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Enhancing Students' Self-Esteem through Psychodrama with Hand Puppets: A Study in Islamic Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the high academic and social demands experienced by students in faith-based schools, which can contribute to low self-esteem. These differentiated demands prompt students to compare themselves with peers in public schools and to evaluate their abilities, physical conditions, and economic status negatively, leading to feelings of inferiority in social interactions and academic performance. This pre-experimental study with a one-group pretest and posttest design examined the effectiveness of a psychodrama hand-puppet intervention in enhancing students' self-esteem. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 10 students from MA Sirojul Hikmah who had the lowest self-esteem scores based on a self-esteem scale adapted to local cultural values and Islamic principles (Cronbach's $\alpha = .816$; item-total correlations $> .30$). Data were analyzed using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The results showed a 77.6% improvement in self-esteem, with the mean score increasing from 76 prior to the intervention to 135 afterward. The Wilcoxon test indicated that the psychodrama hand-puppet intervention was effective in increasing students' self-esteem ($p = .005$). Psychodrama also significantly improved the dimensions of significance ($p = .005$), competence ($p = .005$), power ($p = .005$), and virtue ($p = .005$). These findings offer practical implications for Islamic schools (*madrasah* and *pesantren*) by providing an alternative intervention to foster more positive self-esteem among students. Future research should consider larger sample sizes, alternative research designs, and

variation in gender and coping strategies to obtain more comprehensive results.

Keywords: Psychodrama; Hand Puppet; Self-Esteem

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi tingginya tuntutan akademik dan sosial pada siswa sekolah berbasis agama yang mendorong berkembangnya harga diri rendah. Perbedaan tersebut mendorong siswa membandingkan diri dengan teman di sekolah umum, sehingga menimbulkan evaluasi negatif terhadap kemampuan, kondisi fisik, dan status ekonomi yang berujung pada rasa rendah diri dalam interaksi sosial dan pencapaian akademik. Penelitian *pre-eksperimen* dengan desain *one group pretest-posttest* ini bertujuan menguji efektivitas psikodrama dengan boneka tangan dalam meningkatkan harga diri siswa. Teknik *purposive sampling* digunakan untuk memilih 10 siswa MA Sirojul Hikmah dengan skor harga diri terendah berdasarkan skala harga diri yang disesuaikan dengan nilai budaya lokal dan prinsip Islam ($\alpha = 0,816$; $rit > 0,3$). Teknik analisis data menggunakan uji Wilcoxon dan hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan harga diri sebesar 77,6%, di mana skor rata-rata sebelum intervensi 76 meningkat menjadi 135. Uji Wilcoxon menunjukkan bahwa psikodrama dengan boneka tangan efektif meningkatkan harga diri siswa ($p = 0,008$). Selain itu, psikodrama juga mampu meningkatkan aspek-aspek harga diri secara signifikan; aspek-aspek tersebut meliputi *significance* ($p = 0,005$), *competence* ($p = 0,005$), *power* ($p = 0,005$), dan *virtue* ($p = 0,005$). Hasil ini memberi kontribusi praktis bagi sekolah Islam (madrasah/pesantren) untuk menyediakan intervensi alternatif dalam mengembangkan harga diri siswa yang lebih positif. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan mempertimbangkan ukuran sampel yang lebih besar, desain penelitian lain, serta variasi gender dan strategi *coping* agar hasil lebih komprehensif.

Kata kunci: Psikodrama; Boneka Tangan; Harga Diri

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transformative period marked by profound physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes (Bermúdez, 2020). During this stage, students engage in self-discovery through peer interactions that provide information exchange, social acceptance, and emotional support, all of which contribute to the formation of self-esteem (Bleckmann et al., 2024; Jałowicka-Frania, 2022; Rachman et al., 2025). Social relationships therefore

play a central role in shaping how adolescents view themselves and their capabilities, positioning self-esteem as a key construct in understanding adolescent development (Gidi et al., 2021; Park et al., 2024; Rachman et al., 2025).

Self-esteem can be understood as an individual's subjective evaluation of their own worth, based on an appraisal of personal achievements relative to an internal "ideal self" (Azmi et al., 2022; Roshan, 2022). It is crucial for character development because higher self-esteem supports confidence, problem-solving ability, and perseverance (Khan et al., 2024), which in turn promote academic success and psychological well-being (Lestari & Antika, 2023; Omar et al., 2024; Perveen et al., 2020;). Conversely, low self-esteem is associated with cognitive and emotional difficulties, including impaired problem-solving, heightened anxiety, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideation (Azmi et al., 2022; Gidi et al., 2021). Understanding these consequences underscores the importance of examining the scope and patterns of low self-esteem among adolescents in different sociocultural contexts.

Empirical evidence indicates that low self-esteem is a widespread concern. In Vietnam, 19.4% of students in Can Tho City reported low self-esteem, while in Saudi Arabia the prevalence reached 41% (Azmi et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2019). Studies in Indonesia similarly report substantial proportions of adolescents with low self-esteem, including 14.87% in Serang, 53.4% in Bogor, and 15% in Pandeglang (Gusman et al., 2023; Iftikhar, 2021; Utami & Astuti, 2019). A field study at MA Sirojul Hikmah found that 64.3% of students exhibited low self-esteem, largely attributed to perceived differences in physical appearance, abilities, and financial conditions, compounded by limited social interaction and passive classroom participation. These findings illustrate that self-esteem is shaped by an interplay of personal vulnerabilities and contextual pressures.

The literature consistently shows that self-esteem develops through both internal and external determinants. Internally, feelings of inferiority, negative self-talk, and lack of self-motivation contribute to diminished self-worth (Ulhaq, 2022). Externally, peers, parents, and the broader environment exert powerful influences (Gidi et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2024). Experiences of bullying, social exclusion, and body shaming place students at particular risk of developing low self-esteem (Derang et al., 2023; Ulhaq, 2022). These multifaceted determinants have prompted the development of a range of psychological interventions targeting self-esteem.

Within an Islamic perspective, self-esteem is closely linked to human dignity. Surah At-Tin (95:4) states, “We have certainly created man in the best of stature,” affirming that every individual possesses inherent worth before Allah. Cultivating self-awareness and self-respect is therefore part of realizing one’s divinely endowed potential (Duymun-Demirtas, 2025; Yuniartin et al., 2025). This dignity is embodied in *murū’ah*, a holistic integrity grounded in faith, noble character, and submission to Allah (Arroisi & Badi’, 2022). Islamic self-esteem thus reflects a vertical relationship with Allah, in contrast to many Western perspectives that emphasize social recognition and external validation as the primary basis of self-worth (Rusuli, 2020). In the Indonesian context, this meaning is further illustrated by the example of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), who integrated social dignity with moral and cultural values (Solikhin, 2020). His life reflected nine core values—monotheism, humanity, justice, equality, liberation, simplicity, brotherhood, chivalry, and local wisdom (Solikhin, 2020). Interventions designed to enhance self-esteem can therefore also be understood as efforts to strengthen awareness of inherent dignity, deepening its psychological and spiritual significance. This spiritual grounding provides a culturally robust foundation for integrating approaches such as psychodrama into Indonesian educational settings.

To address low self-esteem, several intervention strategies have been proposed, including problem-solving training, assertiveness training, group counseling combined with stress inoculation, and positive-psychology-based programs (Golshiri et al., 2023; Omar et al., 2024). These approaches generally aim to improve stress management and promote more adaptive cognitions, based on the assumption that increased coping skills and problem-solving capacity will elevate self-esteem. However, adolescents’ fluctuating emotions and still-developing cognitive abilities may limit their capacity to articulate thoughts and feelings in a purely rational manner (Ferdian et al., 2023). This limitation highlights the need for interventions that engage emotional, imaginative, and symbolic processes—such as psychodrama with hand puppets.

Psychodrama is a psychotherapeutic approach originally developed by Moreno that uses spontaneity and creativity to help individuals explore personal experiences and develop new, more adaptive responses that enhance self-esteem (Maya et al., 2025). Techniques such as role-play, role reversal, doubling, and the empty chair are used to facilitate

emotional expression, address unresolved conflicts, and reframe negative self-concepts (Keidar et al., 2025). When implemented within a supportive group climate, psychodrama can strengthen interpersonal connection, improve emotion regulation, and lay the foundation for more stable and positive self-esteem (Luo et al., 2025).

The use of hand puppets in psychodrama aligns naturally with Indonesian traditions of storytelling, particularly *wayang golek*, which has long served as a medium for transmitting moral messages, character education, and religious values (Halimah et al., 2020). Incorporating hand puppets into psychodrama offers students a symbolic and less-threatening channel for self-expression, especially for those who are shy or reluctant to perform in front of others. This strategy increases the cultural relevance and psychological safety of the intervention, thereby enhancing its effectiveness (Kawengian et al., 2024; Trisnani et al., 2024).

Psychodrama is a well-established counseling method that structures role-play into a series of stages, including preparation, assessment, intervention planning, participant selection, and enactment (Asmaryadi, 2019; Lestari et al., 2022). In this context, hand puppets function as symbolic extensions of the self, allowing students to project and explore difficult emotions and underlying issues that contribute to low self-esteem. The approach is particularly meaningful when implemented in a small, supportive group environment.

Within a support group setting, psychodrama helps participants recognize shared experiences and feel less isolated (Jacobs et al., 2016). Research has shown that support groups are effective in addressing a range of psychological concerns, including HIV-related stigma, social isolation, and body image dissatisfaction (Morris et al., 2021; Page-Reeves et al., 2021; Stangl et al., 2021; Ursavaş & Karayurt, 2021). The novelty of the present study lies in the use of hand puppets as a role-playing medium in psychodrama, specifically tailored for adolescents who are hesitant to engage in direct, face-to-face role-play. By providing an emotionally safer and culturally resonant mode of expression, psychodrama with hand puppets is posited as a promising intervention for enhancing adolescents' self-esteem. This study therefore seeks to empirically examine the effectiveness of psychodrama with hand puppets in improving self-esteem and to contribute new insights to the literature on adolescent psychological interventions.

METHODS

The researcher employed a pre-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design to examine the effectiveness of psychodrama with hand puppets in enhancing students' self-esteem, with data collected before and after the intervention (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By comparing participants' self-esteem scores at pretest and posttest, the study assessed the magnitude of change attributable to the psychodrama sessions and evaluated whether the intervention produced statistically significant improvements in self-esteem.

Figure 1 presents the three stages of the research procedure: preparation, implementation, and analysis. In the preparation stage, the researcher planned the study and developed the self-esteem scale. The implementation stage comprised (1) selecting participants according to predetermined criteria, (2) administering the pretest, and (3) delivering the psychodrama hand-puppet intervention. In the analysis stage, the researcher administered the posttest and analyzed the pretest and posttest data using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, a non-parametric statistical procedure.

The psychodrama with hand puppets was implemented in a support-group format over six sessions. A support group is a group-based intervention designed to help members recognize that others face similar difficulties and to facilitate mutual support and shared experience (Jacobs et al., 2016). The hand puppets functioned as symbolic media that enabled participants to express emotions indirectly, thereby increasing comfort and psychological safety when sharing thoughts and feelings. Each session lasted approximately 45–50 minutes and followed the standard phases of a support group.

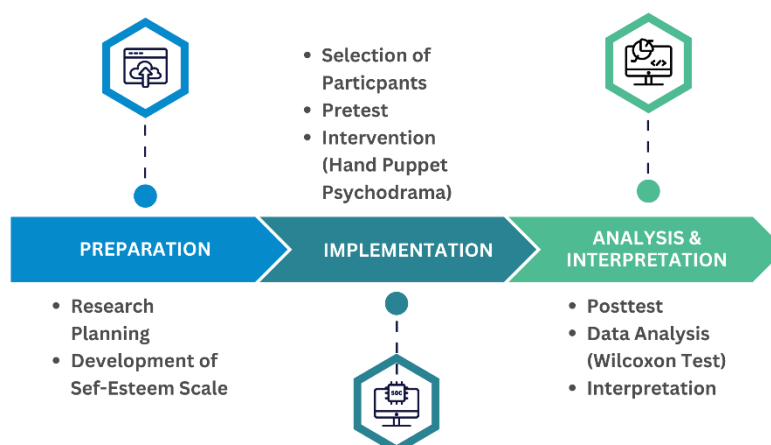


Figure 1. Research Stages

The study was conducted at MA Sirojul Hikmah, an Islamic-based school in Bojonegoro, Indonesia. The school was selected because its religious environment provided a context that is highly relevant to the cultural and spiritual orientation of the intervention, and plays an important role in shaping students' perspectives and behaviors (Moon, 2024). From a population of 30 students, 10 participants were selected through purposive sampling, consistent with the study's objective of identifying those with the lowest self-esteem to receive the psychodrama hand-puppet intervention (Andrade, 2021).

To identify students with low self-esteem, the researcher developed a self-esteem scale based on Coopersmith's self-esteem theory, which comprises four components—significance, power, competence, and virtue—that formed the conceptual foundation of the instrument (Coopersmith, 1967). A detailed review of Coopersmith's framework informed the development of 60 initial items. The scale then underwent content validation by experts, construct validation through item–total correlation analysis, and reliability testing using internal consistency procedures (Nezamdoost et al., 2025; Wehrli et al., 2025). Following these procedures, 42 items were retained as both valid and reliable, with item–total correlations $r > 0.30$ and Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.816$.

Quantitative data were first organized using Microsoft Excel and subsequently processed in SPSS 25.0 for descriptive and inferential analysis. Inferential statistics were conducted using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test to compare pretest and posttest scores (Luckett et al., 2017). This non-parametric test was selected because it is appropriate for paired data with small sample sizes and non-normal distributions (Klukowski, 2021; Luckett et al., 2017). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in participants' self-esteem scores before and after the psychodrama hand-puppet intervention.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study, conducted at MA Sirojul Hikmah, examined the effectiveness of psychodrama with hand puppets in improving students' self-esteem. Table 1 presents a descriptive summary of participants' gender, self-esteem levels, and mean self-esteem scores by gender and overall, before and after the intervention. Most participants were female ($n = 6$), while four participants were male. At pretest, the mean self-esteem score for

female students ($M = 75$) was slightly lower than that of male students ($M = 77$). A similar pattern emerged at posttest, where male students obtained a higher mean score ($M = 142$) than female students ($M = 131$). In absolute terms, mean self-esteem increased by 65 points for male students and 56 points for female students.

With respect to self-esteem levels, a marked shift occurred following the intervention. Before the psychodrama hand-puppet sessions, all 10 participants were categorized as having low self-esteem, with an overall mean score of 76. After the intervention, nine students were classified in the high self-esteem category and one student in the very high category, yielding an overall posttest mean of 135. This change in mean scores indicates a substantial improvement in students' self-esteem across the sample.

The results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test used to compare pretest and posttest self-esteem scores are shown in Table 2. There was a statistically significant increase in self-esteem from pretest ($M = 76$) to posttest ($M = 135$), $z = -2.805$, $p = .005$. This finding indicates that the hand-puppet psychodrama intervention was effective in enhancing participants' self-esteem.

Table 1.
Descriptive analysis of self-esteem by gender and level before and after the intervention

	N		Pretest		Posttest	
		N	Mean	N	Mean	
Sex						
Male	4	4	77	4	142	
Female	6	6	75	6	131	
Level of Self-Esteem						
Very High		0		1		
High		0		9		
Medium		0		0		
Low		10		0		
Very Low		0		0		
Self-Esteem Mean Score			76		135	

Table 2.
Wilcoxon signed-rank test for overall self-esteem before and after the intervention

	M	p	Z	N
Pretest	76			10
Posttest	135			10
Pretest-Posttest	0	.005	-2.805 ^a	0*

Table 3.

Changes in self-esteem dimensions (significance, competence, power, and virtue) before and after the intervention

Aspect	M		p	Z	N
	Pretest	Posttest			
Significance	27	50	.005	-2.814 ^a	10
Competence	9	16	.005	-2.840 ^a	10
Power	14	22	.005	-2.812 ^a	10
Virtue	24	44	.005	-2.805 ^a	10

Table 3 presents the pretest–posttest mean scores and Wilcoxon signed-rank test results for the four dimensions of self-esteem based on Coopersmith’s model: significance, competence, power, and virtue. For significance, the mean score increased from 27 at pretest to 49 at posttest ($z = -2.814$, $p = .005$). For competence, the mean rose from 9 to 16 ($z = -2.840$, $p = .005$). For power, the mean increased from 14 to 22 ($z = -2.812$, $p = .005$). Finally, for virtue, the mean score improved from 24 to 44 ($z = -2.805$, $p = .005$). These results indicate that the psychodrama hand-puppet intervention produced significant gains in all four self-esteem dimensions. The largest improvement was observed in significance (increase of 23 points), followed by virtue (20 points), power (8 points), and competence (7 points).

The findings indicate that all participants initially displayed low levels of self-esteem, reflecting a mix of positive and negative self-appraisals that remained vulnerable to decline under pressure. Although their self-esteem was not at a critical level, it was easily disrupted by social stressors and academic failure. Participants reported that the heavy academic load in faith-based schools, combined with religious obligations, often triggered stress, which is known to be a strong predictor of reduced self-esteem (Maymon & Hall, 2021). At MA Sirojul Hikmah, students are required to master general academic subjects as well as religious subjects such as Fiqh, Islamic history, Arabic, Qur’an, and Hadith (A. Salim et al., 2024; N. A. Salim et al., 2024). Several participants also lived in *pondok pesantren* and were expected to memorize and regularly submit portions of the Qur’an. To meet these expectations, students often stayed up until midnight, resulting in insufficient rest and physical fatigue, which further exacerbated their stress. Over time, the accumulation of academic and religious demands created a cycle of chronic stress that gradually eroded the psychological resources needed to maintain stable self-esteem (de Arellano et al., 2023).

Under such conditions, students tended to develop maladaptive coping mechanisms that negatively affected their self-esteem (Nguyen et al., 2019). Doubts about their abilities frequently emerged when they compared their academic performance or Qur'an memorization progress with that of their peers. Persistent feelings of inferiority in response to perceived incompetence encouraged the formation of negative self-perceptions (Ulhaq, 2022). This situation became more serious when students experienced repeated failure in certain subjects, which, in some cases, led to disengagement from academic tasks and even symptoms of depression (Azmi et al., 2022).

The analysis also revealed a gender-based difference in self-esteem, with female participants reporting lower self-esteem than their male counterparts. This pattern is consistent with previous studies showing that males tend to report higher self-esteem than females, reinforcing the view that gender plays a significant role in self-esteem development (Casale, 2020; Li et al., 2022). Social and cultural norms provide an important explanation for this disparity. Historically, boys have been encouraged to be autonomous, assert control, and exercise power, whereas girls have been more frequently socialized to prioritize obedience, gentleness, kindness, and conformity to idealized beauty standards (Li et al., 2022; Zuckerman et al., 2016). Developmental social role theory suggests that such differences reflect gendered role expectations, gendered socialization processes during childhood, and structural power imbalances (Schmitt et al., 2017). Consequently, males and females internalize different social values, and these value systems shape the development of their self-esteem over time.

Despite these disparities, self-esteem increased in both gender groups following the intervention, providing preliminary evidence for the effectiveness of psychodrama with hand puppets. Among male participants, the mean score rose from 77 to 142; among female participants, it increased from 75 to 131. These results suggest that the intervention was beneficial for both boys and girls. The pattern is consistent with findings by Maharani (2016) and Pratiwi et al. (2024), who reported that hand-puppet psychodrama improved self-esteem among male and female students alike. The adaptability of psychodrama across genders, populations, and clinical concerns is also supported by prior research (Giacomucci et al., 2022; Veljkovic et al., 2021). Notably, the magnitude of improvement differed by gender: male participants showed an 87% increase in self-esteem, while female participants

showed a 70.1% increase. This pattern suggests that the intervention may have been particularly impactful for male students. Equal opportunities for role-play and the use of hand puppets as a mediating tool appeared to facilitate direct emotional expression, especially among male participants who often struggle to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. This aligns with the findings of Arsandaux et al. (2023) and Bermejo-Cantarero et al. (2025), which indicate that interventions emphasizing social engagement, physical activity, and real-life accomplishment are especially effective in enhancing boys' self-esteem. Psychodrama with hand puppets also strengthens perceptions of social acceptance and personal achievement, which Coopersmith (1967) identified as core components of self-esteem.

Table 2 shows that the overall mean self-esteem score increased from 76 at pretest to 135 at posttest, with a statistically significant improvement ($Z = -2.805$; $p = .005$). This result confirms that psychodrama with hand puppets can function as a primary strategy to help participants explore self-esteem-related issues and formulate more adaptive solutions. These findings add to the body of evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of psychodrama in improving personal dimensions such as life satisfaction, positive affect, and self-compassion (Bagherian et al., 2024; Veljkovic et al., 2021; Pusvitasari et al., 2024).

The increase in self-esteem is closely linked to the systematic structure of the intervention, particularly the development of coping skills during psychodrama sessions. Coping skills cultivated in this study included self-awareness and self-acceptance, problem-solving and moral reasoning, as well as self-affirmation. Self-awareness and self-acceptance were foundational, given that individuals with low self-esteem often experience fear and irrational thoughts about their condition (Kang et al., 2021). Through guided reflection, participants were encouraged to acknowledge their limitations realistically without excessive self-criticism, while simultaneously identifying and appreciating their strengths. This shift helped them to focus on personal assets and develop a more positive self-concept instead of engaging in negative social comparison (Utami & Astuti, 2019). Over time, such efforts fostered greater self-acceptance and self-love, independent of others' judgments.

Problem-solving and moral reasoning skills represented another core set of coping strategies strengthened through the intervention. Individuals with low self-esteem often relinquish efforts when confronted with difficulties and resort to maladaptive coping

strategies (Orth & Robins, 2022). Past failures, a sense of lack of control, and fear of negative evaluation contribute to this pattern (Perveen et al., 2020). To address these issues, the psychodrama sessions invited participants to generate multiple behavioral and cognitive alternatives for dealing with problematic situations. Together with the group leader, participants evaluated these alternatives logically and in relation to social and religious norms. They then rehearsed the selected responses using hand puppets, which made it easier to experiment with new ways of thinking and acting in a psychologically safe environment. This process was essential for building more adaptive problem-solving repertoires (Novita et al., 2023).

Self-affirmation emerged as a third coping skill, closely linked to the “power” dimension of Coopersmith’s self-esteem model. It involves internal dialogue that reinforces a sense of personal agency and confidence in one’s decisions (Escobar-Soler et al., 2024). Through self-affirmation, participants worked to internalize newly learned behaviors and thought patterns into their daily lives. Several students reported that this practice helped them focus more on their own progress and feel better equipped to counter negative feelings when difficulties arose. Previous studies have shown that self-affirmation can reduce tendencies toward social comparison and support more positive self-esteem (Zebua et al., 2022).

The effectiveness of psychodrama with hand puppets is also rooted in its interactive and experiential nature. Group dynamics during the sessions fostered a sense of safety and belonging that encouraged participants to share their stories, express emotions, and rehearse alternative behaviors and thoughts (López-González et al., 2021). The structured sequence of sessions, combined with a deliberate focus on building coping mechanisms, supported constructive changes in self-evaluations. Active engagement in self-exploration was a key factor in achieving the intervention goals, as highlighted in previous work on group-based and psychodramatic interventions (Derang et al., 2023; Lestari et al., 2022).

Conceptually, the intervention was grounded in Islamic educational counseling, which emphasizes guiding individuals to recognize their inherent dignity as servants of Allah and to develop their potential for well-being in both worldly and spiritual domains. The overarching aim of the psychodrama in this study was to strengthen human dignity in line with Surah At-Tin verse 4, which affirms that every human being possesses intrinsic worth

and the capacity to cultivate their potential (Duymun-Demirtas, 2025). From this perspective, psychodrama with hand puppets can be understood as a structured effort to deepen students' awareness of their dignity and to strengthen coping mechanisms that reflect this understanding. The approach is consistent with Islamic guidance and counseling practices in culturally grounded schools, where counseling is often intertwined with storytelling, performing arts, and symbolic role enactments that communicate moral and religious values (Halimah et al., 2020). By actively analyzing their own situations and the factors that contribute to low self-esteem (Chen et al., 2023), participants were able to reconstruct these experiences symbolically through hand-puppet role-play in ways that resonated with Islamic counseling values and local cultural traditions.

Using hand puppets as a role-playing medium is closely aligned with traditional performance arts such as *wayang*, which are rich in moral, spiritual, and social messages (Halimah et al., 2020). In this study, hand puppets functioned as symbolic extensions of the self and others, and provided a platform for rehearsing alternative behaviors and thoughts. Through the dramatic scenarios they created, participants became more willing to disclose negative self-evaluations and experiment with new responses (Terence et al., 2024). Previous research has demonstrated that hand puppets can reduce anxiety and enhance interaction among children (Ginanjari et al., 2022; Halimah et al., 2020). Reduced anxiety, in turn, increases comfort in sharing personal experiences, which is crucial for the success of psychodrama (Kawengian et al., 2024; Trisnani et al., 2024). Beyond the Indonesian context, this integration is consistent with other Southeast Asian traditions such as *nang talung* in Thailand and *wayang kulit* in Malaysia, which similarly serve as vehicles for the transmission of moral, spiritual, and communal values (Backer, 2021; Khwanyuen & Sriwichian-aumphai, 2023). These parallels underscore the regional relevance of psychodrama with hand puppets by highlighting its cultural proximity to established puppet traditions across Southeast Asia.

Table 3 shows that the mean score for the significance dimension increased markedly following the intervention ($Z = -2.824$; $p = .005$; $\beta = 23$). In Coopersmith's (1967) framework, significance refers to an individual's perception of being valued by oneself and by significant others. Enhancing this dimension requires self-awareness and self-acceptance, given that individuals with low self-esteem often experience fear and irrational

thinking about their situation (Kang et al., 2021). During the intervention, participants were encouraged to accept themselves more fully and to cultivate self-love regardless of others' opinions, while also receiving validation from group members. Group dynamics created warm, empathetic, and affirming interactions (López-González et al., 2021), and the use of hand puppets provided a safe medium for expressing personal experiences, which further strengthened social bonds (Halimah et al., 2020). Improvements in significance suggest that the intervention helped participants focus on their strengths and construct a more positive self-concept without engaging in detrimental comparisons with others (Utami & Astuti, 2019). Adolescents with high significance tend to show better academic engagement and social resilience, whereas low significance is associated with reduced psychological well-being, loneliness, social isolation, and symptoms of anxiety and depression (Orth & Robins, 2022).

The virtue dimension also showed a substantial increase, with mean scores rising from 24 at pretest to 44 at posttest ($Z = -2.805$; $p = .005$; $\beta = 20$). Within Coopersmith's model, virtue reflects the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as acting in accordance with moral standards, norms, and rules (Coopersmith, 1967). In this study, virtue was strengthened through exercises in moral reasoning, where participants were guided to evaluate social situations and negative self-beliefs against relevant ethical and religious norms (Andargeery & Abdelaliem, 2024). Since social situations often trigger anxiety and lower self-esteem in adolescents (Roshan, 2022), feedback from peers functioned as a form of social validation that reinforced future ethical behavior and indirectly supported higher self-esteem (Liang et al., 2024).

The competence dimension, defined as an individual's appraisal of their ability to handle challenges (Coopersmith, 1967), also improved significantly ($Z = -2.840$; $p = .005$; $\beta = 7$). Throughout the psychodrama sessions, participants practiced problem-solving skills that are essential for developing adaptive responses (Novita et al., 2023). Because individuals with low self-esteem often give up easily and resort to maladaptive strategies (Orth & Robins, 2022), the opportunity to identify and rehearse multiple behavioral and cognitive options was particularly important. By practicing chosen responses through hand-puppet role-play, participants could improvise and refine new narratives and behaviors in a

secure setting (Ginanjar et al., 2022). This process fostered more positive perceptions of their capacity to cope with life's challenges.

The power dimension, which reflects perceived control over one's life and environment (Coopersmith, 1967), also showed significant improvement ($Z = -2.812$; $p = .005$; $\beta = 8$). Autonomy and internal control were fostered through self-affirmation exercises that strengthened beliefs in personal agency and confidence in decision-making (Escobar-Soler et al., 2024). Participants reported feeling less vulnerable to social comparison and more convinced that their actions could effect meaningful change. Previous research suggests that self-affirmation can protect adolescents' self-esteem during developmental transitions (Hoffman & Schacter, 2024).

Among all dimensions, significance showed the largest gain ($\beta = 23$), exceeding virtue ($\beta = 20$), power ($\beta = 8$), and competence ($\beta = 7$). This pattern indicates that the psychodrama with hand puppets intervention was particularly effective in reinforcing participants' sense of being valued and accepted, which is a crucial foundation for adolescent self-esteem. Group dynamics that encouraged warm, mutually supportive interactions appear to have contributed substantially to these gains, reinforcing the view that significance is central to efforts aimed at strengthening self-esteem.

The demonstrated effectiveness of psychodrama with hand puppets has important implications for school counselors and practitioners. The findings support the use of creative, culturally grounded interventions to enhance students' self-esteem and reduce social and emotional difficulties (López-González et al., 2021). The hand-puppet format may be especially useful in lower school levels for students who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally, consistent with previous evidence that hand puppets can reduce anxiety among children aged 4–7 years (Ginanjar et al., 2022).

Despite these positive outcomes, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study used a pre-experimental design without a control group, which restricts causal inferences about the relationship between the intervention and changes in self-esteem. Second, the small sample size ($N = 10$) limits statistical power and representativeness. Third, all participants were adolescents from Islamic-based schools, so the findings may not generalize to youth from other educational or cultural backgrounds. Fourth, the evaluation relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to response bias. Fifth, no follow-up

assessments were conducted, leaving the durability of the intervention effects unknown. Finally, the study focused exclusively on self-esteem and did not examine other psychological outcomes, narrowing the scope of its conclusions.

Future research should consider more rigorous designs, including control or comparison groups, to strengthen causal claims. Testing the effectiveness of psychodrama with hand puppets in larger and more diverse samples would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Comparing this intervention with other evidence-based approaches could clarify its relative advantages. Longitudinal studies with follow-up assessments are also needed to determine the sustainability of treatment gains. In addition, exploring the impact of hand-puppet psychodrama on other psychological constructs, such as anxiety, resilience, or prosocial behavior, would broaden understanding of its potential.

Overall, the present findings suggest that psychodrama with hand puppets is a promising and effective intervention for improving adolescents' self-esteem. Guidance and counseling teachers, as well as counseling practitioners, may consider integrating this approach into their services, particularly for clients presenting with low self-esteem. The development of structured training programs and intervention manuals for hand-puppet psychodrama could further enhance practitioners' competencies and support wider implementation in school counseling settings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that psychodrama with hand puppets is effective in enhancing students' self-esteem within the framework of Islamic educational counseling in a local culture-based school setting in Southeast Asia. The intervention significantly improved all four dimensions of self-esteem as conceptualized by Coopersmith (significance, power, competence, and virtue). The use of hand puppets as a mediating medium helped create a psychologically safe and comfortable atmosphere for role-play, enabling students to express emotions and explore alternative behaviors more freely. The structured development of coping strategies focused on self-esteem also encouraged students to evaluate themselves more positively and rationally, and to develop greater confidence in their personal circumstances. The four coping strategies strengthened in this study comprised self-awareness and self-acceptance, problem-solving

skills, moral reasoning skills, and self-affirmation. Nonetheless, the evidence for the effectiveness of psychodrama with hand puppets should be interpreted with caution due to several methodological limitations. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, and the absence of a control group constrains causal inference. In addition, the study did not explicitly model or test gender influences in response to the intervention. Future research is therefore recommended to employ more rigorous experimental or quasi-experimental designs, include larger and more diverse samples, and systematically examine gender differences in both baseline self-esteem and responsiveness to psychodrama-based interventions. Further studies might also explore alternative or supplementary coping strategies to optimize self-esteem enhancement across different adolescent populations.

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