

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN CHILDREN AGED 5–6 YEARS THROUGH ISLAMIC VALUES-BASED HAND PUPPET MEDIA AT RA MAMBAUL ULUM SUKANAGARA

Article Information

E-ISSN : 3089- 9869

Volume 2 Issue 3

Pages 13–24

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Abstract

*Speaking skills are essential for young children because they support communication, confidence, social interaction, and learning readiness. However, several children in Group B at Raudhatul Athfal Mambaul Ulum Sukanagara still showed limited confidence in answering questions, expressing opinions, asking simple questions, and retelling stories. **This condition reduced children's participation in classroom interactions and limited opportunities for active language development. Although hand puppet media have been widely used to support speaking skills, studies integrating Islamic values into hand puppet-based learning remain limited.** This study aimed to improve the speaking skills of children aged five to six years through **Islamic values-based hand puppet media. The study employed Classroom Action Research using descriptive quantitative and qualitative approaches. The participants were 15 Group B children. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and field notes. The intervention was conducted in two cycles consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The findings showed a continuous improvement in children's speaking skills. The average achievement increased from 48.0% in the pre-cycle stage to 60.0% in Cycle I and reached 86.6% in Cycle II. **Children became more active in answering questions, identifying characters and objects in stories, expressing opinions and feelings, asking simple questions, and retelling story content with greater confidence.** In addition, the stories and dialogues presented through the hand puppets introduced values such as honesty, politeness, responsibility, helpfulness, and respect for others. The study concludes that Islamic values-based hand puppet media provide an enjoyable and meaningful learning experience that effectively improves children's speaking skills while simultaneously supporting the development of positive character values.*

Keywords: *Dialogic Storytelling; Oral Expression; Character Learning; Interactive Media; Language Stimulation*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a critical period for growth and development. During this stage, language is one of the primary domains that requires stimulation because it enables children to express their thoughts, feelings, needs, and experiences. One essential component of language development is speaking skills. These skills support children's communication abilities, social interactions, and readiness for learning (Alfira et al., 2024). From an Islamic perspective, the ability to speak is regarded

as a blessing from Allah SWT, as mentioned in Surah Ar-Rahman, verses 1–4, particularly through the concept of al-bayān, which refers to the human capacity to communicate and explain ideas clearly through language.

Children's language development does not occur in isolation. Vygotsky emphasized that language develops through social interactions among children, adults, and peers (Etnawati, 2022). Therefore, early childhood education should provide opportunities for children to actively speak, ask questions, answer inquiries, and express their ideas. In this process, instructional media play a significant role as tools for delivering messages that can stimulate children's attention and interest in learning (Kwintiana et al., 2023). Learning media may include people, materials, or events that create meaningful learning conditions for children (Sultan & Tirtayasa, 2019).

However, preliminary observations in Group B at RA Mambaul Ulum Sukanagara indicated that children's speaking skills had not yet developed optimally. Of the 15 children in the class, five were still passive, lacked self-confidence, and were unable to participate actively in oral communication activities, such as answering questions or expressing simple ideas. This condition affected classroom interactions because children tended to become passive listeners, participated less frequently in discussions, and showed limited confidence when communicating with teachers and peers. As a result, opportunities to develop language skills through meaningful social interaction were not fully utilized. This condition was associated with learning practices that remained predominantly conventional, limiting children's opportunities to engage actively in classroom interactions.

Islamic values-based hand puppet media offer a relevant alternative to address this issue. This medium aligns with the characteristics of young children because it is concrete, engaging, enjoyable, and provides opportunities for storytelling and role-playing activities. Through characters, dialogues, and Islamic stories, children can develop speaking skills while learning values such as honesty, politeness, responsibility, compassion, and mutual respect. Research by Suradinata and Maharani (2020) demonstrated that storytelling methods assisted by hand puppets positively influence children's speaking abilities, particularly vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation. Similarly, Destyani and Sanoto (2024) found that hand puppet media used in storytelling activities significantly improved children's vocabulary mastery and speaking skills.

Although previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of hand puppet media in improving children's speaking abilities, most of these studies focused primarily on language outcomes such as vocabulary development, pronunciation, and oral communication skills. Limited attention has been given to the integration of Islamic values within hand puppet activities as a means of simultaneously developing speaking skills and character formation in early childhood education. This gap highlights the need for research that examines how Islamic values-based hand puppet media can function not only as a language-learning tool but also as a medium for instilling religious and moral values in young children.

The novelty of this study lies in the use of Islamic values-based hand puppet media not only as a tool for enhancing speaking skills but also as a means of instilling religious and moral values in early childhood. Unlike previous studies that mainly emphasized language development, this study integrates speaking activities with Islamic values such as honesty, politeness, responsibility, compassion, and mutual respect through storytelling and role-playing experiences. This approach contributes to both language development and character education within the context of Islamic early childhood education.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to: (1) identify the initial condition of children's speaking skills in Group B at RA Mambaul Ulum Sukanagara, (2) describe the implementation process of Islamic values-based hand puppet media in learning activities, and (3) analyze changes in children's speaking skills following the implementation of the media. Through these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to the development of innovative and values-based learning strategies for enhancing speaking skills in early childhood education.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive approaches (Luthfiyah, 2018; Magdalena, 2023). Classroom Action Research was selected because the study aimed to improve the learning process and enhance children's speaking skills through a series of systematic interventions implemented in stages (Utomo et al., 2024). The CAR approach was considered appropriate because it allows researchers and teachers to collaboratively identify classroom problems, implement instructional improvements, evaluate outcomes, and continuously refine learning practices to achieve targeted developmental outcomes. The intervention involved the use of Islamic values-based hand puppet media in storytelling activities, dialogues, question-and-answer sessions, and story retelling. The action research model adopted in this study was based on the framework developed by Kemmis and McTaggart, which consists of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. These stages were conducted cyclically until the predetermined success indicators were achieved.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at RA Mambaul Ulum, located in Sukajadi III Hamlet, Sukanagara Village, Sukanagara District, Cianjur Regency, during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research activities took place from April to June 2026 and included preliminary observations, instrument development, implementation of Cycle I, implementation of Cycle II, data analysis, and report preparation. The participants consisted of 15 Group B children aged 5–6 years, including nine

boys and six girls. The classroom teacher served as a collaborator, assisting with the implementation of the intervention, observations, and reflections throughout each cycle.

Research Procedure

The study began with a pre-cycle stage to identify the initial condition of children's speaking skills. During this stage, the researcher observed the learning process and identified several issues, including children's limited willingness to speak, difficulties in expressing opinions, and inadequate ability to retell events or stories in a coherent manner.

The study then proceeded through Cycle I and Cycle II. Each cycle consisted of four stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. During the planning stage, the researcher prepared lesson modules, developed Islamic values-based hand puppet media, selected story themes, designed observation sheets, and prepared documentation tools.

During the action stage, children were introduced to hand puppet characters, listened to simple Islamic stories, answered questions, engaged in dialogues, expressed their opinions, and retold the stories. In Cycle I, the learning activities focused on introducing hand puppet characters and encouraging children to answer simple questions and participate in guided storytelling sessions. Reflection results from Cycle I indicated that several children were still hesitant to speak and required additional stimulation. Therefore, improvements were implemented in Cycle II by increasing opportunities for dialogue, role-playing, independent story retelling, and active interaction with hand puppet characters. These modifications were intended to strengthen children's confidence and verbal participation during learning activities.

During the observation stage, both the researcher and the collaborating teacher observed children's speaking skills throughout the learning activities. During the reflection stage, the outcomes of the intervention were analyzed to determine improvements for the subsequent cycle. If the success indicators were achieved in Cycle II, the intervention was concluded. Otherwise, additional cycles could be conducted.

Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained from Group B children, the classroom teacher, and learning activities involving Islamic values-based hand puppet media. Secondary data included the school profile, student records, instructional materials, lesson modules, activity documentation, books, scholarly journals, undergraduate theses, and relevant previous studies.

Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, documentation, and field notes. Observation was used to assess children's speaking skills. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the classroom teacher to gather information regarding the initial conditions, instructional strategies, media implementation, children's responses, and changes in speaking skills. Documentation was used to collect daily lesson plans or teaching modules, attendance records, children's

developmental records, and photographs of activities. Field notes were used to document children's responses, instructional challenges, and significant findings not captured in the observation sheets.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was an observation checklist designed to assess children's speaking skills. The observed aspects included the ability to answer simple questions, express opinions verbally, retell stories using simple language, communicate with teachers and peers, and speak confidently in front of the class. These indicators were selected because they represent key components of early childhood speaking development and reflect children's ability to communicate ideas, respond to others, and participate actively in learning activities.

Each indicator was scored as 1 if the skill was demonstrated and 0 if the skill had not yet emerged. The scores obtained by each child were then converted into percentages using the following formula:

$$P = F/N \times 100\%$$

Where:

P = percentage of achievement

F = total score obtained

N = maximum possible score

100% = constant value

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed by calculating the percentage of achievement for each child and the overall class mastery percentage in each cycle. Qualitative data were analyzed through data collection, categorization based on the research focus, descriptive data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

Qualitative findings obtained from observations, interviews, field notes, and documentation were used to explain changes in children's speaking behavior, learning participation, responses to the hand puppet media, and challenges encountered during each cycle. These findings complemented the quantitative results by providing contextual explanations for the improvements observed in children's speaking skills.

Qualitative analysis was used to explain the implementation process of Islamic values-based hand puppet media, children's responses, instructional challenges, and improvements made during each cycle.

Integration of Islamic Values-Based Hand Puppet Media

The hand puppet media used in this study incorporated Islamic values through story themes, character dialogues, and learning interactions. Stories emphasized values such as honesty, politeness, responsibility, kindness, gratitude, respect for others, and helping behavior. During storytelling

sessions, children were encouraged to imitate positive expressions, answer questions related to moral situations, participate in role-playing activities, and retell stories using their own words. Through these activities, speaking skill development was integrated with character education and Islamic values learning.

Success Indicators

The success indicators were determined based on improvements in children's speaking skills. The intervention was considered successful if at least 75% of the children achieved the Emerging category on the speaking skill indicators, which included answering questions, expressing opinions, retelling stories, communicating with others, and speaking confidently.

These indicators were directly aligned with the observation instrument and served as benchmarks for evaluating the effectiveness of Islamic values-based hand puppet media in enhancing children's speaking skills across the action research cycles. These criteria were used to determine the effectiveness of Islamic values-based hand puppet media in improving the speaking skills of Group B children at RA Mambaul Ulum Sukanagara.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study was conducted with 15 children aged 5–6 years in Group B at RA Mambaul Ulum Sukanagara, consisting of nine boys and six girls. The research was carried out through three stages: pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. Children's speaking skills were observed using five indicators: (1) answering questions clearly, (2) identifying characters or objects in a story, (3) expressing opinions or feelings verbally, (4) retelling the content of a story, and (5) asking simple questions related to the story. Scores were assigned using two categories: Not Yet Emerged (NYE = 0) and Emerged (E = 1). Children were considered to have achieved mastery if they met at least four out of the five indicators or obtained a score above 70%. The primary data were obtained through classroom action observations conducted during each cycle. The presentation of findings is organized according to the stages of the intervention to demonstrate how Islamic values-based hand puppet media contributed to the improvement of children's speaking skills.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Children's Speaking Skill Achievement

Research Stage	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 4	Indicator 5	Average Achievement	Children Achieving Mastery	Classical Mastery
Pre-cycle	53.3%	66.6%	46.6%	13.3%	60.0%	48.0%	3 children	20.0%
Cycle I	60.0%	73.3%	60.0%	40.0%	66.6%	60.0%	5 children	33.3%
Cycle II	93.3%	100.0%	80.0%	73.3%	86.6%	86.6%	13 children	86.6%

Note:

Indicator 1: Answering questions clearly

Indicator 2: Identifying characters or objects in the story

Indicator 3: Expressing opinions or feelings verbally

Indicator 4: Retelling the story content

Indicator 5: Asking simple questions related to the story

During the pre-cycle stage, children's speaking skills had not yet developed optimally. Most children appeared shy and passive, provided brief responses to questions, and were unable to retell stories coherently. These findings suggest that previous instructional practices had not provided sufficient opportunities for children to engage actively in speaking activities. The lowest achievement was observed in the ability to retell stories, indicating that children experienced difficulties in recalling, organizing, and communicating story sequences using their own words. This condition also affected children's participation during classroom discussions because many children were reluctant to speak, express opinions, or respond to teachers' questions.

In Cycle I, Islamic values-based hand puppet media were introduced through storytelling activities using a puppet character named "Ucup." The activities included an introduction session, puppet character familiarization, storytelling, question-and-answer sessions, identification of story characters or objects, expression of opinions, and story retelling exercises. Observation results indicated improvements compared to the pre-cycle stage. Children showed greater interest in learning activities, became more willing to answer questions, and participated more actively in oral communication. However, some children remained shy, passive, and unable to retell stories coherently. Since the classical mastery criterion had not yet reached the predetermined success indicator, the intervention continued to Cycle II.

In Cycle II, improvements were made based on the reflections from Cycle I. Children were given more opportunities to use the hand puppets directly, tell simple stories, answer questions, and participate in interactive quizzes with the puppet character "Ucup." These modifications created a more dynamic learning atmosphere. Children appeared more enthusiastic, self-confident, and actively engaged in communication. Observation results demonstrated that most children achieved the Emerged category across nearly all indicators. Since classical mastery exceeded the success criterion, the study was concluded at the end of Cycle II.

Overall, the findings indicate that the use of Islamic values-based hand puppet media effectively improved the speaking skills of Group B children at RA Mambaul Ulum Sukanagara. The most notable improvements were observed in children's ability to answer questions, identify story characters or objects, express opinions, and participate confidently in speaking activities. Although the ability to retell stories also improved substantially, it remained the aspect requiring the most support for some

children. The findings demonstrate that each cycle contributed progressively to achieving the research objective of improving children's speaking skills through meaningful and interactive learning experiences.

The average speaking skill achievement increased from 48.0% during the pre-cycle stage to 60.0% in Cycle I and reached 86.6% in Cycle II. Indicator 1 increased from 53.3% to 93.3%, Indicator 2 increased from 66.6% to 100.0%, Indicator 3 increased from 46.6% to 80.0%, Indicator 4 increased from 13.3% to 73.3%, and Indicator 5 increased from 60.0% to 86.6%. These improvements indicate that the intervention positively affected all dimensions of children's speaking skills. These results suggest that hand puppet media can create a more active, enjoyable, and communicative learning environment. This finding is consistent with Alfira et al. (2024), who emphasized that speaking skills are a crucial aspect of early childhood language development because they support communication, social interaction, and learning readiness.

Initially, several children were passive, lacked self-confidence, and struggled to retell stories coherently. These findings indicate that children's speaking skills require appropriate stimulation through learning activities that provide direct opportunities for verbal expression. This result aligns with Vygotsky's perspective, as cited by Etnawati (2022), which emphasizes that children's language development is strongly influenced by social interactions with adults and peers. In this study, interactions among teachers, children, and the puppet character "Ucup" served as important mechanisms for encouraging children to answer questions, express opinions, and retell stories.

The improvements observed in Cycle I demonstrate that hand puppet media successfully captured children's attention and encouraged active participation in learning activities. Instructional media function as tools for delivering messages that stimulate children's attention and interest in learning (Kwintiana et al., 2023). This was evident as children became more attentive to stories, identified characters, and responded to teachers' questions. Furthermore, learning media may include people, materials, or events that create meaningful learning experiences (Sultan & Tirtayasa, 2019). Therefore, the hand puppets used in this study served not only as visual aids but also as interactive media that facilitated communication between children and their learning environment.

The findings from Cycle II showed even greater improvement after modifications were implemented. Children were given more opportunities to use the hand puppets directly, engage in dialogues, answer interactive quizzes, and retell stories. This strategy enhanced children's self-confidence because they perceived the activities as play rather than assessment. Such conditions are consistent with the characteristics of young children, who learn more effectively through concrete objects, visual representations, and engaging activities.

The findings are consistent with the study conducted by Suradinata and Maharani (2020), which demonstrated that storytelling methods supported by hand puppet media positively affect young children's speaking abilities, particularly vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation. Hand puppet media

effectively attract children's attention, encouraging them to communicate more actively and express their ideas more confidently. The findings also support those of Destyani and Sanoto (2024), who found that hand puppet media used in storytelling activities significantly improved vocabulary mastery and speaking skills from the pre-cycle stage to Cycle II. However, unlike previous studies that focused primarily on language outcomes, the present study integrates Islamic values into the learning process, thereby expanding the educational function of hand puppet media.

Despite these similarities with previous studies, this research offers a unique contribution through the integration of Islamic values into hand puppet media. The stories and dialogues were designed not only to improve speaking skills but also to introduce values such as honesty, politeness, responsibility, helpfulness, compassion, and mutual respect. During storytelling activities, children were encouraged to discuss the moral messages conveyed by the puppet characters, express opinions about appropriate behavior, and communicate personal experiences related to the values presented in the stories. This process stimulated children's verbal expression while simultaneously strengthening character development. Consequently, Islamic values-based hand puppet media serve a dual function: as a tool for language stimulation and as a medium for instilling Islamic character values in young children. This aspect strengthens the novelty of the study by demonstrating that instructional media can support both language development and moral education.

The highest improvement was observed in the indicator related to identifying story characters or objects, which reached 100.0% in Cycle II. This result suggests that children more easily understand concrete and visual elements of stories. Meanwhile, the ability to retell stories improved from 13.3% in the pre-cycle stage to 73.3% in Cycle II. Although this increase was substantial, it remained the most challenging indicator because children needed to recall the storyline, organize the sequence of events, and communicate it using their own words.

A major strength of this study lies in the implementation of staged interventions through the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II phases, allowing instructional weaknesses to be addressed through continuous reflection. Additionally, the use of the puppet character "Ucup" made the learning experience more relatable to children and encouraged greater speaking confidence. Another strength is the integration of Islamic values into language learning activities, which enabled children to develop communication skills while learning positive moral values. However, this study has several limitations. The sample consisted of only 15 children from a single institution, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the analysis relied primarily on descriptive statistics in the form of percentages. The study also focused mainly on observable speaking behaviors and did not examine other language dimensions such as sentence complexity, fluency, vocabulary breadth, or long-term retention of speaking skills. Future studies may employ more comprehensive instruments to assess vocabulary, sentence structure, pronunciation, intonation, and speech fluency.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Islamic values-based hand puppet media are effective in improving the speaking skills of children aged 5–6 years. The media encouraged children to become more active, courageous, and confident in answering questions, expressing opinions, asking simple questions, and retelling stories. In addition, the integration of Islamic values contributed to children's understanding of positive behaviors such as honesty, politeness, responsibility, and respect for others. Therefore, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to the development of language learning models that integrate communication skills and character education in early childhood settings. These findings reinforce the importance of designing early childhood language learning activities using concrete, interactive, enjoyable, and character-based instructional media.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the use of Islamic values-based hand puppet media was proven effective in improving the speaking skills of Group B children aged 5–6 years at RA Mambaul Ulum Sukanagara. The improvement was reflected in the average achievement scores of children's speaking skills, which increased from 48.0% during the pre-cycle stage to 60.0% in Cycle I and reached 86.6% in Cycle II. Children became more confident in answering questions, identifying characters or objects in stories, expressing opinions, asking simple questions, and retelling story content. These findings indicate that learning activities supported by interactive and meaningful media provide children with greater opportunities to communicate actively, thereby enhancing both language development and participation in classroom learning. Therefore, the intervention successfully achieved the predetermined research success indicators.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of Islamic values-based hand puppet media as a dual-function instructional tool that simultaneously promotes speaking skill development and character education. While previous studies have generally focused on hand puppets as storytelling media to improve vocabulary and oral communication, this study demonstrates that hand puppet media can also serve as an effective vehicle for introducing and internalizing Islamic values within everyday learning experiences. Values such as honesty, politeness, compassion, responsibility, and helpfulness were conveyed through characters, dialogues, and stories closely related to children's everyday experiences. The originality of this study is reflected in the combination of language stimulation, interactive storytelling, and Islamic character formation within a single learning intervention designed specifically for early childhood education settings. Its pioneering aspect lies in the use of the puppet character “Ucup” as an interactive medium to foster children's confidence in speaking within a safe, enjoyable, and non-threatening learning environment.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the advancement of early childhood education, particularly in the area of expressive language instruction using concrete media integrated with religious values. The findings extend existing knowledge by demonstrating that speaking skills can be developed more effectively when children are engaged in meaningful social interactions

supported by attractive media and value-based learning content. The study also reinforces the understanding that young children learn best through play, storytelling, dialogue, and direct interaction. Furthermore, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on Islamic early childhood education by providing empirical evidence that language development and character education can be integrated within the same pedagogical approach. More broadly, values-based hand puppet media may be implemented in various early childhood education settings by adapting the themes, cultural contexts, languages, and values relevant to each community.

The implications of this study are wide-ranging. For teachers, hand puppet media represent an affordable, easy-to-create, and effective instructional tool for developing children's speaking skills. The findings suggest that teachers should provide more opportunities for children to engage in storytelling, dialogue, questioning, and role-playing activities that encourage active verbal participation. For families and communities, storytelling activities using hand puppets can be implemented at home to foster warm communication between children and parents while reinforcing positive moral values. From a cultural perspective, this medium can be used to introduce stories, etiquette, and values that align with children's everyday lives. Economically, hand puppet media require minimal financial resources, making them suitable for early childhood education institutions with limited facilities. Environmentally, hand puppets can be made from fabric scraps or safe recycled materials, promoting sustainable practices through the reuse of valuable resources. From an educational policy perspective, the findings support the inclusion of creative, character-based, and culturally relevant instructional media within early childhood learning programs. Consequently, Islamic values-based hand puppet media may serve as an effective alternative for strengthening children's speaking skills, confidence, and character development simultaneously, thereby contributing to more holistic early childhood education.

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