

The effectiveness of role-playing assisted by finger puppet media in improving elementary school students' speaking skills: a literature review

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Article Info

Keywords

speaking skills; role-playing; finger puppet; elementary school

Article History

Received: 1 April 2026

Accepted: 8 May 2026

Published: 28 June 2026

DOI: 10.46368/jpd.v14i1.5022

Abstract

Speaking skills are a fundamental component of communication. However, elementary school students often encounter affective barriers that reduce their confidence in expressing ideas orally. This study aims to synthesize the effectiveness of integrating a role-playing model assisted by finger puppet media in improving students' speaking skills. The study employed a qualitative systematic literature review using the PRISMA protocol, with articles obtained from Sinta-indexed journals and other relevant scholarly databases published between 2016 and 2026. The synthesis of six selected studies shows that the integration of role playing and finger puppet media supports the development of speaking skills through structured role-playing simulations. Finger puppets function as scaffolding that helps reduce emotional barriers, enabling students to speak more confidently and effectively. This study is limited by the small number of articles analyzed and the grade-level scope of the reviewed studies. Therefore, the findings may serve as a theoretical reference for teachers in designing innovative communicative learning in elementary schools.

Kata kunci

keterampilan berbicara; bermain peran; boneka jari; sekolah dasar

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Abstrak

Keterampilan berbicara merupakan komponen mendasar dalam komunikasi. Namun, siswa sekolah dasar sering menghadapi hambatan afektif yang mengurangi kepercayaan diri mereka dalam mengungkapkan gagasan secara lisan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyintesis efektivitas integrasi model bermain peran yang dibantu media boneka jari dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode tinjauan pustaka sistematis kualitatif dengan protokol PRISMA, dengan artikel yang diperoleh dari jurnal terindeks Sinta dan basis data ilmiah relevan lainnya yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2016 hingga 2026. Sintesis terhadap enam studi terpilih menunjukkan bahwa integrasi bermain peran dan media boneka jari mendukung pengembangan keterampilan berbicara melalui simulasi bermain peran yang terstruktur. Boneka jari berfungsi sebagai scaffolding yang membantu mengurangi hambatan emosional, sehingga memungkinkan siswa berbicara dengan lebih percaya diri dan efektif. Penelitian ini memiliki keterbatasan pada jumlah artikel yang dianalisis yang relatif sedikit serta cakupan tingkat kelas dalam studi yang ditinjau. Oleh karena itu, temuan ini dapat menjadi rujukan teoretis bagi guru dalam merancang pembelajaran komunikatif yang inovatif di sekolah dasar.



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INTRODUCTION

Language skills play an important role for humans as social beings in communicating ideas, feelings, and information to others. Tarigan et al. (2023) state that good language proficiency requires mastery of four interrelated aspects, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which together form an integrated communication process. In line with this view, Slamet (as cited in Lubis & Nasution, 2024) presents data on the use of language skills in society: listening accounts for 42%, speaking for 32%, reading for 15%, and writing for 11%. These figures suggest that speaking is the second most frequently used language skill after listening. This finding demonstrates that speaking skills have a substantial influence on both learning processes and social interaction; therefore, they require special attention in classroom instruction.

Putri et al. (2024) argue that speaking skills enable students to interact with peers and adults. The age range of 7 to 12 years is part of late childhood, a period in which students' cognitive, linguistic, and social development progresses rapidly. At this stage, speaking functions not only as a means of conveying messages but also as a medium for developing ideas. However, this ideal condition does not fully correspond to the reality found in schools. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023), through the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), reported that Indonesian students' reading literacy score was 359, lower than the OECD average of 476. Low reading literacy may limit students' vocabulary mastery. Reading is a receptive skill that provides a foundation for speaking as a productive skill (Setyonegoro et al., 2020); therefore, limited reading competence can make it difficult for students to construct ideas orally. This condition is supported by data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) in 2022, which showed that the level of speaking fluency among elementary school students reached only 32.5%. The data suggest that many students may experience difficulties in oral communication, particularly those related to self-confidence (Fitriyanto & Wiranti, 2025). This finding is reinforced by Fardana et al. (2025), who observed that only 20% of students were willing to perform, whereas the remaining 80% tended to remain silent or speak in a very low voice because of psychological barriers, such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Maharani et al. (2024) similarly found that communication barriers are marked by physical and mental symptoms, including confusion and cold sweating when students are required to express themselves in front of their peers.

To address these problems, the integration of a role-playing model assisted by finger puppet media is considered a relevant solution. The role-playing model engages students in performing characters as a means of communication practice (Adini, 2021). Through this activity, students become more willing to speak because they feel comfortable and less pressured when expressing their opinions, while also connecting their knowledge with speaking practice (Khamraeva, 2021). Finger puppet media functions as scaffolding that helps students develop independence through guidance and collaboration (Wardani et al., 2023). This medium also serves as a protective device for students, as the audience's attention is directed more toward the character being played than toward the students themselves. Such conditions can reduce shyness, minimize emotional barriers, and make storytelling clearer (Puspasari et al., 2016). This is consistent with Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes that ability development occurs through social interaction; consequently, students' speaking confidence can increase as classroom interaction becomes more intensive (Syarif, 2020).

Several studies, including those by Anumerta et al. (2025), Bagialih et al. (2024), and Anjeli and Latifah (2021), have demonstrated the effectiveness of using these models and media to improve students' speaking ability. Nevertheless, most previous studies have examined the model and the media separately. This gap indicates that studies focusing on the integrated use of role-playing and finger puppets remain limited. Therefore, a literature review is needed to summarize previous findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of the synergy between the two. This study

aims to synthesize the effectiveness of this integration in improving elementary school students' speaking skills as a reference for innovation in language learning. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically and provide practical references for teachers in developing participatory learning and strengthening students' confidence. Accordingly, students' speaking skills can develop optimally in line with the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes courage in self-expression.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a literature review method. According to Putrihapsari and Fauziah (2020), a literature review is a type of research conducted by examining various library sources to achieve the research objectives. The research procedure followed the PRISMA protocol (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), which consists of four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, as described by Retnawati et al. (as cited in Auliarahmah & Nuraida, 2025). The use of this protocol was intended to ensure that the article selection process was systematic, transparent, and objective.

The data used in this study were secondary data in the form of accredited scientific articles obtained from GARUDA, SINTA, Google Scholar, DOAJ, and reputable international journals. The article search used the keywords “role-playing”, “finger puppet”, and “elementary school students' speaking skills”. The inclusion criteria consisted of articles published between 2016 and 2026 with elementary school students as research subjects. The exclusion criteria included articles that were not available in full text and articles that were not relevant to the research objectives.

The selection process was conducted through the four PRISMA stages. At the identification stage, 21 articles were found. At the screening stage, ten articles were excluded because of subject mismatch or full-text access limitations. At the eligibility stage, five articles were excluded because they were not relevant to the research objectives and focus.

The final stage resulted in six articles that met the criteria for analysis. Quality assessment was conducted by reviewing the accreditation status of the journals and the relevance of their content to the review objectives. Data analysis was conducted through cross-study analysis, consisting of data reduction, data presentation in a comparative table, and conclusion drawing to produce a synthesis of findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature search produced an article selection flow, as presented in Figure 1. From the initial 21 articles identified in the databases, a rigorous screening process based on inclusion and exclusion criteria resulted in 6 articles for analysis. These six articles were selected because they aligned with the research topic and demonstrated sufficient methodological quality for synthesis.

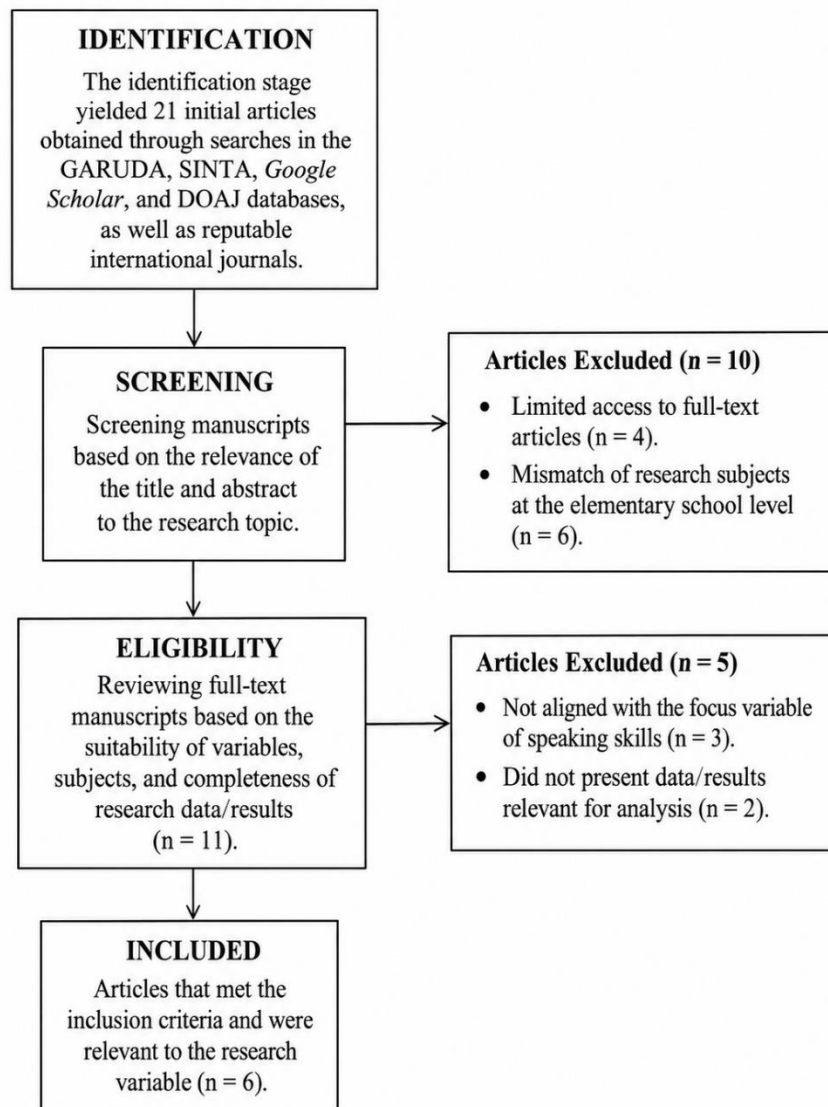


Figure 1. Article Selection Flow

Based on the selection process, a summary of the six articles is presented in Table 1. This presentation is intended to facilitate analysis and comparison of findings concerning the integration of the role-playing model assisted by finger puppet media in elementary schools.

Table 1. Characteristics and Main Findings of the Synthesized Articles

No.	Author(s) (Year)	Research Design	Model/Media Used	Main Findings
1	Anumerta et al. (2025)	Quantitative (one-shot case study)	Role-playing method	The mean speaking skill score increased substantially from 50.3 to 86.6, supported by the t-test result ($t = 7.311$, which exceeded the critical value 2.093).
2	Fardana et al. (2025)	Classroom action research	Role-playing method	Classical mastery increased from 54.73% in Cycle I to 80.25% in Cycle II.

No.	Author(s) (Year)	Research Design	Model/Media Used	Main Findings
3	Fitriyanto & Wiranti (2025)	Quantitative (pre-experimental)	Character mask media	Students' krama alus speaking skill scores showed a significant difference between the pretest (73.5) and posttest (90.2), with Sig. 0.004 < 0.05.
4	Bagialih et al. (2024)	Quantitative (quasi-experimental)	Hand puppet media	The experimental group achieved a higher score (81.14) than the control group (70.17), with a statistically significant difference.
5	Dumaini & Ardhiani (2023)	Quantitative (quasi-experimental)	Paper puppet media	The experimental group obtained a higher score (88.13) than the control group (77.82), with a statistically significant difference.
6	Anjeli & Latifah (2021)	Research and development (ADDIE model)	Finger puppet media	The media was rated very feasible (4.3) and received a very positive response (4.6), indicating its quality in supporting students' activeness and speaking confidence.

The data in Table 1 were used as the basis for synthesis and cross-study analysis to identify patterns in the findings of the six reviewed articles. The results of the analysis were then grouped into the following three discussion focuses.

Synthesis of the Effectiveness of Role-Playing in Improving Students' Speaking Skills

The implementation of the role-playing model shows a positive contribution to improving elementary school students' speaking skills. This is confirmed by Anumerta et al. (2025), who reported that before role-playing simulation was implemented, the average speaking ability score of third-grade students was 50.3 because instruction was still teacher-centered. This condition contributed to students' low confidence in expressing ideas independently. After the role-playing method was implemented, the average speaking skill score increased to 86.6. This increase was accompanied by a correlation coefficient of 0.985, indicating a strong relationship between the intervention and students' speaking skills.

The improvement in individual scores also affected students' classical learning mastery. This finding is consistent with Fardana et al. (2025), who reported an increase in mastery from 54.73% in Cycle I to 80.25% in Cycle II. This improvement was supported by better classroom management, which helped students understand how to perform roles according to the learning scenario. However, this finding also indicates that the success of role-playing strongly depends on teachers' readiness to design scenarios. Without effective classroom management, learning activities may become less focused, and learning objectives may not be achieved optimally. Overall, the findings collectively suggest that role-playing not only improves individual speaking skills but also contributes to more equitable classroom learning outcomes.

The effectiveness of role-playing appears to be further strengthened when it is integrated with visual media. This is reflected in Fitriyanto and Wiranti (2025), who reported an increase in students' speaking skill scores from 73.5 to 90.2. The use of the media helped students engage with the learning material because the audience's attention was directed not only toward the students but also toward the characters being portrayed. This finding is further supported by Bagialih et al. (2024), who reported that students' average speaking skill score reached 81.14 when hand puppet media was used.

The results suggest that the media can enhance students' confidence by providing opportunities for self-expression while portraying characters. A similar finding was reported by Dumaini and Ardhiani (2023), who found that the experimental group achieved an average score of 88.13, higher than the control group's average score of 77.82. A comparison of these three studies shows that although different types of visual media were employed, including character masks, hand puppets, and paper puppets, the key factor contributing to improvements in speaking skills was their ability to reduce students' psychological barriers. Based on the reviewed studies, the application of the role-playing model contributes to optimizing students' speaking ability across grade levels. This strengthens the view of Lubis and Nasution (2024), who state that role-playing simulations can create more authentic and memorable learning experiences, thereby encouraging students to express ideas more confidently. Nevertheless, such outcomes require active student involvement and continuous practice. In line with this, Niweroh and Kusuma (2024) emphasize that regular practice is a determining factor that enables students to communicate fluently without anxiety. Thus, this learning model supports a more contextual learning process and promotes the optimal development of students' speaking skills.

Synthesis of the Role of Finger Puppet Media in Addressing Students' Speaking Barriers

Finger puppet media plays an important role in bridging psychological barriers in elementary school students' speaking skills, particularly shyness and low self-confidence. The small size of the puppet and its placement on students' fingers shift audience attention away from the speaker and toward the character being portrayed. This condition helps reduce psychological pressure and lowers students' mental burden when speaking.

Various findings indicate that the effectiveness of this medium emphasizes different dimensions of students' abilities. In the affective aspect, Anjeli and Latifah (2021) explain that finger puppet media creates a more dynamic learning atmosphere and increases students' courage to speak. Similarly, Mudiayah and Watini (2021) emphasize its communicative function, namely that the media helps make communication clearer, enabling students to retell information effectively. Meanwhile, Gokmen (2025) shows that finger puppets help students identify story elements, ranging from character introduction to setting, and strengthen students' oral memory in conveying information verbally. In the linguistic aspect, Nur et al. (2025) found an increase in students' vocabulary, with 40% reaching the Developing as Expected category, accompanied by improved verbal responses during learning. These findings show that finger puppets function as scaffolding that helps students transform from passive communicators into students who are more willing to respond to teachers' instructions.

The effectiveness of finger puppets in reducing emotional barriers is consistent with the use of other character-based media. A comparison with the use of masks in Fitriyanto and Wiranti (2025) indicates that both types of media can reduce students' nervousness through character embodiment, allowing them to perform more confidently and speak more fluently. This finding is consistent with Dumaini and Ardhiani (2023), who found that engagement with character-based media deepened students' understanding of the material and made it more memorable. Thus, visual media serves not only as an instructional aid but also as a psychological tool that effectively reduces communication anxiety through meaningful language-learning experiences.

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed studies, finger puppet media and similar character-based media tend to function as learning approaches that can help overcome elementary school students' speaking barriers. These media reduce psychological barriers by shifting the audience's attention to the character being performed, allowing students to feel more comfortable when expressing ideas

verbally. The impact is evident not only in linguistic aspects, such as vocabulary development and fluency, but also in the strengthening of memory related to story content. However, the effectiveness of these media is not fixed, as it is influenced by the learning context and teachers' pedagogical competence in managing classroom activities so that students' enthusiasm remains directed toward learning goals. Therefore, these media can be used as a learning approach that connects emotional readiness with the gradual and meaningful development of students' speaking skills.

Synthesis of the Effectiveness of the Role-Playing Model Assisted by Finger Puppet Media in Improving Elementary School Students' Speaking Skills

The integration of the role-playing model with finger puppet media can promote student engagement, allowing speaking skills to develop more optimally. As discussed earlier, this success is reflected in the findings of Anumerta et al. (2025), who reported an increase in the average score from 50.3 to 86.6. In line with this, Fardana et al. (2025) found that the implementation of the model increased classical mastery to 80.25%. These outcomes were supported by the role of puppet media, which provided students with opportunities for spontaneous verbal expression. As a result, students were better able to construct and deliver utterances spontaneously with less psychological pressure. This is confirmed by Bagialih et al. (2024), who reported a score of 81.14 in the very high category through the integration of puppet media. This achievement is consistent with the principle that students' abilities develop through social interaction and active communication with their surroundings (Syarif, 2020).

These outcomes are also influenced by the quality of the media. Anjeli and Latifah (2021) demonstrated that finger puppet media achieved a material validity score of 4.3 in the very good category, indicating that the accuracy of media design is a prerequisite for supporting instructional content. Similarly, Agustin et al. (2022) found that the use of this medium significantly increased student activity to 92.5% and social development to 86.25%. Finger puppet media functions as scaffolding to improve students' independent abilities through guidance and collaboration (Wardani et al., 2023).

However, the effectiveness of this integration still depends on the dynamics of student engagement in the classroom. Treviana and Pranata (2023) emphasize that speaking performance can be optimized only when the role-playing model encourages comprehensive active participation. Without effective classroom management, the use of media may become merely a play activity that loses its educational essence. This indicates that speaking skills are a fundamental aspect for elementary school students and serve as a foundation for success at the next level of education (Lustia & Liansari, 2025). Therefore, the integration of the role-playing model assisted by finger puppet media is not merely a pedagogical technique for increasing student engagement; it is also a psycho-educational strategy that trains interpersonal communication by gradually strengthening self-confidence and reducing emotional barriers.

Although most studies report positive results, differences in the assessment instruments used across studies should be acknowledged, as they may affect the objectivity of the findings. In addition, the success of integrating the model and the media strongly depends on the teacher's ability to manage the classroom and guide role-playing activities. This shows that the effectiveness of role-playing and finger puppet media does not produce uniform outcomes, but is shaped by learning conditions and teachers' readiness to implement them in classroom practice.

CONCLUSION

Based on the synthesis of six studies, the integration of the role-playing model assisted by finger puppet media indicates an improvement in elementary school students' speaking skills through role-playing simulations that involve active social interaction in the classroom. Finger puppet media helps reduce psychological barriers, such as shyness and anxiety, by shifting the audience's attention to the

characters being performed. This condition supports improvements in fluency, articulation clarity, and students' confidence. The findings show that the development of speaking skills is influenced not only by linguistic aspects but also by psychological readiness supported by instructional media. However, this study has limitations because it is based on the analysis of only six articles published between 2016 and 2026; therefore, the findings are contextual to the reviewed studies and cannot be broadly generalized. Future field research is recommended to test the direct implementation of this integration in various elementary language-learning subjects using experimental designs to strengthen the empirical validity of the findings.

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