situations. These interactive activities encourage natural language use, promote active participation, and foster both linguistic competence and self-confidence. Therefore, the findings of this study confirm that finger puppet learning media have a significant influence on students' speaking skills and self-confidence in English, supporting both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the use of finger puppets in English language learning is effective in improving students' speaking skills and self-confidence at the high school level. This medium helps reduce psychological barriers, such as anxiety and fear of speaking in front of others, by creating a sense of psychological distance between students and their audience, which encourages more confident oral expression. In addition, finger puppets create a more relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere, support authentic communication through dialogue and role-play activities, and can be adapted to different levels of language proficiency. In Muslim school contexts, this medium can also be aligned with values of modesty and cultural and religious principles, allowing English learning to remain consistent with students' identities. Therefore, finger puppets can be considered an innovative and contextual teaching medium, although further research with stronger research designs and broader samples is still needed to strengthen these findings.

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