

Constructivism-Based Hand Puppet Role-Playing to Improve Children's Emotional Regulation Skills

Mirna Sari¹, Aini Mahabbati²

Pendidikan Luar Biasa, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Emotional regulation difficulties among early childhood learners, particularly those with emotional disorders, require instructional strategies that are developmentally appropriate and engaging. This study aimed to enhance children's emotional management abilities through constructivism-oriented hand puppet role-playing activities. The research employed Classroom Action Research, combining qualitative and quantitative descriptive approaches. It was conducted with 11 children in Group B2 at TK Negeri 2 Kaubun during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, with a focused observation of three children identified as having difficulties with emotional regulation. The research procedure followed four iterative stages: planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. Data were obtained through systematic observation of emotional regulation indicators, behavioral responses, and participation during learning activities. The findings demonstrated a marked improvement in children's emotional management skills after the intervention. The mean achievement score increased from 44.8% in Cycle I, categorized as Beginning to Develop, to 77.1% in Cycle II, classified as Developed as Expected. Improvements were evident across four aspects: recognizing personal and others' emotions, expressing emotions appropriately, strengthening self-confidence, and demonstrating positive social behavior. These results indicate that constructivist hand-puppet role-playing is an effective pedagogical medium for supporting children's ability to recognize, express, and regulate emotions in constructive and social ways.

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Corresponding Author:

Mirna Sari

Pendidikan Luar Biasa, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

Email: mirnasari.2024@student.uny.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to manage emotions is an important aspect of early childhood development. Children who can recognize, express, and appropriately regulate their emotions tend to have better social relationships, higher self-confidence, and greater adaptability in learning environments [1]. However, not all children can manage their

emotions well. Some children, especially those who experience emotional disorders, often have difficulty recognizing, expressing, and controlling their feelings. Emotional disorders in children may manifest in the form of anxiety, excessive anger, or even depression, which, if not addressed, can have negative impacts on the child's social, academic, and emotional development [2]. Therefore, it is important to provide appropriate early intervention so that children can manage their emotions healthily and adaptively. Managing emotions is a way of becoming aware of what lies behind a feeling (for example, pain that triggers anger) and learning how to cope with anxiety, anger, and sadness [3]. In addition, emotional management is the ability to use thought, reasoning, and behavior to manage feelings so they can be expressed appropriately or harmoniously, thereby achieving balance within the individual [4].

In Kindergarten (TK) Group B, children are at a very important developmental stage, beginning to learn to regulate their emotions and interact with peers. However, some children in this group may experience difficulties in managing their emotions, which can affect their social relationships and behavior. Therefore, it is important to provide effective and enjoyable approaches to help them learn to better manage their feelings [5]. Click or tap here to enter text. Children with emotional disorders are in a condition where they experience difficulties in recognizing, expressing, and managing their feelings or emotions in a reasonable manner. This disorder is characterized by excessive emotional responses that are inappropriate to the situation, difficult to control, thereby affecting the child's social behavior, academic performance, and interpersonal relationships [6].

Based on initial observations, several children experienced difficulty managing their emotions. This is in line with Hanifah et al. [7] opinion that early childhood is vulnerable to emotional outbursts and has not yet been able to express feelings verbally or in a controlled manner. Preschool-aged children (Group B) often show difficulties in expressing or controlling their emotions. They may cry more easily, feel angry, fearful, frustrated, or anxious in situations that are not actually very stressful, and have difficulty adapting to the social environment, such as disturbing peers, being easily offended, or behaving aggressively when their wishes are not fulfilled. This certainly requires an effective approach to help them manage and express emotions in a healthy way [8].

Based on the researcher's preliminary study of Group B at TK Negeri 02 Kaubun at the beginning of the new academic year, three children were found to experience emotional disorders, such as being unable to control or manage emotions like anger, crying, anxiety, and fear, while in the school environment. The children were not yet able to express their emotions; for example, when playing with friends, they responded with anger and physical aggression, showing a lack of empathy toward peers or others. They were also unwilling to cooperate or share toys during play. One child even displayed hyperactivity, making the learning process difficult. In such situations, the children did not yet possess the skills to manage their own emotions. It was observed that the children recognized only basic emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear.

Teachers have attempted to address these issues through conventional approaches, such as making various efforts to help children manage their emotions, giving verbal warnings or advice when children display disruptive behavior, calming the children, giving

consequences such as seating them separately, and providing praise when children successfully show positive behavior. However, these strategies have not shown significant results. The children still display the same behaviors, and there has been no consistent improvement in how they manage their emotions. They still often have difficulty understanding their own feelings and are not yet able to channel their emotions appropriately. Based on the initial findings, this problem may be caused by several factors: from the child's side, a lack of deep emotional awareness; from the teacher's side, the absence of approaches suited to children's needs; from the methodological side, approaches that are still general in nature; and from the support system side, which has not been maximized.

Considering these problems, a more active, enjoyable approach that aligns with the developmental characteristics of early childhood is needed. One suitable approach is a constructivist play approach using hand puppets for role-playing. This approach is based on the learning theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, which emphasize providing children with space to express themselves, build a concrete understanding of emotions, and learn through direct experience in enjoyable contexts [9]. This approach emphasizes the importance of direct experience in the learning process, guiding children to construct their own understanding and knowledge through interaction with the environment and others [10]. In the context of emotional management, a constructivist approach can provide children with opportunities to engage with diverse social situations, thereby enhancing their ability to recognize and manage feelings [11].

Role-playing is one of the most effective methods within the constructivist approach, especially for early childhood. Through role-playing, children can imitate roles and situations they encounter in real life, giving them opportunities to experiment with various emotions and ways of coping with them [12]. Using hand puppets in role-playing provides a fun and safe way for children to express their feelings. Hand puppets can be an effective tool in helping children recognize various emotions, understand others' perspectives, and develop social skills that support emotional management [13]. This aligns with early childhood learning principles that emphasize play, exploration, and direct experience as the foundation for skill development.

According to a study by Wahyuningsih [14] on the Effect of Hand Puppet Media on Emotional Regulation Ability, it can be inferred that hand puppet media influences children's ability to control emotions. This study confirms that hand puppet media can be applied as a learning medium to support the development of children's emotional regulation abilities. Based on this background, this study aims to improve the emotional management abilities of children with emotional disorders through a constructivist approach using hand puppet role-play in Kindergarten Group B. Through this intervention, it is expected that children will acquire better skills in recognizing and managing their emotions, as well as improving their social relationships with peers.

Therefore, the researcher will conduct a classroom action research focusing on the study entitled "Improving Emotional Management Abilities in Children with Emotional Disorders through a Constructivist Play Approach Using Hand Puppet Role-Play in Kindergarten Group B," to determine whether the constructivist play approach through hand

puppet role-play can improve the emotional management abilities of children with emotional disorders in Group B of TK Negeri 02 Kaubun.

2. METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) using a descriptive, qualitative, and quantitative approach to improve the learning process and outcomes through concrete actions and continuous reflection. The research was conducted in Group B2 of TK Negeri 2 Kaubun during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year for approximately one month (May 2025), encompassing the pre-action stage, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The research subjects consisted of 11 children, with a particular focus on three children identified as experiencing emotional disorders based on initial observations. The research procedure followed four stages of CAR: planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection, in which the researcher was directly involved throughout the entire process. During the planning stage, the researcher developed teaching modules and observation instruments and prepared constructivist-based hand-puppet role-playing media. Data collection was conducted through observation of children's emotional regulation abilities and behavioral changes, and their participation in learning activities, which were then analyzed to identify improvements for the subsequent cycle.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of the Pre-Action Stage

The pre-action assessment results showed that most children were in the Not Yet Developed (NYD) and Beginning to Develop (BD) categories. The highest score achieved by the children was 12, while the lowest score was 4 out of a maximum total score of 32. The classical average reached 25%. These findings indicate that children experienced difficulties in managing their emotions, both in recognizing their feelings and expressing them appropriately. In addition, children tended to display impulsive behaviors, such as crying, anger, or complaining, when facing unpleasant situations. Based on these results, the teacher designed learning activities using a constructivist, play-based approach with hand puppet media to help children improve their emotional regulation skills.

Recapitulation of Cycle I Results

a. Recapitulation of Individual Children's Data in Cycle I

Table 1. Recapitulation of Data on the Development of Children's Emotional Regulation Skills in Cycle I

No	Name	Cycle I		Total	Average %	Criteria
		S.% P1	S.%P2			
1	2	3	4	6	7	8
2	Gibran	40,6%	53,1%	93,8%	46,9%	MB
3	Yopi	43,8%	56,3%	100,0%	50,0	MB
4	Atika	34,4%	40,6%	75,0%	37,5	BB
Total					134,45%	
Average					44,8%	MB

Source: Children's Instrument Cycle I, Meeting 1 and Meeting 2

The data above show that the average ability of children to manage their emotions increased to 44.8%, placing it in the Beginning to Develop (BD) category. Compared to the average of the first meeting, which was 39.6% (Not Yet Developed/NYD), this indicates an improvement.

b. Recapitulation of Data by Aspect of Emotional Ability in Cycle I

Table 2. Recapitulation of Observation Results of Children’s Emotional Regulation Skills by Aspect in Cycle I

No	Indicator of Children’s Emotional Regulation Observed Sub-Indicators/Behaviors		Cycle I		Total	Average %	Criteria
			P1	P2			
1	Children can regulate their own emotions and those of others	Children mention their feelings during play	41.7%	50.0%	91.7%	45.8%	MB
		Children can recognize emotions through facial expressions/voice	41.7%	58.3%	100.0%	50.0%	MB
2	Children can express emotions in a healthy way	Children show ways to express feelings without hurting others	33.3%	41.7%	75.0%	37.5%	BB
		Children do not hit or shout when angry	25.0%	33.3%	58.3%	29.2%	BB
3	Children can develop self-confidence	Children dare to speak or lead during role play	41.7%	100.0%	100.0%	50.0%	MB
		Children show initiative in choosing roles	58.3%	125.0%	125.0%	62.5%	BSh
4	Children can display positive behavior	Children advise friends in a positive manner	33.3%	41.7%	75.0%	37.5%	BB
		Children show good behavior (e.g., sharing, helping, etc.).	41.7%	50.0%	91.7%	45.8%	MB
Average						44.8%	MB

Source: Children’s Instrument Cycle I, Meeting 1 and Meeting 2

From the table above, it can be concluded that most aspects have entered the Beginning to Develop (BD) category. One sub-indicator, namely “showing initiative in choosing roles,” has reached the Developing as Expected (DE) category. Several aspects still need improvement, particularly in the expression of negative emotions such as anger, which is still classified as Not Yet Developed (NYD).

At the end of Cycle I, there was an initial improvement in the emotional regulation abilities of children with emotional disorders in Group B of the kindergarten. Observation results showed that the average score for children’s emotional regulation abilities in this cycle reached 44.8%, which was previously in the “Not Yet Developed” category. After the intervention, several children showed progress toward the “Beginning to Develop” stage, including verbalizing their feelings (e.g., “I’m angry,” “I’m sad”) and reduced crying or complaining when competing for toys.

This process did not occur instantly. The improvement in children’s emotional regulation skills was closely related to the learning strategy used, namely a constructivist, play-based approach through role-playing with hand puppets. Children were actively involved through direct experiences, such as playing puppet characters,

listening to simple stories depicting emotional situations (e.g., being angry due to losing a toy), and engaging in light discussions with the teacher.

Through hand-puppet media, children could express their emotions indirectly. For example, shy children became more confident when speaking with puppets. Children who usually expressed anger by hitting their peers were gradually guided to channel their emotions through puppet conversations, such as saying, "I'm sad because you didn't invite me to play."

Recapitulation of Cycle II Results

a. Recapitulation of Individual Children's Data in Cycle II

Based on the recapitulation results, the following findings were obtained:

Table 3. Recapitulation of Data on the Development of Children's Emotional Regulation Skills in Cycle II

No	Name	Cycle I		Total	Average %	Criteria
		S.% P1	S.% P2			
1	2	3	4	6	7	8
2	Gibran	71,9%	90,6%	162,5%	81,3%	BSB
3	Yopi	68,8%	87,5%	156,3%	78,1%	BSH
4	Atika	62,5%	81,3%	143,8%	71,9%	BSH
Total					231,3%	
Average					77,1%	BSH

Source: Children's Instrument Cycle II, Meeting 1 and Meeting 2

These results indicate a significant improvement compared to the previous cycle. The children were able to manage their emotions better, with two children reaching the Developing as Expected (DE) category and one child reaching the Developing Very Well (DVW) category.

b. Recapitulation of Data by Aspect of Emotional Ability in Cycle II

Table 4. Recapitulation of Observation Results of Children's Emotional Regulation Skills by Aspect in Cycle II

No	Indicator of Children's Emotional Regulation		Cycle II		Total	Average %	Criteria
	Observed Sub-Indicators/Behaviors		P1	P2			
1	Children can regulate their own emotions and those of others	Children mention their feelings during play	75.0%	100.0%	175.0%	87.5%	(BSB)
		Children can recognize emotions through facial expressions/voice	75.0%	91.7%	166.7%	83.3%	(BSB)
2	Children can express emotions in a healthy way	Children show ways to express feelings without hurting others	58.3%	75.0%	133.3%	66.7%	(BSH)
		Children do not hit or shout when angry	50.0%	75.0%	125.0%	62.5%	(BSH)
3		Children dare to speak or lead during role play	66.7%	91.7%	158.3%	79.2%	(BSH)

	Children can develop self-confidence	Children show initiative in choosing roles	83.3%	100.0%	183.3%	91.7%	(BSB)
4	Children can display positive behavior	Children advise friends in a positive manner	58.3%	75.0%	133.3%	66.7%	(BSH)
		Children show good behavior (e.g., sharing, helping, etc.).	75.0%	83.3%	158.3%	79.2%	(BSH)
	Average					77.1%	(BSH)

Source: Children’s instruments, Cycle II, Meeting 1 and Meeting 2

It can be seen that indicators that were previously still developing (Beginning to Develop/BD and Not Yet Developed/NYD) showed improvement toward Developing as Expected (DE), and several even reached the Very Well Developed (VWD) category. At the end of Cycle II, there was a significant improvement in the emotional regulation abilities of children with emotional disorders in Group B of the kindergarten. Based on the observation results, the average achievement increased from 44.8% in Cycle I to 77.1% in Cycle II, exceeding the predetermined success threshold of 70%.

This improvement indicates that the learning strategy, implemented through a constructivist, play-based approach using hand puppet role-playing, was successful in positively impacting children’s emotional development. Children began to recognize their own emotions and those of others, express their feelings verbally, and respond to emotional situations in a calmer, more directed manner.

Results of the Improvement in Emotional Regulation Skills of Children with Emotional Disorders through a Constructivist Play Approach Using Hand Puppet Role-Playing

Based on the observation results in Cycle I and Cycle II, there was a fairly significant improvement in children’s ability to manage emotions. The results of Cycle I and Cycle II for each aspect of emotional ability are as follows:

a. Recognizing One’s Own Emotions and the Emotions of Others

In Cycle I, children’s ability to recognize their own emotions and those of others was still limited, with an average score of only 45.8%–50%. Children were hesitant to name their feelings and had difficulty understanding their peers’ emotions. However, in Cycle II, a significant improvement occurred, reaching an average of 91.7%–100%, placing it in the *Very Well Developed* (VWD) category.

This improvement was supported by the use of hand puppets, which allowed children to express themselves without fear of being judged. Children became more confident in voicing their emotions through the puppet as a medium.

b. Expressing Emotions in a Healthy Way

In Cycle I, this ability was still low, with an average of only 29.2%–37.5%, categorized as *Not Yet Developed* (NYD) to *Beginning to Develop* (BD). Children still tended to hurt their peers or shout when feeling angry.

However, in Cycle II, the score increased to 75%, categorized as *Developed as Expected* (DAE). Role-playing activities helped children understand how to express their feelings without hurting others and provided a safe space for verbal emotional expression.

c. **Developing Self-Confidence**

In Cycle I, this aspect began to show development with scores ranging from 50%–62.5%. Children began to try speaking up or taking an active role, though some remained shy. In Cycle II, the scores increased to 91.7% and even reached 100% in the sub-indicator of initiative in choosing roles, placing it in the *Very Well Developed* (VWD) category.

This indicates that role-playing indirectly builds children’s courage to make decisions and perform in front of their peers.

d. **Demonstrating Good Behavior**

The development of this aspect was relatively stable. While in Cycle I the scores ranged from 37.5%–45.8%, in Cycle II they increased to 75%–83.3%, categorized as *Developed as Expected* to *Very Well Developed* (DAE–VWD). Children began to demonstrate prosocial behaviors such as advising peers, helping others, and sharing.

Hand puppets as a learning medium proved effective in helping children understand positive social values through simulations of everyday roles. The details of the average results are as follows:

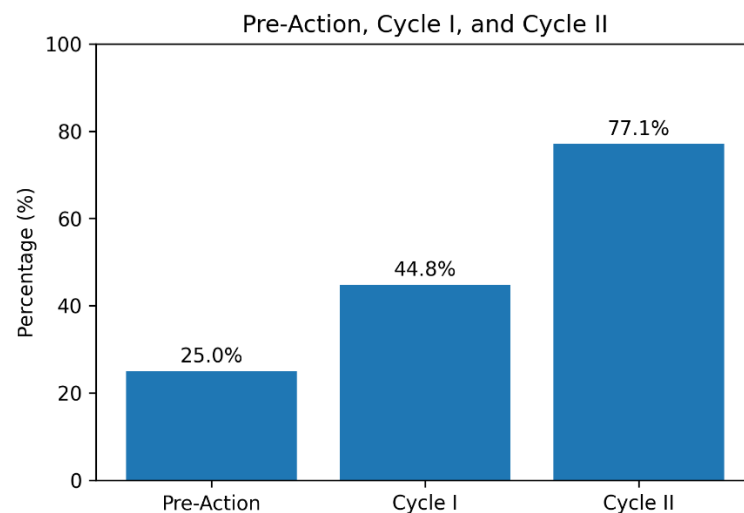


Figure 1. Recapitulation Data of Observations on Emotional Regulation Skills in the Pre-Action Stage, Cycle I, and Cycle II

The increase from 25.0% in the pre-action stage to 44.8% in Cycle I and 77.1% in Cycle II indicates that the role-playing approach using hand puppets was successful in helping children with emotional disorders learn to recognize, express, and regulate their emotions more positively and effectively.

Discussion

This study is a classroom action research consisting of two cycles, with each cycle comprising two meetings. Prior to the implementation, the researcher prepared the aspects to be assessed related to improving emotional regulation skills in children with emotional disorders through a constructivist play approach using hand puppet role-playing in Group B.

Based on observations from the two cycles that were carried out, it was found that there was an improvement in children's ability to manage their emotions. In the pre-action stage, the classical average of children's emotional regulation ability reached 25%, categorized as Not Yet Developed (NYD). In Cycle I, the average increased to 44.8% with the category Beginning to Develop (BD). Meanwhile, in Cycle II, the average further increased to 77.1%, placing it in the Developing as Expected (DE) category, and was declared successful, as it exceeded the minimum success indicator of 70%.

Thus, actions implemented through a constructivist play approach, including role-playing, have been proven effective in helping children manage their emotions [15]. The children became more sensitive to emotions, more skilled at expressing feelings in healthy ways, showed increased self-confidence, and began to demonstrate consistent positive social behavior. Fun, concrete, and interactive activities such as these are highly suitable for early childhood, as they allow children to learn through play and express themselves without fear. This improvement indicates that the applied learning strategy constructivism through hand puppet role-playing had a positive effect on children's emotional development, especially for children with emotional disorders [16]. The improvement did not occur instantly but through a series of systematic, repetitive, and enjoyable activities. Several factors contributed to the success of the intervention:

1. The Use of Hand Puppets as Expressive Media

Hand puppets attracted children's attention and served as an extension of the teacher or playmates. Children felt safer and more comfortable expressing emotions through puppet characters, creating a fun and non-threatening learning atmosphere.

2. Meaningful Role-Playing Activities

Role-playing with simple scenarios helped children empathize with characters' feelings and place themselves in various emotional situations, enabling them to recognize emotions such as anger, sadness, happiness, and fear, and practice appropriate responses.

3. Simple Emotion Regulation Techniques

Teachers introduced simple techniques such as deep breathing, sitting calmly, or using mirrors to recognize facial expressions, which were easy for children to apply and effective in calming themselves.

4. Consistent and Empathetic Teacher Guidance

Teachers played a crucial role in guiding children's emotional processes. Positive reinforcement motivated children to repeat positive behaviors, and teachers also served as role models in expressing emotions calmly.

5. A Safe and Enjoyable Learning Environment

Activities were conducted in small groups, with rich interaction and without demanding perfection, allowing children to feel comfortable and unafraid to make mistakes when expressing their feelings.

The findings support the constructivist theories of Jean Piaget and Vygotsky, which emphasize that children construct knowledge through direct experience and social interaction [17]. In this study, hand puppet role-playing served as a medium for children to build an understanding of emotions and how to manage them through real experiences and

reflection. According to Piaget [18], early childhood is the preoperational stage during which symbolic play, such as role-playing, is essential for cognitive and socio-emotional development. Vygotsky also highlighted the importance of social environments, where interactions with adults (teachers) and peers foster the development of higher psychological functions. Furthermore, Ulfa and Na'imah [19] stated that children's emotional development occurs through play activities and social relationships. Arif [20] also demonstrated that the consistent use of hand puppets in learning helps children recognize, express, and manage their emotions more effectively.

4. CONCLUSION

This classroom action research demonstrates that a constructivist play-based learning strategy using hand puppet role-playing can meaningfully strengthen emotional regulation capacities among kindergarten children with emotional difficulties. The intervention facilitated gradual changes in how children understand emotions, interact socially, and respond to everyday emotional situations within the classroom context, indicating that experiential and play-centered learning supports socio-emotional development more effectively than conventional approaches. The findings imply that early childhood educators can integrate hand puppet role-playing as a practical pedagogical tool to foster emotional awareness, self-expression, confidence, and prosocial behavior. From an educational perspective, this approach aligns with constructivist principles by positioning children as active learners who build emotional understanding through interaction, reflection, and guided social experiences. It also highlights the importance of creating safe, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environments for children with emotional regulation challenges.

This study is limited to a small group of kindergarten learners within a single educational setting and was implemented over a relatively short period. The focus on children identified with emotional disorders in one class restricts the generalizability of the findings to broader populations or different educational levels. In addition, the research focused on observable emotional behaviors, without longitudinal follow-up to assess long-term impacts. Future research is recommended to involve larger, more diverse samples, extend the intervention duration, and examine the sustainability of emotional regulation outcomes over time. Subsequent studies may also explore integrating hand puppet role-playing with parental involvement or digital media to enhance emotional learning beyond the classroom. This research contributes to the general public by offering an evidence-informed, low-cost, and developmentally appropriate strategy that teachers and caregivers can apply to support children's emotional well-being and social adjustment in early childhood education settings.

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