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## Play Therapy with Ajining Dhiri Puppet Media to Improve Self-Esteem of Slow Learners

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# Play Therapy with *Ajining Dhiri* Puppet Media to Improve Self-Esteem of Slow Learners



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**Abstract:** This quasi-experimental study examines the effectiveness of play therapy using the *Ajining Dhiri* (ADHI) puppet medium to enhance self-esteem in slow learners. Utilizing a pretest-posttest control group design, the study involved 16 slow learners with low self-esteem, as measured by the Self-Esteem Inventory by Coopersmith (1978), validated ( $r=0.711-0.794$ ) and reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.760$ ). Participants were divided into a treatment group receiving play therapy with ADHI puppets and a control group receiving standard group counseling. Data were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test. Baseline findings revealed that 50% of students scored low in Strength (recognition and respect), 62.5% moderate in Significance (acceptance and affection), 75% moderate in Virtue (ethical behavior), and 87.5% low in Ability (task performance). Post-intervention results demonstrated significant improvements in self-esteem across all indicators for the treatment group. The Mann-Whitney U test yielded a value of 0.000,  $Z = -5.093$ , and a  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ , confirming a significant difference between the treatment and control groups. The play therapy sessions, structured in three phases, enabled students to explore self-expression and cognitive engagement through puppet interactions. Compared to the control group, students in the treatment group showed greater enthusiasm and consistent self-esteem improvements. These findings validate the alternative hypothesis (H1) that play therapy using ADHI puppet media effectively enhances self-esteem in slow learners, offering a culturally contextualized and engaging intervention for addressing their psychological needs.

**Key Words:** *Ajining Dhiri* (ADHI) puppets; Play therapy; Self-esteem; Slow learners

## INTRODUCTION

Wayang culture in Java is a game with the title of cultural arts that are familiar to all circles. Culture is one of the elements that exist in social life. Through culture can create a mindset and relationship in a certain society (Rohisfi, 2022). Relationships that are not harmonious in society can affect the psychological condition of individuals. Wayang culture can encourage children to interact more directly with their peers (Winanda & Siti, 2024). Through puppetry, children can actualize themselves so that they can increase their self-esteem (Budiati, 2010). Children with learning delays are children who have low cognitive ability problems. Usually, slow learner students have an IQ of 70 to 85, tend to have difficulty understanding abstracts, behavioral deficits, in understanding material that needs to be repeated, and slow in academics (Rasmitadila, 2017; Ruhela, 2014). In addition, slow learner students need a longer learning time than their peers. Children who are slow to learn fail to cope with learning situations and give abstract reasons, have poor memory, have poor concentration disorders, have difficulty understanding the teacher's instructions orally, are unable to express ideas and have difficulty finding and combining words, so they are unable to express ideas (Novitasari et al., 2018;

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Karande, 2008). The obstacles experienced by slow learners make them feel different from their peers. Students of slow learners who attend public schools, are considered to be at risk of low self-esteem related to the significant difficulties they experience in public schools, both in terms of academic performance and peer acceptance (Sibosiso et al., 2018)

Self-esteem is what makes us feel satisfied with ourselves, even makes us like ourselves and be proud of what we do on a daily basis. This makes one feel valued and knows that individuals have a role to play in the surrounding community. This allows individuals to feel valued and loved by known people, and develop new relationships. Self-esteem gives an individual confidence to try new activities (Goleniowska, 2014). Slow learners are often considered stupid by those around them, so the negative stigma they receive builds the idea that they are compared to other social groups and affects their self-esteem (Paterson et al., 2012; Lahane et al., 2013). Self-esteem is an important factor that affects the success of children to live happier lives. Having high self-esteem is difficult for children who are slow to learn. Individuals with low self-esteem are individuals who are pessimistic, unable to assess their abilities, feel less valuable, and less useful. Low self-esteem can cause individuals to avoid new jobs, are unable to express themselves in social settings, are afraid to start friendships, avoid social, tend to isolate themselves, lack courage to express their opinions, act as they please, passive, aggressive, self-destructive, believe they are failures, and do not deserve to be treated badly (Dian Ekowati, 2017).

Students of slow learners who have low self-esteem need interventions that can help them cope with academic and social relationship problems (Nurshobah et al., 2021; Swanson & Stomel, 2012). One of the interventions that can be applied to overcome students' self-esteem problems is through play therapy (Meliha & Yilmaz, 2020). Play therapy is an interpersonal process through which through play, trained counselors help children with cognitive, behavioral, emotional and traumatic problems, and facilitate the learning of children's coping skills (Demanchick et al., 2003). Play is the right way of therapy because children often have difficulty expressing their feelings verbally. Through play, children can lower their barriers and express their feelings better. In addition, play is an active process that allows a child to cope with stress and trauma, and can ultimately lead to mastery of that stress or trauma (Porter et al., 2009).

Slow learners must be able to change their minds about low self-esteem experienced due to negative stigma from the environment through play therapy with the media of puppet ADHI because of puppets or often used as a model of cognitive strategy and to make positive self-statements. Through the APHI puppet game, students who are slow learners are able to carry out the evaluation process shown to themselves and later related to the process of accepting themselves (Pratiwi, 2014). ADHI puppets are a type of contemporary puppet that is modified using stories used in play therapy. The contemporary puppet used in this study is the ADHI (Ajining Dhiri) puppet. This puppet was given the name ADHI because according to the Javanese people Ajining diri means that people can be appreciated. This puppet is a puppet puppet but has been modified by using clothes like people in general according to the role played, besides that the puppet is designed to resemble puppets in general but there is an element of humor so that it can attract the attention of students who are slow to learn. The goal is to use a coping model approach to help express analytical skills or solutions to problems that may be parallel to the child's difficulties. One aspect of this approach emphasizes concentration on the child's strengths by utilizing play and underestimating complex cognitive and verbal interventions. This approach allows the child to recreate the problem situation and challenge it (Porter et al., 2009). Wayang ADHI plays an important role in play therapy because children feel comfortable projecting their feelings through inanimate objects (Widjajanto et al., 2009; Reffiane & Mazidati, 2016). Based on the above findings, this study tests the effectiveness of play therapy with ADHI puppet media to improve the self-esteem of students who are slow to learn. This intervention is considered to be able to assist counselors in providing assistance to students who are slow to learn in inclusion schools.

## METHOD

This is a quasi-experiment study with a pretest-posttest control group design. A sample of 16 students exhibiting sluggish learning is utilised to represent the entire population (Sugiyono, 2009). Sixteen samples comprised kids who had slow learning tendencies and possessed low self-esteem levels.

The item employed is derived from the Self-Esteem Inventory created by Coopersmith in 1978. The self-esteem scale has undergone validity testing, with a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ranging from 0.711 to 0.794. The reliability test yielded a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.760, indicating that the self-esteem measure is reliably functional. The effectiveness test results were subjected to quantitative analysis. Two groups will be evaluated: the treatment group and the control group. The treatment group underwent play therapy utilising ADHI's puppet medium. The control group consisted of participants who did not undergo play therapy utilising ADHI puppets. The technique employed is the Mann Whitney U Test, a non-parametric statistical method. This methodology was employed to assess the median difference between two independent groups using a data scale of bounded variables that were ordinal, interval, or ratio, yet not normally distributed. Data analysis was conducted via SPSS. This methodology was employed to assess the median difference between two independent groups with a data scale of bounded variables that were ordinal, interval, or ratio, but not normally distributed. Data analysis was conducted via SPSS.

## RESULTS

Implementation of Play Therapy Utilising ADHI Puppet Media to Enhance Self-esteem in Slow Learners Three meetings were conducted, focussing on issues pertaining to the self-esteem of slow-learning pupils utilising ADHI puppet media. The initiation of play therapy commences with an evaluation to ascertain the child's developmental status. The counselor's second stage involves elucidating to the youngster the use of play therapy using APhi puppet medium. Additionally, throughout the activity phase, students who exhibit slower learning will be encouraged to select their preferred puppets to enhance their cognitive development. In the concluding phase, the counsellor elucidates the rationale behind the behavioural change process that has been identified and modified, and formulates follow-up activities to assess the execution of subsequent actions.

According to the self-esteem statistics of students with learning delays, eight (8) individuals from the medium and low learning delay categories were selected for therapy. The data is delineated by indication in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Initial Conditions (*Pre-Test*) of Self-Esteem Students who are slow to learn

No	Aspects	F %	Criterion					Sum
			Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High	
1	Strength (the presence of recognition and respect received from others)	F %	0 0	8 50	8 50	0 0	0 0	16 100
2	Significance (the acceptance, care, and affection that individuals receive from others)	F %	0 0	10 62,5	6 37,5	0 0	0 0	16 100
3	Virtue (performing behavior that does not violate ethics, morals, and religion)	F %	0 0	12 75	4 25	0 0	0 0	8 100
4	Ability (ability to succeed in meeting the demands of tasks and achievements)	F %	0 0	14 87,5	2 12,6	0 0	0 0	8 100

According to Table 1, the Strength indicator, which encompasses recognition and respect from others, reveals that 50% of students, or 8 individuals, fall into the low category, while the remaining 50%, also 8 students, are classified in the moderate category. In the Significance Indicator, which

measures the acceptance, care, and affection individuals receive from others, 62.5% (10 students) fell into the moderate category, while 37.5% (6 students) were classified in the low category. In the Virtue indicator, which assesses behaviour that adheres to ethics, morals, and religion, 75% (12 students) fall within the moderate category, while 25% (4 students) are classified in the poor category. In the Ability indicator, which measures the capacity to fulfil task demands and achieve objectives, 87.5% or 14 students are classified in the low category, while 12.6% or 2 students are categorised as low. The results indicated that 16 children with sluggish learning had moderate to low self-esteem.

The study's results indicated that children with learning impairments who received play therapy utilising ADHI puppet medium exhibited an enhancement in self-esteem, as detailed in Table 2.

**Table 2** Changes in self-esteem of students who are slow to learn between *pretest* and *post-test*

Participants	Experimental Group		Experimental Group	
	Pretest Score	Post-test Score	Pretest Score	Post-test Score
1	58	75	68	68
2	58	76	69	69
3	57	74	68	69
4	58	75	69	69
5	55	74	69	69
6	58	76	69	69
7	67	75	69	69
8	53	75	68	69

The analysis revealed a modification in the initial self-esteem levels of students with learning difficulties, evidenced by an increase in their self-esteem scale scores, both overall and in each individual indicator. It can be asserted that play therapy utilising ADHI puppet media helps enhance the self-esteem of children with learning difficulties. Simultaneously, the pretest and posttest scores of the control group, as supplied by group counselling services, indicated that while some individuals exhibited an improvement in scores, others continued to experience poor self-esteem. Students with slower learning rates exhibit greater enthusiasm for engaging with ADHI puppet media than for merely participating in group counselling services. To demonstrate a change or improvement, it is essential to perform a statistical analysis utilising the Mann Whitney U test (see to Table 3).

**Table 3** Mann-Whitney U *T-test*

	Self-Esteem Slow learners
Mann-Whitney U	.000
Wilcoxon W	136.000
Z	-5.093
Asymp.Sig (2-tailed)	.000
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.000 <sup>b</sup>

According to Table 3, the Mann-Whitney U value is 0.000 and the Wilcoxon W value is 136.000. The magnitude, when translated to a Z value, is -5.093. The significance or p-value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. If the p-value is less than 0.05, a substantial difference exists between the two groups, indicating acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H1). Consequently, an alternate hypothesis positing that the play therapy paradigm utilising ADHI puppet media effectively enhances the self-esteem of students with learning disabilities is valid.

## DISCUSSION

The efficacy test findings indicate that the post-test scores of the experimental group surpass those of the control group. The play therapy model utilising ADHI puppet media is reported to be successful in enhancing the self-esteem of students with learning difficulties. The resulting model has a peculiarity, namely providing services to students who are slow to learn using media where children with special

needs must indeed get services that are in accordance with their conditions such as statements (Rekha et al., 2013) that students who are slow to learn cannot be equated with normal students, with their limitations will be able to participate in learning if they use the available teaching aids so as to increase their interest and they can be involved in the learning process.

The above statement corroborates that the ADHI puppet media used is in accordance with the characteristics of slow learners who have difficulty understanding abstract things so they must use the right media so that they can describe their situation. Wayang can display various human characters and can provide inspiration for people who see them and be used as a medium for self-identification and reflection. The role of puppets in the formation of self-identity for individuals who see them can begin in the span of life from childhood to adulthood (Subandi, 2017; Rahmawanto & Rahyono, 2019). The way students learn slowly cannot be equated with normal children, they tend to be able to understand new things when learning from experience. Teachers must have a strategy that is able to arouse the enthusiasm of students who are slow to learn to participate in the activities given. One of the fun activities to do can be through playing. This is in accordance with the statement (Hartini et al., 2017) That is, activities that are carried out with fun activities are very necessary for children who are slow to learn so that their interest in learning increases. Play is the right therapy for children who are slow to learn because they often have difficulty expressing their feelings. Through play, children can lower their barriers and express their feelings better (Porter et al., 2009). Through play, children are also encouraged to reduce anxiety and be able to change negative thoughts in certain situations. In addition, through play, children can lower their inhibitions and express their feelings better (Porter et al., 2009). Children's play behavior with neglected cases and with certain limitations can be reduced by looking at examples during the game process (Frederick, 1994).

Play therapy with ADHI puppet media is the selection of the right strategy in service activities that can be easily understood by students who are slow to learn. Wayang is still a repository for traditional values, and is also a dynamic art form, in its responses to popular cultural currents, political and religious changes, as well as current issues and wayang is constantly being recreated in various sectors (Cohen, 2014). Puppets can be used as a fun communication medium such as statements Piman & Talib (2012) Arm movements in puppet games can stimulate cognitive abilities and improve communication skills. The power of puppet games to influence students' minds lies in the earnest attention that can be aroused sharply through the images of story characters that are demonstrated like puppets (Fitri & Huda, 2016). Next Kostak et al., (2021) It also states that puppets are one of the therapeutic intervention media, which stimulates children to express their feelings comfortably and plays an important role in their personal, social, and emotional development.

Counselors in providing services must be able to create media that can support the delivery of service materials through teaching aids, so they are required to be creative in using methods that are suitable for children with special needs (Iriani Fasisih, 2021). The ADHI puppets used in this study can be used as props to express the feelings of children who are slow to learn. Children must be able to choose puppets that will replace their role in the implementation of play therapy. Through this game, children with slow learning are expected to be able to play their roles well through the chosen puppets so that children feel relaxed and can stimulate their cognition. The obstacles experienced by children who are slow to learn make themselves not the same as their peers. Low academic and non-academic abilities, low verbal responses, low social acceptance and stigmatization from the environment make self-esteem low (Cosden et al., 1999). Self-esteem has been shown to have a broad and powerful impact on human emotions, cognition, behaviour and motivation (Ntshangase et al., 2008). Counselors provide services in improving attitudes and satisfaction in relationships. Counselors should also build children's abilities and strengths rather than just focusing on academic weaknesses. This will increase satisfaction in relationships and the child's self-esteem (Lahane et al., 2013). Based on the statement presented above, it shows that the play therapy model with ADHI puppet media is effective in increasing the self-esteem of students who are slow to learn.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that play therapy with Wayang ADHI is helpful in enhancing the self-esteem of students with learning difficulties, as evidenced by a shift from a low to a moderate category over the course of eight sessions.

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