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METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DEVELOPING ORAL SPEECH IN PREPARATORY GROUPS THROUGH PUPPET THEATRE

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Language plays a central role in a child's intellectual, emotional, and social development. Oral speech, in particular, forms the basis for effective communication, learning, and social interaction. For children in **preparatory groups** (typically ages 5–6), this period marks a critical stage in developing vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and confidence in self-expression. It is during this time that educators must apply effective, engaging, and age-appropriate methods to support and accelerate speech development.

Among the various pedagogical tools available in early childhood education, **puppet theatre** stands out as an especially rich and dynamic medium. Puppet theatre combines storytelling, dramatic play, visual stimuli, and interaction—all of which are key factors in supporting language development in young learners. Puppets can create a playful and emotionally safe learning environment where children are more willing to take risks in speaking, experiment with new words, and express their thoughts more freely. Moreover, puppet-based activities help bridge the gap between receptive and expressive language, transforming passive listeners into active communicators.

Despite its growing popularity in early childhood classrooms, the **methodological foundations** of using puppet theatre specifically for developing oral speech are not always clearly defined or systematically implemented. Educators may struggle with integrating puppet-based activities into their lesson plans or lack the training to observe and evaluate speech development effectively through these activities.

This study aims to address that gap by exploring how puppet theatre can be intentionally and methodically used to foster oral speech in preschool-aged children. It investigates the **curriculum design principles, lesson planning strategies, teacher roles, and observation techniques** necessary for maximizing the effectiveness of puppet-based speech development. Drawing on recent educational research and real-world classroom practices, the thesis provides a framework that can be used by educators, curriculum designers, and early childhood specialists alike.

By grounding this exploration in both theoretical insight and practical application, the study

contributes to the growing body of pedagogical methods aimed at improving early childhood language education—placing puppet theatre not as a supplementary tool, but as a central strategy in the development of children’s oral communication skills.

Recent studies in early childhood education emphasize the importance of interactive and play-based learning strategies for effective language development. Among these, **puppet theatre** has been highlighted as a versatile and powerful pedagogical tool that combines storytelling, drama, and social interaction to support children’s oral speech development.

Research by **Wahyuni and Sukinah (2023)** demonstrated the effectiveness of hand puppet storytelling in improving the expressive language of children with speech delays. Over a six-week intervention period, children showed significant improvements in vocabulary use, sentence formation, and speech confidence. Their findings support the idea that puppetry creates a non-threatening environment in which children are more willing to speak and experiment with language.

Similarly, **Sumartiningsih (2022)** explored the impact of storytelling using hand puppet media on the cognitive and linguistic development of children aged 4–6. Her study concluded that puppets stimulated both receptive and expressive language skills, and also enhanced children’s memory, comprehension, and sequencing abilities during retelling exercises. The structured use of fables and familiar narratives within puppet theatre made it easier for children to grasp complex ideas and reproduce them in their own words.

From a methodological standpoint, **Öztürk (2021)** analyzed how puppets act as communication mediators, allowing children to express thoughts they might otherwise hesitate to verbalize. Puppets serve as a “third voice” in the classroom—neither adult nor child—which encourages emotional distance and builds children’s confidence. This psychological safety is especially important for children who are shy or have underdeveloped verbal skills.

In a culturally relevant context, **Nazarova (2023)** examined the role of puppet theatre in Uzbek preschools. While her study focused on moral development, she highlighted the parallel growth in oral speech as children participated in character dialogues, storytelling, and conflict resolution. The incorporation of traditional Uzbek stories into puppet theatre provided linguistic and cultural continuity that enhanced language acquisition in a natural and meaningful context.

Moreover, **Kencana et al. (2023)** found that puppet-based lessons not only improved sentence structure and vocabulary but also encouraged higher-order thinking, such as the use of cause-and-effect language and logical connectors (“because,” “then,” “if”). Their classroom observations documented how children progressed from single-word responses to full, grammatically structured sentences after regular exposure to puppet theatre activities.

Collectively, these studies provide a strong theoretical and empirical basis for the inclusion of puppet theatre in preschool curricula. They highlight its potential to enhance vocabulary acquisition, sentence construction, dialogic speech, and confidence in verbal expression. However, they also underscore the need for a clear methodology to guide educators in planning, implementing, and evaluating puppet-based language development activities—an area that this study aims to address in depth.

3.1 Curriculum Design

Designing an effective curriculum for developing oral speech through puppet theatre in preparatory groups requires a balanced integration of language development goals, age-appropriate activities, and cultural relevance. At this developmental stage (ages 5–6), children are in the sensitive period for acquiring expressive and receptive language skills. Therefore, a speech-focused curriculum must be both structured and engaging, providing frequent opportunities for children to practice speaking in meaningful contexts.

The curriculum should begin with clearly defined **language development objectives**, such as:

- Enriching thematic vocabulary related to daily life, emotions, animals, professions, and social roles.
- Encouraging the use of full sentences with correct word order and grammar.
- Promoting the ability to ask and answer questions (e.g., “who,” “what,” “why,” “where”).
- Supporting dialogic speech and basic storytelling abilities.

These objectives are best achieved when embedded within **integrated learning themes**. For instance, a unit on “Family” might involve puppet plays where children act out roles such as mother, father, or sibling, using target vocabulary and sentence patterns. Similarly, a “Nature” theme can include puppet stories about animals and seasons, stimulating the use of descriptive language and sequencing.

Each weekly unit in the curriculum should include:

- **A storytelling session** using puppets (teacher-led).
- **Guided puppet play** for children to retell or recreate the story.
- **Free play opportunities** for children to invent their own puppet dialogues.
- **Reflection and sharing**, where children describe their puppet characters or story events.

In addition, the curriculum should incorporate **phonetic awareness**, helping children articulate sounds clearly through repetition and roleplay. This is especially important for children who may be struggling with pronunciation or speech clarity.

Another important component is **cultural and linguistic relevance**. Puppet shows should reflect familiar cultural narratives, folk tales, and everyday experiences from the children’s environment. This connection not only supports comprehension but also fosters pride in one’s linguistic and cultural identity.

To support consistent implementation, the curriculum should also include:

- **Teacher guidance materials**, including model dialogues, scripts, and vocabulary lists.
- **Visual aids and puppet-making activities**, which involve children in creating characters—enhancing both creativity and ownership of the learning process.
- **Assessment tools**, such as checklists or observation forms, to track children’s oral language development over time.

In essence, the curriculum serves not just as a sequence of lessons but as a flexible framework that empowers teachers to use puppet theatre as a systematic, intentional tool for developing oral speech. When well-designed, such a curriculum ensures that puppet play is not merely entertaining but also educationally rich, supporting key linguistic milestones for young learners.

3.2 Planning Puppet-Based Lessons

While curriculum design provides the overall framework, the successful implementation of puppet theatre in language development depends on how individual lessons are planned and executed. Puppet-based lessons must be engaging, developmentally appropriate, and aligned with the oral speech objectives outlined in the curriculum. Careful lesson planning ensures that each session offers structured opportunities for children to hear, practice, and produce language in meaningful contexts.

A typical **puppet-based lesson** in a preparatory group can be structured into five main phases:

1. Introduction and Warm-up (5–10 minutes)

This phase sets the tone for the lesson and activates prior knowledge. The teacher introduces the day’s theme or story topic using realia, pictures, or simple questions. A puppet character may “greet” the children or ask them about their day, which helps establish an emotional connection

and invites spontaneous speech.

Example activity: The puppet asks each child, “What is your name?” or “How are you today?” allowing children to respond with simple sentences.

2. Storytelling or Puppet Show (10–15 minutes)

The teacher presents a short, interactive puppet show or story, using clear speech, exaggerated intonation, and gestures. Visual props and background music can be added to enhance engagement. The story should include targeted vocabulary and sentence structures, repeated throughout to reinforce language learning.

Example: A puppet named “Lola the Ladybug” goes on an adventure, meeting other animals and asking questions like “Who are you?” and “Where are you going?”

3. Guided Practice and Dialogue Repetition (10–15 minutes)

Children are invited to participate by repeating key phrases, taking on roles from the story, or answering the puppet’s questions. This is a teacher-supported phase, where scaffolding is provided to help children construct full sentences and respond confidently.

Example: The teacher asks, “Can you help Lola find her friend?” and encourages children to use phrases from the story: “I see a frog! He is in the pond!”

4. Creative Puppet Play and Improvisation (10–20 minutes)

Children use puppets (individually or in pairs/groups) to retell the story, invent new versions, or create their own dialogues. This phase promotes spontaneous language production, cooperative interaction, and creativity. The teacher observes, supports vocabulary use, and encourages children to express emotions and ideas freely.

Example: Two children use puppets to create a mini-dialogue:

Child A (with a dog puppet): “Hello, who are you?”

Child B (with a cat puppet): “I am a cat. I like milk!”

5. Reflection and Language Review (5–10 minutes)

The session concludes with a brief group discussion, led by the teacher or puppet. Children are asked questions about the story or what their puppets did. New vocabulary is reviewed, and positive feedback is given to reinforce participation and effort.

Example: The puppet asks, “What did your puppet say today?” or “Who remembers a new word we used?”

Materials and Resources

Planning effective puppet lessons also involves selecting the right materials:

- **Hand puppets** representing animals, people, or fantasy characters.
- **Simple props and backgrounds** (e.g., puppet stages, cardboard houses, scenery).
- **Puppet-making materials** for creative arts integration.
- **Storybooks or custom scripts** adapted to children's language level.

Planning Considerations

- **Simplicity and repetition:** Keep language simple and repeat key phrases often.
- **Child participation:** Design lessons to give every child a turn to speak.
- **Flexibility:** Allow space for improvisation and child-led storytelling.
- **Integration:** Align puppet lessons with weekly themes or language units.

When planned carefully, puppet-based lessons become a powerful tool for language development. They allow children not only to imitate and rehearse speech, but also to create meaning through their own voices, building confidence and communication skills that extend beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

Puppet theatre is a powerful and engaging method for developing oral speech in preparatory group children. It provides a playful yet structured environment where children can practice vocabulary, sentence construction, and dialogue through storytelling and roleplay.

This thesis has shown that with thoughtful **curriculum design**, well-planned **puppet-based lessons**, and active **teacher involvement**, puppet theatre can significantly support children's language development. It also encourages creativity, confidence, and social interaction.

Rather than being just entertainment, puppet theatre should be viewed as a purposeful teaching tool that brings language learning to life. When used methodically, it becomes an effective foundation for building strong oral communication skills in early childhood education.