

Innovative *Muhadastah* Material Development by Puppet Theater for Special Needs Students Based on William Francis Mackey's Theory

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ABSTRACT

Developing effective *muhadastah* (conversational/oral communication) materials for special needs, students presents ongoing challenges. This study investigates the use of Puppet Theater as an innovative tool to improve *muhadastah* skills in special needs students, drawing on William Francis Mackey's theory of contextual and interactive learning. This research was conducted at MTs Wachid Hasyim Surabaya and involved 11 Class VIII special needs students, including individuals with hearing and speech impairments, ADHD, slow learning, and emotional needs. A qualitative methodology was applied, employing observations, interviews, and instructional material analysis to assess the effectiveness of Puppet Theater in enhancing communication skills within Mackey's theoretical framework. The findings indicate that Puppet Theater markedly improved student engagement, interaction, and language development. Notably, a student with a speech impairment exhibited enhanced articulation and confidence, while students with ADHD showed better focus and participation. Slow learners benefited from the structured social interactions that Puppet Theater provided, fostering their conversational skills. These results suggest that Puppet Theater aligns well with Mackey's contextual learning principles, offering a dynamic approach for *muhadastah* skill development in special needs students. It fosters a conducive environment for social and linguistic growth, accommodating diverse learning needs effectively. Puppet Theater proves to be a creative and interactive method for developing *muhadastah* materials, highlighting its potential as an educational strategy for diverse learners. This study contributes to special education literature by demonstrating Puppet Theater's effectiveness in enhancing conversational skills, with implications for broader educational applications.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The challenge of inclusive education lies in ensuring that every student, regardless of their abilities or needs, receives an equitable and high-quality education (Bombardelli, 2020). Despite numerous strategies, achieving full inclusion remains a complex task, especially in creating engaging and accessible learning experiences for students with diverse needs. Puppet Theater has emerged as a promising solution to this challenge, offering an interactive and creative approach that fosters engagement, enhances social skills, and supports learning for students with special needs. This method holds potential as an innovative tool to facilitate inclusive education effectively. Nevertheless, the task of establishing a comprehensive and efficient educational setting for pupils with special needs continues to be immensely difficult (Hasan et al., 2023). Customized learning strategies are often necessary to enable students with diverse special needs to achieve their maximum capabilities (Sivarajah et al., 2019). Integrating innovative teaching methods is essential for effectively tackling these issues (Muta'ali et al., 2022). A viable strategy in this situation is to use puppet theater as an educational instrument, specifically for imparting Arabic conversation skills (Romanski, 2019).

The integration of puppet theater into an inclusive educational setting offers distinct advantages, serving as a captivating and dynamic tool to enhance student engagement, motivation, and enthusiasm for learning. This approach is particularly beneficial for students with special needs, providing a customized and interactive method of content delivery that helps overcome challenges in communication and social interaction (Kröger et al., 2019). As noted by Davis (2010), the use of puppets significantly facilitates experiential learning and student engagement (Macari et al., 2021).

In inclusive education, maximizing student involvement is crucial for promoting educational achievement, as engaged students tend to show higher motivation, improved social skills, and better academic progress (Maciver et al., 2019). For students with special needs, who often experience lower levels of engagement compared to their typically developing peers, interactive techniques such as puppet theater can be particularly effective (Gilmour et al., 2019). Previous studies have consistently shown that enhanced student engagement positively impacts both academic and social outcomes (Korpershoek et al., 2020).

William Francis Mackey's theory of contextual and interactive learning serves as a foundational framework for integrating Puppet Theater into the teaching of *muhadastah* skills. Mackey emphasized that optimal learning occurs within interactive and meaningful environments where students actively engage and connect concepts to real-life scenarios (Hansell et al., 2022). Puppet Theater aligns well with Mackey's theory by creating authentic, interactive situations that encourage student participation in meaningful communication and negotiation. This method reinforces Mackey's principle of contextual learning, which underscores the importance of relevance and active engagement in the learning process. Therefore, Mackey's theory provides a robust rationale for utilizing Puppet Theater in teaching *muhadastah* skills, as it allows students to practice speaking in a dynamic, real-world context, thereby enhancing their language acquisition and communication abilities (Lombardi et al., 2021).

Current research confirms the effectiveness of this approach. Caparulo et al. (1977) conducted a study showing notable language proficiency improvements in students engaged in activities closely related to their everyday experiences. Additionally, Peng and Kievit (2020) found that learning in a social setting accelerates the development of cognitive and language skills, even for children with special needs. Consequently, Puppet Theater holds promise as a method for enhancing both linguistic abilities and social intelligence in children with special needs (Peng et al., 2020).

Within the realm of Arabic language acquisition, *muhadastah* plays a key role. Conversational competence is defined as the ability to communicate verbally, attentively, and comprehend the context of conversations in everyday situations (Rachmawati et al., 2024). Students who achieve proficiency in *muhadastah* demonstrate enhanced abilities in verbal and written communication, enabling them to effectively express and comprehend ideas and feelings in diverse academic and social contexts (Whitlock et al., 2022). *Muhadastah* skills are critical in inclusive education because they actively promote social

connections and communication among students, thereby enhancing the integration of children with special needs into the educational environment (Farmer et al., 2019).

This study aims to develop and implement *muhadastah* content through puppet theater, adhering to the principles of William Francis Mackey's theory, which emphasizes contextual and participatory learning (Asbarin et al., 2024). The primary objective of this study is to assess the influence of puppet theater on the level of involvement, social interaction, and linguistic abilities of students with special needs at MTs Wachid Hasyim, Surabaya. Recognized as one of the pioneering inclusive madrasahs in East Java, this institution dedicates itself to delivering high-quality education to all its students, including those with special needs.

The eighth grade at MTs Wachid Hasyim implements various instructional methods specifically designed to assist kids with exceptional needs. Students with hearing impairments need supplementary assistance through hearing aids and visual teaching techniques. Similarly, students with speech impairments need speech therapy and instructional approaches that encourage the use of natural language. In order to maintain focus, students diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) need to employ techniques such as structured schedules and interactive activities. Conversely, students with learning delays need a more incremental and comprehensive approach, including extra repetition and explanation, to guarantee a profound comprehension of the subject matter. Finally, students who have emotional needs require appropriate emotional and social assistance, together with a secure and nurturing educational setting.

This study aims to develop and implement *muhadastah* content using Puppet Theater, guided by Mackey's principles of contextual and participatory learning. Specifically, it seeks to assess the impact of Puppet Theater on student engagement, social interaction, and language proficiency among special needs students at MTs Wachid Hasyim, Surabaya, a pioneering inclusive madrasah in East Java. Therefore, this research is anticipated to make a significant contribution to the advancement of interactive teaching methodologies in inclusive education and provide innovative strategies for enhancing the language and social skills of students with special needs within a diverse, inclusive educational environment like MTs Wachid Hasyim.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative methodology to explore the development of conversational materials using Puppet Theater at MTs Wachid Hasyim, specifically focusing on Class VIII students (Snyder, 2019). A qualitative approach was selected because it provides an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, engagement, and interactions within their learning environment. Puppet Theater was chosen as the intervention method due to its ability to offer an interactive and contextual learning experience, which aligns with participatory learning principles and has proven effective in enhancing *muhadastah* skills among students with special needs.

The study involved eleven special needs students, including individuals with hearing impairment, speech impairment, ADHD, learning difficulties, and emotional needs. These participants were chosen based on specific criteria related to their learning challenges and their readiness to engage in Puppet Theater activities. The inclusion criteria ensured that the study remained focused on students facing language development delays, communication difficulties, or social interaction challenges. Readiness was assessed through interviews with teachers and parents, as well as preliminary observations to determine each student's ability to participate actively in the intervention.

Data collection was conducted using three methodologies: observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis (Busetto et al., 2020). Observations were carried out over an eight-week period, twice a week, with each session lasting about 60 minutes. These semi-structured sessions provided the flexibility to observe natural interactions while focusing on key aspects of the study. The purpose of these observations was to examine how students' relationships, participation in activities, social interactions, and language proficiency developed over time, aligning with the research questions on the impact of

Puppet Theater on *muhadastah* skills. Field notes and video recordings were utilized to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the data (Parameswaran et al., 2020).

Following each phase of Puppet Theater implementation, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with educators and students, split evenly between the two groups. Each interview, lasting between 30 to 45 minutes, aimed to delve into the participants' experiences with Puppet Theater, their development of *muhadastah* skills, and any challenges they faced. Questions focused on how students felt about using Puppet Theater, their perceived improvements in language skills, and obstacles they encountered in participation. The interview data were analyzed for recurring themes and patterns, providing further insights into student engagement and communication progress (Mezmir, 2020).

Additionally, instructional materials used in Puppet Theater were analyzed to evaluate the content, including word choice, complexity, and presentation techniques. A comparative analysis was performed to assess the alignment of the materials with current theories and their relevance to the educational needs of students with special needs (Rutakumwa et al., 2020). Two independent researchers conducted this analysis to ensure the validity of the findings.

Data from observations, interviews, and material analysis were comprehensively analyzed using NVivo software, which facilitated the thematic analysis. This process allowed for coding, categorizing, and identifying relevant themes and patterns in the data (Dalkin et al., 2021). Data triangulation was employed to enhance the reliability of the findings by comparing the results from different sources. To further ensure accuracy and dependability, the study incorporated pilot testing of observation and interview guidelines, expert discussions for validation, and feedback from research peers to verify the results.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Findings

The following table presents the results and discussion of research examining the development of Arabic *muhadastah* (conversational) materials for special needs students in eighth grade at MTs Wachid Hasyim. This research utilized Puppet Theater as an instructional medium, structured according to William Francis Mackey's theory of contextual and interactive learning. By focusing on student engagement, social interaction, language skill development, and the alignment of teaching methods with Mackey's principles, the study assessed how Puppet Theater could enhance communication skills among students with diverse needs. Key observations across various aspects of learning are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Results from Observation

Research Aspect/ <i>Muhadastah</i> Material	Observation Results
Student Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students showed high levels of engagement when using Puppet Theater - Interactive activities encouraged active participation.
Social Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There was an increase in student interaction during Puppet Theater sessions. - Students collaborated in role-playing.
Language Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students showed improvements in vocabulary usage and sentence structure during sessions. - Improvement in pronunciation and articulation.
Alignment with Mackey's Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The use of Puppet Theater aligned with Mackey's principles of contextual and interactive learning.
Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The learning environment became more dynamic and supportive. - Students felt more comfortable and engaged.
Special Needs of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The use of Puppet Theater had a positive impact on students with various special needs. - Improvements were seen in engagement and language skills.

The observation results, as presented in Table 1, reveal several key findings regarding the use of Puppet Theater in *Muhadastah* material for enhancing student engagement, social interaction, language skills, learning environment, and accommodation of special needs. Firstly, in terms of student engagement, the Puppet Theater sessions led to high levels of student participation and encouraged interactive activities that fostered active engagement. This suggests that the approach is effective in drawing students into the learning process. In the aspect of social interaction, the Puppet Theater facilitated increased interactions among students, with noticeable collaboration during role-playing, which highlights its potential to improve cooperative learning experiences.

Further analysis shows that language skills were significantly enhanced, as students exhibited improvements in vocabulary usage, sentence structure, pronunciation, and articulation. Additionally, the alignment with Mackey's Theory emphasizes that the Puppet Theater method is consistent with principles of contextual and interactive learning, supporting its theoretical foundation. In terms of the learning environment, the introduction of Puppet Theater made the environment more dynamic, supportive, and comfortable, contributing to higher engagement levels among students. Lastly, the use of Puppet Theater showed a positive impact on students with special needs, resulting in notable improvements in engagement and language skills, thus demonstrating its inclusivity and adaptability to diverse learning needs.

Furthermore, Table 2 presents the interview results regarding the impact of using Puppet Theater in *Muhadastah* material on various aspects of the research.

Table 2. Result from the interviews

Research Aspect/ <i>Muhadastah</i> Material	Interview Results
Student Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students felt more motivated and interested in using Puppet Theater. - Educators reported increased student willingness to participate.
Social Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educators noted increased frequency and quality of social interactions among students. - Students felt more comfortable interacting with classmates.
Language Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educators reported significant improvements in students' speaking skills and language comprehension. - Students felt more confident using the language.
Alignment with Mackey's Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educators confirmed that this approach was consistent with Mackey's theory and supported the learning needs of special needs students.
Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educators reported that the resulting learning environment was more inclusive and enjoyable. - Students felt more accepted and supported.
Special Needs of Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Educators reported that Puppet Theater helped students with various special needs to be more engaged and communicative.

The interview results indicate that the use of Puppet Theater has a positive impact on student engagement, social interaction, language skills, alignment with Mackey's theory, the learning environment, and the special needs of students.

In terms of student engagement, students felt more motivated and interested in using Puppet Theater, and educators reported an increase in students' willingness to participate. Regarding social interaction, educators observed an improvement in both the frequency and quality of interactions among students, with students feeling more comfortable interacting with their peers. Language skills also showed significant progress, as students demonstrated considerable improvement in speaking abilities and language comprehension, along with increased confidence in using the language.

Educators confirmed the alignment with Mackey's Theory, stating that the Puppet Theater approach effectively supported students' learning needs, particularly for those with special requirements. The learning environment became more inclusive and enjoyable, fostering a more supportive atmosphere that made students feel more accepted. Lastly, the Puppet Theater proved beneficial for students with special needs, helping them to become more engaged and enhance their communication skills.

Table 3. Result from the teaching materials analysis

Research Aspect/ <i>Muhadastah</i> Material	Teaching Material Analysis
Student Engagement	- Puppet Theater-based teaching materials showed increased engagement in conversational activities.
Social Interaction	- Puppet Theater provided scenarios that facilitated social interaction and group communication.
Language Skills	- Conversational materials through Puppet Theater demonstrated better application of vocabulary and sentence structure among students.
Alignment with Mackey's Theory	- The integration of Mackey's theoretical elements in Puppet Theater showed improvements in students' conversational skills.
Learning Environment	- Puppet Theater created a creative and responsive learning environment to meet individual student needs.
Special Needs of Students	- Puppet Theater facilitated the adaptation of teaching to meet the special needs of students, including hearing, speech, ADHD, slow learners, and emotional needs.

Table 3 presents the results from the analysis of teaching materials related to the use of Puppet Theater in *Muhadastah* material across various research aspects. The findings indicate that Puppet Theater-based teaching materials have a positive impact on several areas, including student engagement, social interaction, language skills, alignment with Mackey's Theory, the learning environment, and the accommodation of students with special needs.

The analysis reveals that Puppet Theater significantly enhances student engagement in conversational activities, providing scenarios that promote social interaction and group communication. This method also facilitates the application of vocabulary and sentence structure, contributing to improvements in students' language skills. Furthermore, the integration of Mackey's theoretical elements within the Puppet Theater approach supports advancements in students' conversational abilities. Puppet Theater creates a creative and responsive learning environment that effectively meets individual student needs, demonstrating adaptability in addressing the special needs of students, including those with hearing, speech, ADHD, slow learners, and emotional challenges.

Based on research conducted at MTs Wachid Hasyim, involving 11 special needs students in Grade VIII, the use of Puppet Theater was found to significantly enhance student engagement, social interaction, and language skills. Observations indicated that students became more active and participatory in learning activities, supported by educators who reported increased student motivation and interest. Puppet Theater also facilitated collaboration among students through interactive scenarios, improving the quality of social interaction and making special needs students more comfortable communicating with their peers. From a pedagogical perspective, the teaching materials presented through Puppet Theater enabled students to apply vocabulary and sentence structures more effectively, with noticeable improvements in pronunciation and articulation.

The success of Puppet Theater in this context aligns with the principles of William Francis Mackey's theory of contextual and interactive learning, as confirmed by educators involved in the study. The use of Puppet Theater created a dynamic, inclusive, and enjoyable learning environment that fostered student engagement and comfort. It also had a positive impact on students with various special needs, including those with hearing impairments, speech disorders, ADHD, slow learning

capabilities, and emotional needs, all of whom showed marked improvements in both engagement and language skills. This adaptability to meet individual student needs underscores Puppet Theater's potential as an innovative teaching strategy for special needs education.

Below is the table of *Muhadastah* material in Arabic for special needs children in Grade VIII at MTs Wachid Hasyim, developed using William Francis Mackey's theory through the elements of selection, gradation, presentation, and repetition:

Table 1. *Muhadastah* Materials for Special Needs Students: Grade VIII, MTs Wachid Hasyim

<i>Muhadastah</i> Material	Material Description	Selection	Graduation	Presentation	Repetition
الرياضة (Sports)	This material includes conversations about various types of sports, their benefits, and related activities.	- Selection of vocabulary related to various types of sports and physical activities. - Focus on frequently used words in the context of sports.	- Material starts with basic vocabulary such as names of sports, then progresses to more complex descriptions of sports activities. - A gradation from single words to descriptive sentences.	- Vocabulary and phrases related to sports are introduced through scenes of playing sports with puppets. - Using videos or images of sports activities to clarify the context.	- Vocabulary and phrases related to sports are repeated through games and different conversation scenarios. - Repeated practice in group discussions about favorite sports.
المهنة (Jobs)	This material involves practice conversations about various types of jobs, tasks, and work environments.	- Selection of vocabulary relevant to various professions and job descriptions. - Focus on commonly used words in the context of work.	- Practice begins with the introduction of job names, then progresses to descriptions of tasks and work environments. - Gradation from simple descriptions to complex ones.	- Conversations about jobs are introduced through role-play scenarios with puppets depicting various professions. - Using visual aids such as images of work tools.	- Job descriptions and tasks are repeated through discussions and role-playing simulations. - Repeated practice in presentations about each student's dream job.

Based on the analysis of the *Muhadastah* materials on الرياضة (Sports) and المهنة (Jobs) for special needs students in Grade VIII at MTs Wachid Hasyim, it can be concluded that applying the principles of selection, gradation, presentation, and repetition according to William Francis Mackey's theory successfully enhances the conversational skills of special needs students. The sports material includes conversations about various types of sports and physical activities, with vocabulary selection focused on terms commonly used in this context. The gradation starts with introducing basic vocabulary and progresses to more complex descriptions of activities, presented through puppet-based sports scenes and visual aids. Repetition is carried out through different games and conversation scenarios, as well as discussions about favorite sports, which overall improves special needs students' understanding and language skills in the context of sports.

The job-related material involves conversational practice on various professions, tasks, and work environments, with a focus on relevant vocabulary frequently used in job contexts. Gradation begins

with introducing job names and progresses to more detailed descriptions of tasks and work environments, presented through role-play scenarios with puppets depicting various professions. The use of visual aids, such as images of work tools, helps clarify the context, while repetition is done through discussions and role simulations, as well as repeated exercises on each student's dream job. This approach not only reinforces vocabulary and sentence structures for special needs students but also enhances their engagement and interaction in Arabic language learning, demonstrating the effectiveness of this method in meeting the educational needs of special needs students.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Engagement of Special Needs Students in *Muhadastah*

The use of Puppet Theater as a teaching medium for Arabic *muhadastah* among special needs students at MTs Wachid Hasyim led to a significant increase in student engagement. Observations indicated that, following the implementation of *muhadastah* materials developed according to William Francis Mackey's theory, special needs students demonstrated high levels of engagement. The success of Puppet Theater in this context can be attributed to its ability to create a learning environment that is both interactive and relatable, elements central to Mackey's theory of contextual and participatory learning. Role-playing activities allowed students to immerse themselves in real-life conversational scenarios, while visual aids such as puppets made abstract language concepts more concrete, facilitating comprehension. Repetition of dialogues within Puppet Theater activities reinforced language patterns, aiding in the retention of new vocabulary and structures.

Interviews further supported these findings, with students expressing increased motivation and interest when using Puppet Theater, which suggests that the interactive nature of this approach made language learning more accessible and enjoyable. Educators also reported that students exhibited a greater willingness to participate in lessons, indicating that Puppet Theater effectively reduced anxiety and encouraged active involvement, which aligns with Mackey's assertion that language acquisition is enhanced in low-stress, engaging environments (Ritonga, 2021).

Analysis of the teaching materials revealed that Puppet Theater not only increased student engagement but also improved their confidence in using the Arabic language (Asri et al., 2023). This finding is consistent with Mackey's theory, which emphasizes that contextual and interactive learning promotes better language comprehension and use (Chen et al., 2019). The process of role-playing provided students with opportunities to practice pronunciation and articulation in a safe, supportive setting, while the use of visual and tactile stimuli (i.e., puppets) made language learning more tangible, reinforcing the connection between language and meaning. This aligns with Mackey's principle that learning should involve meaningful interactions in relevant contexts.

In conclusion, this study confirms that integrating Puppet Theater into *muhadastah* instruction effectively enhances pronunciation, articulation, and conversational skills among special needs students. By providing an interactive, context-rich environment, Puppet Theater aligns closely with Mackey's theory of language learning, demonstrating that elements such as role-playing, visual aids, and repetition are key mechanisms that contribute to the success of this teaching method in fostering language development.

This approach is consistent with previous findings that engaging and interactive learning media can increase student engagement and motivation, as well as enhance language skills (Puspitarini & Hanif, 2019). However, unlike prior studies that primarily focused on typically developing students, this research demonstrates that Puppet Theater can effectively improve language acquisition among students with a variety of special needs, including those with speech impairments, ADHD, and learning delays. This suggests that Puppet Theater may offer unique advantages in inclusive settings by providing tailored opportunities for students to practice language skills in a supportive and engaging environment.

Interestingly, while previous research emphasized improved motivation, this study found that students with communication difficulties showed significant gains in articulation and conversational

skills, indicating that Puppet Theater might be particularly effective for this group. This contrasts with studies such as Jones and Lee (2019), which reported limited language development for students with speech impairments using traditional methods. These findings suggest that the interactive and contextual nature of Puppet Theater can address challenges that conventional approaches might not overcome.

In terms of broader implications, the success of Puppet Theater in enhancing language proficiency among students with special needs supports its potential as a valuable tool in the broader field of special education. It not only confirms the importance of interactive learning but also extends our understanding of how such methods can be adapted to support diverse learners in inclusive classrooms. The use of Puppet Theater could be a promising strategy to bridge the gap in language acquisition for students who face unique communication challenges.

These findings contribute to the field of language acquisition by demonstrating that immersive, role-play-based interventions can yield positive outcomes, even for students who typically struggle with language learning. This study's impact goes beyond its specific context by offering an effective, adaptable teaching method that can be applied to a variety of inclusive educational settings.

3.2.2 Social Interaction of Special Needs Students

Research on the use of Puppet Theater as a teaching medium for Arabic *muhadastah* among special needs students at MTs Wachid Hasyim shows a significant improvement in students' language skills. Observations reveal that after implementing the *muhadastah* materials developed according to William Francis Mackey's theory, there was an increase in interactions among students during Puppet Theater sessions. Students collaborated in playing roles, creating an interactive and enjoyable learning environment. Interviews with educators confirmed these findings, noting an increase in the frequency and quality of social interactions among students. Students felt more comfortable interacting with classmates, indicating that this method effectively facilitates communication and social interaction.

An analysis of the teaching materials shows that Puppet Theater provides scenarios that facilitate social interaction and communication within groups. This aligns with Mackey's theory, which states that contextual and interactive language learning can enhance students' understanding and language skills (Siregar et al., 2022). Using Puppet Theater as a learning tool offers a real context for students to practice language skills, boosting their confidence in communication (Goldstein et al., 2022). This research also supports previous findings that engaging and interactive learning media can increase student engagement and motivation, as well as improve their language skills. For example, a study by Rose Mini Agoes (Abdullah & Salim, 2020, pp. 34-45) found that using visual aids and interactive activities in language learning can significantly enhance students' speaking skills and comprehension. Overall, this approach demonstrates that integrating puppet theater into language learning is effective in meeting the educational needs of special needs students and improving their social interaction and language skills.

3.2.3 Language Skills of Special Needs Students

Observations indicate that special needs students at MTs Wachid Hasyim experienced significant improvement in vocabulary usage and sentence structure during Puppet Theater sessions. Students not only pronounced words more accurately but also showed enhancements in pronunciation and articulation. This aligns with William Francis Mackey's theory, which emphasizes the importance of real and interactive contexts in language learning, where students can practice their language skills in life-like situations (Mackey et al., 1977).

Furthermore, interviews with educators support these observational findings. Educators reported significant improvements in students' speaking skills and language comprehension. Students became more confident in using Arabic, demonstrating that the Puppet Theater teaching method effectively enhances their communication abilities. The teaching materials developed through Puppet Theater not only introduced new vocabulary but also helped students understand the correct use of sentence structures in relevant conversational contexts.

An analysis of the teaching materials shows that Puppet Theater provides conversational scenarios that facilitate better application of vocabulary and sentence structures. This approach allows students to practice actively in a supportive environment, which, according to Mackey's theory, is a key element of effective language learning (Agil, 2023). Previous studies by Shofa Musthofa Khalid et al. (Khalid et al., 2023) also support these findings, stating that learning approaches involving interactive and contextual activities can significantly improve students' language skills. Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that using Puppet Theater as a teaching medium effectively enhances the language skills of special needs students and supports previous theories and research in the field of language education.

3.2.4 Development of *Muhadastah* Materials and the Use of Puppet Theater Based on William Francis Mackey's Theory

Observations indicate that the development of *muhadastah* materials using Puppet Theater successfully applies the principles of William Francis Mackey's theory of contextual, interactive, and inclusive learning. Special needs students at MTs Wachid Hasyim showed high levels of engagement and active participation in Puppet Theater learning sessions. This approach not only makes learning more engaging but also provides real contexts where students can practice their language skills, which is a core aspect of Mackey's theory (Muassomah et al., 2023).

Additionally, interviews with educators support these observational findings. Educators confirmed that this approach aligns well with Mackey's theory and effectively meets the learning needs of special needs students. They reported that students were not only more motivated but also better able to understand and use the language in meaningful contexts. This approach allows special needs students to learn the language in a supportive environment that encourages active interaction, which Mackey identifies as key to successful language learning (Affandi et al., 2022).

Further analysis of the teaching materials shows that integrating Mackey's theoretical elements into *muhadastah* materials through Puppet Theater significantly improves the *muhadastah* skills of special needs students. Students were able to remember and use new vocabulary, form more complex sentences, and communicate with greater confidence (Jundi et al., 2024). Previous studies by Lathifatul Husna (Husna et al., 2023) also support these findings, indicating that approaches involving contextual and interactive learning can significantly enhance students' language abilities. Overall, the results of this study demonstrate that using Puppet Theater as a teaching medium is not only effective in improving the language skills of special needs students but also supports previous theories and research in the field of language education.

3.2.5 Learning Environment for Special Needs Students

An effective learning environment is crucial for the development of special needs students, and research at MTs Wachid Hasyim shows that using Puppet Theater as part of *muhadastah* material development has created a more dynamic and supportive learning environment. Observations indicate that special needs students feel more comfortable and engaged during learning sessions. MTs Wachid Hasyim, as one of the first inclusive madrasahs in East Java, provides additional learning facilities after regular school hours. These additional facilities offer special needs students the opportunity to enhance their skills in a more supportive and inclusive environment, thereby helping to foster their self-confidence. This finding aligns with research indicating that an inclusive and supportive learning environment can enhance the participation and engagement of special needs students (Hasan et al., 2023).

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regular school hours. These additional facilities offer special needs students the opportunity to enhance their skills in a more supportive and inclusive environment, thereby helping to foster their self-confidence. This finding aligns with research indicating that an inclusive and supportive learning environment can enhance the participation and engagement of special needs students (Hoffer, 2020).

Interviews with educators support these observational findings. Educators reported that the resulting learning environment is more inclusive and enjoyable, with special needs students feeling more accepted and supported. They noted that using Puppet Theater as a teaching tool is not only engaging for students but also helps create a more collaborative and interactive classroom atmosphere. This aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of a supportive learning environment that is responsive to the individual needs of students (Cahya et al., 2021).

Further analysis of the teaching materials shows that developing *muhadastah* materials using Puppet Theater creates a creative learning environment that responds to the individual needs of students. These materials not only help students understand and use Arabic effectively but also support social interaction and collaboration among them. With this approach, special needs students can learn in meaningful and relevant contexts, which is crucial for their language and social skills development (Mirnawati et al., 2023). This approach also aligns with the principles of differentiated instruction, emphasizing the importance of tailoring teaching methods to meet diverse learning needs (Saloviita, 2020).

3.2.6 Special Needs of Students

The development of *muhadastah* materials using Puppet Theater has shown a significantly positive impact on special needs students with various requirements. Observations indicate that this medium enhances student engagement and language skills. Special needs students participate more actively and show improvements in vocabulary usage and sentence structure. These improvements reflect better pronunciation and articulation, which are crucial for their language development. This outcome aligns with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, which states that effective learning occurs when students interact in a supportive and meaningful context (Kostogriz & Veresov, 2021).

Interviews with educators support these observational findings, as educators reported that developing *muhadastah* materials using Puppet Theater helps special needs students engage and communicate more effectively. Educators noted that students feel more comfortable and motivated to participate in learning activities, indicating that this method successfully creates an inclusive and supportive learning environment. This is consistent with the principles of inclusive education, which emphasize the importance of adapting teaching methods to meet individual student needs (Molina Roldán et al., 2021).

Further analysis shows that Puppet Theater facilitates the adaptation of teaching to meet the diverse special needs of students, including hearing impairments, speech impairments, ADHD, slow learners, and emotional needs. This medium allows students to learn in a more enjoyable and interactive context, supporting their social and emotional development (Najakh, 2020). According to constructivist learning theory, effective learning occurs when students can construct their knowledge through social interaction and direct experience (Rodrigues et al., 2019). This approach also aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of learning through observation and interaction (Virginia et al., 2022).

The findings of this study confirm the effectiveness of William Francis Mackey's theory of four aspects of language learning when adapted to the context of special needs education. Specifically, the integration of interactive media, such as puppet theater, fosters a learning environment that supports both cognitive and affective development. The interactive nature of puppet theater aligns with Mackey's emphasis on contextual and social interaction in language acquisition. This approach not only enhances the students' language and communication skills but also promotes social engagement and emotional well-being, demonstrating a significant improvement in their overall learning outcomes.

These results highlight the potential of innovative, context-driven teaching strategies for addressing the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms.

4. CONCLUSION

This study assessed the effectiveness of Puppet Theater as an instructional tool to enhance muhadastah (conversational) skills in 11 eighth-grade special needs students at MTs Wachid Hasyim. The findings indicate that Puppet Theater significantly improved student engagement, social interaction, and language proficiency. Specifically, students showed higher participation levels, improved pronunciation, and increased confidence in conversational Arabic. The interactive and role-playing aspects of Puppet Theater contributed to a more inclusive and collaborative classroom atmosphere, allowing students to participate in meaningful peer interactions and strengthen their communication abilities. The approach aligns well with William Francis Mackey's contextual and interactive learning principles, facilitating a dynamic and inclusive environment that supports the diverse needs of students with hearing and speech impairments, ADHD, learning delays, and emotional challenges. While these results are promising, the study's limitations include its focus on a small sample size in a specific setting, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should examine Puppet Theater's effectiveness in varied educational contexts and develop additional muhadastah materials tailored to the unique requirements of special needs students. Further studies should also investigate the long-term impact of Puppet Theater and evaluate its applicability across diverse, inclusive educational settings to better understand its broader potential in special education.

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