

SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION IN KINDERGARTEN INITIATED BY THE USE OF STAGE PUPPETS

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Abstract

Communication in kindergarten is crucial in the social interaction of children, but it is also important for the overall development of the child. The role of stage puppets in the educational and upbringing process in preschool institutions is recognized not only in the artistic dimension but also in the overall development of the child's personality, especially in the development of speech and communication. The theoretical foundation of the work includes the concepts of communication, stage puppets, and methods of stage communication. In this empirical research, which is part of a wider research conducted with 125 respondents - preschool teachers from the Center for Preschool Education and Upbringing Banja Luka, the aim was to determine the representation of specific aspects of communication initiated by the use of stage puppets and recommendations for their improvement from the perspective of preschool teachers. Data were collected in 2023 through surveys, scaling and interviewing, with the help of self-created research instruments. The results confirm that stage puppets stimulate preschool children's communication not only during dramatic play but also through everyday activities, where the puppet takes on the role of an animator, motivator, and facilitator. The pedagogical implications highlight the importance of integrating stage puppets into daily educational activities to enhance children's communication and engagement.

Keywords: communication, stage puppet, educational and upbringing process, children of preschool age, preschool teachers.

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Introduction

Communication in kindergarten is very important for the child because it supports not only the development of speech, but also the emotional, social, and intellectual development of the child. Lepičnik Vodopivec and Hmelak (2021) highlight the pedagogical aspect of communication in kindergarten and the importance of the preschool teacher's competencies for communication with children. The preschool teacher communicates effectively when responding to the different needs of children, knows how to coordinate and recognize their needs and intentions, is comprehensible, tolerant, and understanding knows how to listen, hear and ask open questions, takes into account the differences in thinking, behaviour and feelings of the interlocutors and enables him to express his opinion. This creates a positive and constructive environment for establishing and maintaining good mutual relations (Lepičnik Vodopivec & Hmelak, 2021).

Communication is the process by which a common (general) understanding of a message is reached between people, through the transmission and reception of a message (Mićović, 2009). That is why discovering ways and strategies of communication are very important steps in the child's progress and growth. According to the form ie. depending on the way information is transmitted, communication can be verbal and non-verbal (Kovačević & Isaković, 2019). Verbal communication can be direct (one-on-one) or group (achieved through working with the whole group). Non-verbal communication refers to body language (gesticulation, body movements, facial expressions, eye contact) and is often a supplement to verbal communication.

In kindergarten, the child establishes communication with various actors and in numerous situations. One of the most important communication relationships in preschool is between the child and the preschool teacher (Kamenov & Spasojević, 2008), where the emotional aspect of communication is very important (Lepičnik Vodopivec & Šindić, 2022). Preschool teachers also use game elements in play and play-like activities with the entire kindergarten group as a means of learning and encouraging different aspects of development, while both adults and children participate in communication. Also, communication represented in numerous activities should not be neglected, especially in play, because play, as observed by Duran (1995), is based on social interaction and communication. During free play, the emphasis is on peer communication, which is focused on

dialogue, exchange of experiences, cooperation, problem-solving, and expression of emotions and is informal.

A puppet is a frequent companion of play and playful, symbolic activities (Misailović, 1991), and a stage puppet is a companion of dramatic games (Lazić, 2007). Bojović (2010) emphasizes the importance of stage puppets in the development of communication. Kroflin (2011) defines a stage puppet as any object that is given movement, which is animated. A stage puppet "brought to life" with the help of a human (child or preschool teacher) enters into communication with the child through the world of symbols and new roles, enriched with signs, movements and possibly speech (Bastašić, 2014). Majoran (2004) observes that the stage puppet with its appearance, and movement, with the help of articulate and inarticulate speech, enables the child to more easily accept both non-verbal and verbal communication. The method of stage communication, as a way of learning and developing children through play, movement, speech, mime, acting, music, and song, is based on the obviousness and simulation of the real context (Dimitrijević, 2016; Košničar, 2002; Šindić, 2018) proved to be successful especially in working with the youngest, in kindergarten (Sebastian, 2019). Research on good practice indicates that this method ensures more fun and better quality of teaching and learning (Janković, 2009), contributes to better expression and communication of children, development of speaking and listening skills (Beth et al., 2019), speech culture (Dimitrijević, 2017), but also acquiring knowledge from other fields (Cvjetičanin et al., 2010; Šindić et al., 2019; Šindić et al., 2020). This method is based on the idea that the stage is a place where children can freely play, communicate, explore, discover and learn about themselves and the world around them, with a stage puppet being an important "helper".

Because of the great potential that activities with stage puppets can have for the development of speech and communication, but also in the overall development and learning of children, and the modernization of educational and upbringing practice, as indicated by contemporary pedagogical thought (Bojović, 2010; Krušić, 2018; Misailović, 1991; Majaron, 2004; Majaron & Korošec, 2006) and pedagogical practice research (Čađanađa & Kalmış, 2023; Karaoils, 2023; Remer & Tzuriel, 2015; Šindić et al., 2019), the intention was to examine the aspects of communication initiated by the use of stage puppets and their representation in kindergarten activities.

Method

This mixed-design empirical research aimed to determine the representation of different aspects of communication initiated by the use of stage puppets in a kindergarten context and recommendations for their improvement from the perspective of preschool teachers.

In the quantitative part of the research, a descriptive method and surveying with scaling were applied with the help of a survey questionnaire with a Likert-type scale and 44 items. The calculated Alpha Crombach coefficient of the instrument was 0.994, which indicated its high reliability. This part of the research enabled an insight into the representation of different aspects of communication initiated by the use of stage puppets in kindergarten.

The qualitative part of the research was carried out through a focus group in which 5 respondents from the sample were included. A semi-structured interview consisting of four main questions with sub-questions was applied. The qualitative part of the research enabled a deeper insight and understanding of the educational perspective on communication in kindergarten and its improvement with the use of stage puppets.

The instruments were created independently, taking into account contemporary knowledge and research on activities with stage puppets in preschool education and upbringing to encourage communication and overall development of the child (Bojović, 2010; Čaġanaġa & Kalmış, 2015; Karaoils, 2023; Krušić, 2018; Misailović, 1991; Majaron, 2004; Šindić et al., 2019).

The survey was conducted in 2023. It was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles. All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in the study. The research was also approved by the management of the preschool institutions where the study was conducted. Participants' anonymity was guaranteed, and all collected data was used exclusively for research purposes. 125 preschool teachers of the Banja Luka Center for Preschool Education participated in the survey. The sample was convenient, and the participants were primarily female preschool educators. It included 123 women and 2 men. Some of the basic characteristics of the respondents from the sample are given in Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 1.*Age of the respondents*

Age of the respondents	<i>f</i>
Under 30 years	21
30-40 years	52
41-50 years	38
Over 50 years	14
Total	125

The largest number of participants are between 30 and 40 years old ($n = 53$) (Table 1).

Table 2.*Respondents work experience*

Respondents work experience	<i>f</i>
up to 10 years	63
from 10 to 20 years	38
from 20 to 30 years	19
over 30 years	5
Total	125

More than half of the participants have been employed in preschool institutions for less than 10 years ($n = 63$) (Table 2).

Table 3.*Graduated from the faculty of the respondent*

Name of the faculty	<i>f</i>
Faculty of Philosophy, Banja Luka	85
NUBL	35
Faculty of Pedagogy, Bijeljina	1
College of Medicine	2
College of Vocational Studies for Preschool Teacher Education in Novi Sad	1
Other state faculties	1

More than 70% of respondents are between 30 and 50 years old, while more than 80% of them have up to 20 years of work experience. 68% of respondents graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Banja Luka (Table 1, Table 2, Table 3). All respondents are employed at the Center for Preschool Education and Upbringing in Banja Luka.

Results and Discussion

The research results obtained through quantitative data processing are presented in Table 4. Descriptive indicators indicated that the stage puppet was largely used to encourage different aspects of communication.

Also, in the research conducted by Karaoilis (2023), in which stage puppets have been used in dramatic activities aimed at developing communication skills in preschool children, similar results have been obtained. It has been observed that stage puppets have animated children to talk and have encouraged their expression and creativity in a way that is very close to them. Remer and Tzuriel (2015) have examined the use of stage puppets as a mediating tool in encouraging communication in both regular and special kindergartens, and have observed that, with the help of puppets, children have become better motivated and more active. In another study, Çağanağa & Kalmış (2015) have confirmed that puppets are highly attractive and motivating for preschool children, making them effective tools that can be used in classrooms. Children have developed self-confidence in dramatic games with stage puppets and have enhanced their communication skills faster and more effectively because they feel more relaxed while talking to puppets than when communicating with a preschool teacher or another adult.

Table 4.

Communication with the help of stage puppets in the educational and upbringing process

The use of a stage puppet	<i>N</i>	Sum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness	Kurtosis		
in the motivational part of the activity as the "leader"	125	472	3.78	0.84	-0.63	0.217	0.82	0.43
of the entire activity	125	352	2.82	1.06	0.09	0.22	-0.70	0.43

The use of a stage puppet	<i>N</i>	Sum	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Skewness		Kurtosis	
when initiating conversations with children during	125	497	3.98	0.74	-0.58	0.22	1.23	0.43
communication in a dramatic play to facilitate preschool	125	550	4.40	0.66	-0.65	0.22	-0.60	0,43
teacher-child communication for starting a	125	514	4.11	0.80	-0.79	0.22	0,98	0.43
conversation with a child in adaptation for more successful	125	506	4.05	0.85	-0.57	0.22	0.05	0.43
communication with shy children for more successful	125	521	4.17	0.73	-0.40	0.22	-0.58	0.43
communication with children with speech difficulties where the	125	510	4.08	0.81	-0.43	0.22	-0.632	0.430
child translates imagination into speech that the child	125	546	4.37	0.68	-0.610	0.217	-0.695	0.430
listens carefully to encourage empathic verbal and non-verbal	125	548	4.38	0.781	-1.415	0.217	2.546	0.430
expression for the child to confide in her about his problem	125	494	3.95	0.860	-0.448	0.217	-0.102	0.430

Note: *N* – number of respondents; Sum – sum of all answers; *M* – arithmetic mean; *SD* – standard deviation; Skewness - coefficient of asymmetry; Kurtosis – roundness coefficient

The results obtained from the evaluation of the respondents indicated that, with the help of a stage puppet, communication was mostly initiated through a dramatic artistic approach: by the child turning their imagination

into speech in spontaneous and deliberate play ($M = 4.5$) and during dramatic play ($M = 4.4$).

The second most frequent use was the puppet to improve the emotional component of communication, in the development of empathic communication, where empathic verbal and non-verbal expression ($M = 4.38$) and attentive listening ($M = 4.37$) were encouraged.

According to the statements of the respondents, the stage puppet was used the least in initiating communication and leading a complete directed activity instead of the preschool teacher ($M = 2.82$), while in the introductory part of the activity, to motivate children to participate, it was used a little more often ($M = 3.78$).

To take a deeper look at the obtained quantitative indicators, qualitative research was carried out through a focus group. The results obtained by coding the respondents' answers, in accordance with the specifics of the research subject, are presented in Table 5. Four areas and 18 categories were distinguished.

Table 5.

Activities and recommendations for communication with the help of a puppet - focus group

Areas	Categories
(1) Stage puppets that are most often used when working with children	(1) Stick puppets (2) Guignol puppets (3) Puppet gloves (4) Finger puppets (5) A combination of different types of puppets (6) Interactive plays in which puppets "talk" to children
(2) Stage puppets activities that encourage communication the most	(7) A stage puppet as a "mediator" in communication with children (8) A stage puppet is a means of interpreting stories or songs (9) Stage puppet in a role-play (10) Stage puppets as "problem solvers" or "advisors"
(3) Stage puppet activities in which children show the greatest interest	(11) Performing puppet plays in front of other children and playing roles with a puppet (dramatic play with a stage puppet) (12) Free play with a stage puppet

Areas	Categories
(4) Recommendations for improving stage puppet activities in the function of speech development	(13) Singing songs or performing recitations with a doll
	(14) Use the stage puppet as much as possible in practice and make the puppet available at all times
	(15) Use the puppet while telling stories and singing songs
	(16) Encourage children to independently make puppets or characters and to create their own stories and dialogues.
	(17) Involve parents in activities with puppets
	(18) Use a stage puppet as a "helper" or "teacher" in games that encourage language skills

The results of the focus group research (Table 5) confirmed the importance and variety of activities with stage puppets in the development of preschool children's communication and provided useful guidelines for their improvement in the kindergarten context. There was a need for the constant availability of stage puppets for children, to encourage children to make stage puppets independently and to involve parents in activities with stage puppets. Also, the recommendation to preschool teachers referred to the more frequent use of the puppet during talking or reading literary parts, during speech exercises in which the puppet becomes a "helper" and "teacher".

To gain a better insight into the specificity of communication initiated using a stage puppet, specific aspects of communication that were encouraged by the use of a stage puppet were singled out by unifying and grouping the data obtained by surveying and interviewing, while the support was represented by contemporary knowledge about aspects and forms of communication as well as activities with a stage puppet (Bojović, 2010; Čaġanaġa & Kalmiř, 2015; Lepiċnik Vodopivec & řindić, 2022; Kamenov & Spasojević, 2008; Kovaċević & Isaković, 2019; Karaoils, 2023; Kruřić, 2018; Misailović, 1991; Majaron, 2004). Selected specific aspects of communication encouraged by the use of stage puppets are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.

Specific aspects of communication in kindergarten initiated by the use of stage puppets

Data collection technique	Corrective communication	Communication with the whole group	The emotional component of communication	Stage speech and communication in dramatic play
Surveying with scaling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicates with shy children - Communicates with children with difficulties - Starts the conversation with the children in the adaptation - Facilitates preschool teacher-child communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Motivational introductory part - Lead the activity - Inicira razgovor - Facilitates preschool teacher-child communication - It encourages the child to listen carefully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourages empathic verbal and non-verbal expression - It encourages the child to listen carefully - Entrusts the problem to puppet - Facilitates preschool teacher-child communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The child translates imagination into speech - Communicates in dramatic play
Interviewing in a focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A puppet as a "mediator" in communication with children - Puppet as a "problem solver" or "adviser" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A puppet as a "mediator" in communication with children - Puppet as a "problem solver" or "adviser" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Puppet as a "problem solver" or "adviser" - A puppet as a "mediator" in communication with children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interactive plays - puppets "talk" to children - The puppet as a means of interpreting stories and songs - Role play puppets - Acting and plays with a puppet - Singing songs and performing recitations with a puppet - Free play with a stage puppet

The results shown in Table 4 and Table 6 indicated that communication was most intensively encouraged when the puppet is used to develop children's artistic, dramatic, musical and literary potential, through verbal and non-verbal elements to create stories and situations. This was achieved through interactive plays, role play, acting and children's puppet plays, singing songs and performing recitations, and interpretations of stories.

Also, it was noticeable that the stage puppet stimulates communication when it was used as a medium for developing other skills, knowledge and abilities, not only artistic ones (Table 4 and Table 6). First of all, it was the encouragement of socio-emotional development through the emotional component of communication, which was dedicated to expressing, recognizing and understanding emotions in children and supporting the development of their emotional intelligence (Lepičnik Vodopivec, & Šindić, 2022; Lepičnik Vodopivec, & Šindić, 2023). Respondents' answers indicated that it was achieved through empathic communication, entrusting problems to dolls and facilitating communication between the teacher and the child for the purpose of socio-emotional progress. In emotionally based communication, the doll became a "counsellor," "mediator," and solved socio-emotional problems. In addition to helping the child to improve communication, giving him a type of protection behind which he can hide, the child spontaneously revealed his feelings to her, and thus the puppet entered the child's world of imagination in which he only stated the rules and explored the possibilities of solving his problems (Majaron, 2004). Brogini (1995) has noticed that the puppet, as an aid, makes it easier for the preschool teacher to create affective bonds with the child that contribute to better communication.

The aforementioned enabled the preschool teacher to, with the help of the puppet, encourage, initiate, and facilitate communication in corrective approaches with children in adaptation, shy children, and children with developmental difficulties, where the puppet was given the role of "advisor" and "mediator" (on what the research results indicated). When a child had a certain problem, then a puppet could be a basic means of communication (Bastašić, 2014). Corrective communication with the help of a puppet was focused on support, encouragement, help in expressing and solving problems, supporting positive patterns of behaviour, correcting behaviour, setting boundaries, etc.

Communication was also encouraged when the preschool teacher used a puppet as a methodical tool for performing learning-oriented activities with the whole group, in the introductory part, and during the entire activity, while making educational and upbringing work of higher quality, more interesting, more fun, and closer to the children (Šindić et al., 2019), and encouraged cooperation and togetherness.

Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical implications of this research highlight the importance of the puppet as a tool for promoting communication and socio-emotional development in children in preschool settings. Specifically:

1. Enriching the educational process

The puppet should become an integral part of daily activities in preschool, not only in dramatic play but also as a tool for motivation, guiding activities, and facilitating communication.

2. Encouraging speech and communication development

The puppet allows children to translate their imagination into speech through play, helping them develop expression and communicate more easily, especially for shy children or those with speech difficulties.

3. Improving emotional communication

The puppet can serve as an "intermediary" or "advisor," assisting children in expressing emotions, developing empathy, and building trust in communication.

4. Role in adaptation and socialization

The puppet can facilitate a child's first interactions with the teacher and peers, reduce anxiety, and support the adaptation process to the preschool environment.

5. Individualization in the educational process

Recognizing and respecting the specificities of children's socio-emotional development in the process of individualization and tailored approaches is crucial for successful development (Šindić, 2021; Šindić, et al., 2024). This process is effectively achieved through meaningful communication between the adult and the child, with the mediation of a puppet.

6. Education and Parenting for Social Sustainability in Early Childhood

Encouraging empathy, solidarity, self-confidence, cooperation, tolerance, and other factors that are at the core of social sustainability (Šindić & Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2025; Lepičnik Vodopivec & Šindić, 2025; Šindić et al., 2025) happens most naturally and spontaneously through communication with a puppet.

7. Recommendation for further use

It is recommended to continue using the puppet in working with children, to involve parents in puppet activities, and to encourage children to independently create puppets and design dialogues.

8. Supporting playfulness and developing educators' play competencies

The educational process should actively support playfulness as a pedagogical value (Šindić & Pribišev Beleslin, 2018). Developing educators' competencies for playful interaction, especially through the use of puppets, contributes to more meaningful and engaging learning experiences, fosters children's creativity and agency, and aligns with child-centered pedagogical approaches.

These implications emphasize the need for a more systematic inclusion of puppets in preschool practices to enhance communication and the overall development of children.

Conclusion

The results of the study confirm that with the help of a stage puppet, communication can be encouraged in different ways, that it is most intense during dramatic play when children translate their imagination into words, but also that it is an excellent medium for initiating communication between the preschool teacher and the child, and that communication is successfully developed when is a puppet in the capacity of "animator", "motivator" and "leader" of educational and upbringing activities. Pedagogical implications of the study indicate the need to enrich the everyday educational and upbringing process with the use of a puppet. The next research step could be action research through which an effort would be made to enrich and improve kindergarten practice with new contents and activities with a puppet in the function of communication development,

and to check its effectiveness. It would be desirable to design an action program in which children would constantly have access to a stage puppet, where they would jointly make stage puppets and involve parents in activities with the puppet, while the preschool teacher would use the puppet more intensively during speaking and reading literary parts, during speech exercises in which the puppet becomes a "helper" and a "teacher". A limitation of this study is that it is based solely on self-reporting by preschool educators, and the focus group included a smaller number of participants.

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SPECIFIČNI ASPEKTI KOMUNIKACIJE U VRTIĆU PODSTAKNUTI UPOTREBOM SCENSKIH LUTAKA

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Apstrakt

Komunikacija u vrtiću ima značajnu ulogu u socijalnoj interakciji djece, ali je takođe važna za cjelokupan razvoj djeteta. Uloga scenskih lutaka u vaspitno-obrazovnom procesu u predškolskim ustanovama prepoznata je ne samo u umjetničkoj dimenziji, već i u sveukupnom razvoju ličnosti djeteta, posebno u razvoju govora i komunikacije. Teorijsko utemeljenje rada obuhvata pojmove komunikacije, scenskih lutaka i metoda scenske komunikacije. U empirijskom istraživanju, koje je dio šireg istraživanja sprovedenog sa 125 ispitanika – vaspitača iz Centra za predškolsko vaspitanje i obrazovanje Banja Luka – cilj je bio da se utvrdi zastupljenost specifičnih aspekata komunikacije koje podstiče upotreba scenskih lutaka i da se sagledaju preporuke za njihovo unapređenje iz ugla vaspitača. Podaci su prikupljeni tokom 2023. godine, tehnikama anketiranja, skaliranja i intervjuisanja, pomoću samostalno konstruisanih istraživačkih instrumenata. Rezultati potvrđuju da scenske lutke stimulišu komunikaciju djece predškolskog uzrasta ne samo tokom dramske igre, već i kroz svakodnevne aktivnosti, gdje lutka preuzima ulogu animatora, motivatora i fasilitatora. Pedagoške implikacije naglašavaju značaj uključivanja scenskih lutaka u svakodnevne vaspitno-obrazovne aktivnosti s ciljem unapređenja dječje komunikacije i angažovanosti.

Ključne riječi: komunikacija, scenska lutka, vaspitno-obrazovni proces, djeca predškolskog uzrasta, vaspitači.

СПЕЦИФИЧЕСКИЕ АСПЕКТЫ ОБЩЕНИЯ В ДЕТСКОМ САДУ, ВЫЗВАННЫЕ ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕМ ТЕАТРАЛЬНЫХ КУКОЛ

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Резюме

Общение в детском саду играет важную роль в социальном взаимодействии детей и является очень важным для всеобщего развития ребенка. Роль театральных кукол в воспитательно-образовательном процессе в дошкольных учреждениях признается не только на художественном плане, но и на плане общего развития ребенка, особенно в развитии речи и общения. Для теоретической основы статьи важны понятия общения, сценических кукол и метод сценического общения. В эмпирическом исследовании, которое является частью более широкого исследования, проведенного между 125 респондентами – воспитателями в Центре дошкольного воспитания и образования Баня-Луки, цель состояла в том, чтобы установить представленность специфических аспектов коммуникации, вызванных использованием театральных кукол и рассмотреть рекомендации воспитателей по их улучшению. Данные были собраны в течение 2023 года, с помощью методов опроса, шкалирования и интервьюирования с использованием самостоятельно сконструированных исследовательских инструментов. Результаты подтверждают, что театральные куклы стимулируют общение детей дошкольного возраста не только во время драматической игры, но и в повседневной деятельности, где кукла играет роль аниматора, мотиватора и фасилитатора. Педагогические импликации подчеркивают важность включения театральных кукол в повседневную воспитательно-образовательную деятельность с целью улучшения общения и вовлеченности детей.

Ключевые слова: *общение, театральная кукла, воспитательно-образовательный процесс, дети дошкольного возраста, воспитатели.*
