



# Teachers' Perspectives on Puppet-Assisted English Instructional Practices and Constraints in Indonesian Private Elementary Schools

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## Abstract

Creative teaching approaches can broaden opportunities for interaction in elementary English classrooms, yet little is known about how teachers sustain puppet-assisted instruction under institutional and pedagogical constraints. This study aims to examine how elementary English teachers use puppets and negotiate institutional, material, and pedagogical constraints in nine private schools in Jakarta, Tangerang, and Bogor, Indonesia. The study employed a qualitative design involving nine purposively selected teachers with prior experience of puppet-assisted teaching. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person or via Zoom, audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis. The findings identified five interrelated themes: motivations to encourage speaking and social interaction; puppet use in storytelling, dialogues, and classroom routines; limited institutional recognition; constraints in materials and professional training; and adaptation to curriculum and assessment requirements. Teachers perceived puppets as supporting pupils' confidence and participation, but these perceptions were not independently verified through classroom observations or pupil assessments. The findings suggest that teachers' creative choices are negotiated within available resources and school expectations rather than determined by personal enthusiasm alone. This study contributes teacher-reported evidence on the conditions shaping puppet-assisted English pedagogy, with implications for curriculum planning, resource provision, and context-responsive teacher professional learning.

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## 1. Introduction

The teaching of English at the elementary level increasingly draws on creative and learner-centered pedagogies that stimulate young learners' curiosity, imagination, and communicative engagement (Alan & Mumcu, 2024; Scott-Barrett et al., 2023). Among these approaches, puppetry offers opportunities for playful interaction and emotionally supportive language use.



Puppets can serve not only as engaging characters but also as linguistic mediators through which children participate in dialogue, experiment with language, and express ideas with less perceived pressure (Karaolis, 2023; Timmins & King, 2024). In elementary English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classrooms, where meaningful opportunities for oral interaction must often be created within lessons, the educational question extends beyond puppetry's appeal to how teachers make it part of ordinary instruction. Recent JIEEd research on elementary speaking instruction similarly identifies interactive activities and socio-emotional support as relevant teaching considerations, without establishing puppetry-specific effects (Fauyan et al., 2026).

Research has documented several educational applications of puppets. A literature review identified their potential to facilitate communication, support classroom climate, encourage creativity, and foster cooperation (Kröger & Nupponen, 2019). Studies in language-learning settings describe puppets as resources for introducing vocabulary, modeling dialogues, supporting storytelling, and encouraging oral participation (Aridasarie & Rohmah, 2024; Khasanah & Burhan, 2022; Mogollon, 2024). Other work connects puppetry with multimodal literacy, imaginative interaction, and value-oriented narratives (Hong & Hong, 2022; Karaolis, 2023). These studies establish pedagogical possibilities, but evidence of improved learner outcomes in particular settings does not by itself explain how teachers select, adapt, and maintain puppet-assisted practices within routine teaching. Research on digital puppetry provides an additional but technologically distinct example of adapting creative media for language-related instruction (Karakaş, 2023; Thamesh & Aziz, 2023).

Existing research has often examined pupils' speaking, vocabulary, motivation, or engagement through classroom interventions and development projects (Brilianti & Sugirin, 2024; Sari et al., 2023; Umaru et al., 2023). Such studies provide relevant evidence about learning activities and reported outcomes, yet their designs typically foreground learners or instructional products rather than teachers' ongoing professional decisions. Moreover, evidence about implementation barriers is not entirely absent. Timmins and King (2024), for example, documented educators' perceived benefits of puppet play as well as barriers involving resources, confidence, and awareness in early-years settings. However, those findings do not directly explain how in-service elementary EFL teachers negotiate curricular expectations, classroom purposes, and institutional recognition of puppetry in the Indonesian school contexts examined here. Indonesian development-oriented studies of puppet media likewise foreground the designed product and learning activity rather than institution-level teacher negotiations (Islamiyati et al., 2023).

The role of teachers is particularly important because puppetry is not a self-implementing technique. Teachers decide when to introduce a puppet, how to

connect a character or story with linguistic goals, and whether to use it for dialogue, classroom routines, or moral messages. These choices also require time to prepare materials, manage activities, and respond to pupils' participation. Although creativity is commonly associated with pedagogical flexibility, teachers' decisions are made within expectations concerning syllabus coverage, assessment, resources, and what school communities regard as legitimate instruction. Therefore, this study approaches creative pedagogy as a situated professional practice: teachers exercise judgment and agency, but their options may be enabled or constrained by institutional conditions. The emphasis is on how teachers describe those negotiations, not on establishing whether puppetry independently improves pupils' English proficiency. Studies of teachers working within elementary school structures and of language teachers responding to textbook reforms provide a basis for examining such agency without assuming unrestricted autonomy (Dao et al., 2025; Mercier, 2024). Research on pre-service EFL teachers' practicum experiences also highlights context-dependent professional learning, but addresses a different population from the in-service teachers in this study (Li et al., 2023).

The Indonesian context sharpens this issue. In the nine urban private elementary schools involved in this study, English instruction operated alongside school expectations for curricular coverage and learning targets. The schools were described as national-plus or semi-international settings in which an emphasis on English and opportunities for pedagogical innovation do not necessarily guarantee consistent support for every creative practice. Material provision, collegial attitudes, professional development, and the perceived legitimacy of puppet-based activities may shape whether teachers incorporate puppetry regularly or only when it fits established routines. These conditions make it important to investigate creativity and constraint together rather than assume that either school resources or teacher enthusiasm alone determines implementation. Comparative research indicates that curriculum demands, professional relationships, and school organization may enable or constrain teachers' agency, although these studies concern different countries and subjects (Nally et al., 2026; van de Kuilen et al., 2025).

Taken together, previous scholarship explains several potential benefits of puppetry and provides some evidence concerning educators' perceived barriers, but offers a less detailed understanding of how in-service elementary English teachers in these Indonesian private-school contexts combine instructional purposes with the practical demands of formal schooling. The unresolved issue concerns the relationship between classroom enactment and institutional conditions: how teachers use puppets, what constrains their choices, and how they adapt their practices to remain pedagogically relevant. Addressing this gap can extend discussion from the potential effects of puppets on learners to the professional and institutional processes through which puppet-assisted

instruction is sustained, modified, or marginalized. JIEEd studies of Indonesian elementary and international classroom pedagogy document teachers' flexible combinations of scaffolding and multimodal approaches, but draw on different practices and evidence bases than this interview-focused puppetry study (Marshallina, 2026).

Accordingly, this study investigates how elementary English teachers use puppetry in their instructional practices and the institutional, material, and pedagogical constraints they encounter. The central research question is: How do elementary English teachers implement puppetry in their instruction, and what institutional, material, and pedagogical constraints do they encounter? Drawing on semi-structured interviews with nine purposively selected teachers in Jakarta, Tangerang, and Bogor, the study foregrounds teachers' experiences and adaptive judgments. Its intended contribution is a contextually grounded understanding of creative teaching under constraint, with implications for teacher education, curriculum planning, and school-level support for elementary EFL instruction. Rather than testing instructional effectiveness, it examines the conditions under which a potentially valuable pedagogy can become a recognized part of everyday practice.

## 2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore elementary English teachers' experiences with puppet-assisted instruction and the constraints shaping its implementation. The design was appropriate because the research question concerned teachers' instructional decisions, experiences, and interpretations within their school contexts rather than measured effects on pupils' English proficiency. Semi-structured interviews were used to examine how participants described the relationship between creative pedagogy and institutional expectations. Therefore, the inquiry seeks context-sensitive interpretations of teachers' accounts rather than estimates of intervention effectiveness.

The research was conducted in Jakarta, Tangerang, and Bogor, Indonesia, across nine private elementary schools described as national-plus or semi-international. These schools emphasized English language learning and incorporated elements of international curricula or thematic instruction. English was taught as a compulsory subject across grade levels in the participating settings. These characteristics provide the context for examining teachers' use of puppetry; they do not imply that all nine schools had identical curricula, resources, or approaches to creative teaching.

Nine elementary English teachers were purposively selected because they had at least 3 years of relevant teaching experience and had previously

integrated puppetry into their lessons. Recruitment began by identifying teachers who met these criteria in the participating school contexts. Prospective participants were approached individually, informed about the study, and included only after confirming their experience with puppetry and willingness to participate. All held a bachelor's degree in English or English education. Nine interviews are reported as the dataset actually obtained; a systematic review cautions that qualitative sample adequacy depends on study goals, sample characteristics, and data depth rather than an interview count alone (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). No claim of demonstrated saturation is made.

The participants comprised eight female teachers and one male teacher, aged 27–40 years. Participation was voluntary. Before data collection, teachers received information about the research purpose, interview procedures, confidentiality, and data protection, and each provided written informed consent. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, Teacher 1 (T1) through Teacher 9 (T9); their names and the identities of their schools were withheld from the report. These measures were intended to protect confidentiality while retaining the participants' professional accounts as the primary evidence.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or via Zoom, according to participants' preferences and availability. Each interview lasted approximately 30–50 minutes. The interviews followed a common sequence, beginning with questions about teaching backgrounds and classroom contexts, moving to examples of puppet use, and ending with reflections on constraints, adaptations, and perceived pupil responses. This structure allowed participants to describe individual experiences while addressing comparable topics across the nine interviews.

The interview guide was developed from literature on creative pedagogy, language instruction, and teacher agency. It was piloted with two elementary English teachers who were not included in the study, and the wording, order, and focus of questions were subsequently refined. The final guide covered three areas: the instructional purposes and activities associated with puppetry; puppet design, preparation, and selection; and institutional, material, and pedagogical constraints. The pilot informed revisions to the clarity, order, and focus of the interview questions; it was not treated as a psychometric validation exercise.

Interview prompts asked how teachers introduced puppets, organized storytelling and dialogue activities, prepared materials, interpreted pupils' responses, and responded to curriculum and resource constraints. The instrument grid in Table 1 links these interview areas with the associated indicators and questions. All interviews were audio-recorded with the teachers' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

**Table 1.**  
Instrument Grid for the Interview Protocol

| No | Interview domain                                      | Indicator                                       | Focus of Interview Question                                                                                                    |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Implementation of puppet-assisted English instruction | Instructional purposes                          | How teachers use puppets to support speaking, storytelling, vocabulary learning, classroom routines, and student participation |
| 2  | Implementation of puppet-assisted English instruction | Classroom procedures and activities             | How puppets are introduced, how activities are structured, and how students respond during the lesson                          |
| 3  | Implementation of puppet-assisted English instruction | Puppet preparation and selection                | How teachers design, adapt, select, or prepare puppets and related teaching materials                                          |
| 4  | Institutional constraints                             | School policy and curricular expectations       | How school leadership, lesson planning requirements, and curriculum targets influence puppet use                               |
| 5  | Material constraints                                  | Resources and facilities                        | What material limitations do teachers face in obtaining, making, or using puppets and supporting media?                        |
| 6  | Pedagogical constraints                               | Instructional challenges and teacher adaptation | What difficulties teachers face in classroom implementation, and how they adjust their strategies to address them              |

Interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2022) six-phase thematic analysis. The researcher first read the transcripts repeatedly and wrote initial notes to become familiar with the participants’ accounts. Relevant segments were then coded, including descriptions of instructional purposes, storytelling and dialogue, pupil responses as perceived by teachers, material preparation, school expectations, and classroom adaptations. Coding attended to recurring patterns across participants without treating the interview topics as predetermined findings. This approach was used for interpretive theme development, not for estimating inter-coder reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

Related codes were compared and developed into potential themes. These themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and full transcripts, with overlapping themes revised or combined where necessary. The resulting five themes were defined and named according to their central meanings and relationships to the research question. The final analytical account was written using selected participant quotations to illustrate how teachers described both the pedagogical uses of puppetry and the constraints they experienced. Because the evidence came from teacher interviews, reports of changes in pupils’ confidence or language use were interpreted as teachers’ perceptions rather than independently measured outcomes.

Several procedures were reported to support the trustworthiness and transparency of the analysis. Participants were invited to review summaries of their interview accounts and initial interpretations through member checking. Peer

debriefing with other qualitative researchers provided opportunities to question emerging codes and the boundaries of themes. An audit trail documented coding decisions, theme development, revisions, and researcher reflections. These procedures supported scrutiny of the interpretation but did not remove the contextual and interpretive limitations of an interview-based study. No classroom observations, independent pupil assessments, or intervention-effect measurements are reported in this study. Consistent with reflexive thematic analysis, these checks are described as opportunities for clarification and critical reflection rather than as proof of a single objectively correct coding scheme (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

### 3. Results

Analysis of interviews with nine elementary English teachers (T1–T9) identified five themes. The first two concern teachers' reported reasons for using puppets and the classroom activities they described. The remaining three address institutional expectations, material and training constraints, and adaptations to curriculum requirements. Because the data come from teacher interviews rather than classroom observation or pupil assessment, accounts of pupils' confidence, engagement, and language learning represent teachers' perceptions.

#### 3.1 Teachers Valued Puppets for Speaking and Social Learning

Teachers described puppets as a way to make oral participation less threatening for pupils who were reluctant to speak. T3 reflected, *"When I use the puppet, students suddenly become more confident. It is like the puppet speaks for them, and they do not feel afraid of making mistakes."* T8 similarly stated, *"Puppets break the tension. Even the quietest student will respond if the puppet asks a question."* T6 explained, *"The puppet becomes their voice. It is not the student speaking; it is the character. That makes a huge difference."* These accounts suggest that teachers viewed the puppet character as a buffer against the pressure of speaking directly as oneself.

Teachers also associated puppets with vocabulary practice, conversation, and turn-taking. T1 remarked, *"I use the puppet to review vocabulary. Students repeat after it, and sometimes they start asking questions to the puppet themselves."* T7 described the puppet as a dialogue partner: *"When students speak with the puppet, they practice real conversation, not just repeating phrases from the textbook."* T4 similarly stated, *"The puppet says something, then the student replies. It is like a game, but they are actually practicing English."* These examples represent teachers' descriptions of participation opportunities, not independently measured gains in oral proficiency.

Participants further linked puppetry with storytelling, empathy, and moral learning. T5 noted, *“Students become part of the story. They help the puppet make decisions, and that leads to more complex language use.”* T9 added, *“The puppet shares stories that include lessons like being kind or helping friends, and students respond thoughtfully in English.”* T2 described using a puppet to address feelings and minor conflicts: *“Sometimes I use the puppet to talk about feelings or solve small conflicts in class. Students relate more when it comes from the puppet.”* Therefore, the reported purposes extended beyond language practice to social interaction and value-oriented classroom activities.

### 3.2 Teachers Used Puppets for Storytelling, Dialogue, and Routines

Teachers described planned storytelling alongside more spontaneous classroom interactions. T4 explained, *“The puppet tells a story at the beginning of the lesson, and then students are asked to retell it or act it out in pairs. This helps them understand sequence and use complete sentences.”* T6 shared a related practice: *“Sometimes I adapt fairy tales into dialogues for the puppet and the class. It keeps the story alive and makes the vocabulary more meaningful.”* In these accounts, puppet narratives provided a context for vocabulary, sequencing, dialogue, and retelling.

Interactive dialogue and language modeling were another reported use. T1 noted, *“I use my puppet to introduce new vocabulary. The puppet asks questions, and students respond; sometimes they even correct each other in English.”* T5 described role-play: *“We do role plays. The puppet starts the dialogue, and the students complete it or continue the story.”* T2 explained, *“When students struggle with sentence patterns, I let the puppet model the structure. It sounds playful, but they remember it better.”* Teachers thus incorporated puppets into vocabulary review, sentence patterns, and conversational exchanges; the interviews did not independently assess effects on fluency or grammatical accuracy.

Teachers also incorporated puppets into classroom management and transitions, sometimes giving them names, voices, or distinct personalities. T9 explained, *“My puppet reminds students about classroom rules. If they forget, it gives gentle reminders in a funny voice. They respond better to it than to me sometimes.”* T3 noted, *“When the class gets noisy, the puppet asks for quiet. It is more effective than raising my voice.”* T8 described transitions between activities: *“Between tasks, the puppet appears and tells them what to do next. It keeps them on track without breaking the flow of the lesson.”* These examples indicate that teachers used the same medium for language tasks, behavioral reminders, and the sequencing of classroom routines.

### 3.3 Institutional Recognition and Assessment Pressures Constrained Puppetry

Teachers reported limited formal recognition for puppet-assisted instruction, even in private schools they described as receptive to creative teaching. T2 remarked, *“My school does not discourage it, but they do not really support it either. It is not mentioned in any curriculum or planning documents.”* Assessment expectations were another concern. T3 noted, *“When it comes to evaluations, they only look at how much content I cover from the textbook. They do not ask how I deliver it.”* Participants associated these conditions with the need to justify puppetry against curriculum coverage and performance expectations. These are teachers’ accounts of institutional practice, not an independent analysis of school policy documents.

Several participants also described skeptical responses from colleagues. T6 observed, *“Some teachers think using puppets is only for kindergarten. I had to explain how it helps with language, not just fun.”* T7 similarly stated, *“When I talk about using puppets, some colleagues laugh and say it is childish. But they have not seen how well students respond.”* Teachers linked such responses to the perception that puppetry belonged mainly in kindergarten. T5 described difficulty allocating lesson-plan space to the approach: *“There is no room in the lesson plan for puppets unless I squeeze it in. But when I do, the class actually learns better.”* Together, these accounts reveal a tension between teachers’ use of puppetry and the professional or curricular recognition they perceived it to receive.

### 3.4 Material Limitations and Training Needs: Increased Teachers’ Workload

Limited access to puppets and instructional materials was a recurring concern. Teachers described making puppets from recycled or inexpensive materials and spending additional time preparing them. Such improvisation offered a practical solution but also meant that preparation depended on teachers’ own resources and effort.

T7 explained, *“I make my own puppets from socks and paper. There is no budget for buying ready-made ones, so we have to be resourceful.”* T4 highlighted the need for professional learning: *“I wish there were workshops or training. I feel I am just experimenting, and it would be great to learn from other teachers who use puppets too.”* Participants therefore described two related challenges: obtaining or making suitable materials and developing techniques without sufficient training or opportunities to learn from colleagues.

### 3.5 Teachers Adapted Puppet Activities to Curricular Demands

Teachers described a recurring tension between creative activities and syllabus coverage. T1 admitted, *“Sometimes I skip puppet activities when I feel behind in the syllabus. There is pressure to complete the textbook content.”* T9

stated, *“I feel torn. Students enjoy the puppet sessions, but I am constantly thinking about whether I am meeting the school’s targets.”* These accounts suggest that teachers sometimes shortened, postponed, or omitted puppet activities when they perceived pressure to complete prescribed content.

Other accounts showed how teachers adapted puppetry to existing learning targets. T6 explained, *“I blend puppet activities with grammar drills. The puppet explains the grammar point, so I am still covering the lesson, but in a fun way.”* T5 described using puppets before quizzes: *“The puppet asks questions like in the test. Students respond naturally, and I assess their understanding informally.”* Rather than treating puppetry only as an additional activity, these teachers incorporated it into grammar practice, vocabulary review, and informal assessment. Their adaptations illustrate how creative activities were reshaped to meet curriculum expectations, but do not demonstrate that the arrangements improved learning outcomes.

#### 4. Discussion

The present study investigated how elementary English teachers implement puppetry and the institutional, material, and pedagogical constraints they encounter. The five themes describe teachers’ motivations for encouraging oral participation and social learning; their use of puppets for storytelling, dialogue, and classroom routines; limited institutional recognition; material and training needs; and adaptation to curricular demands. Together, these findings underscore a tension between professional creativity and structural constraints. This pattern may be understood as creativity under constraint: rather than abandoning puppetry when faced with school expectations, teachers described reshaping it to fit recognized instructional purposes. Creative pedagogy in this setting was therefore not only an individual expression of imagination but also a situated practice shaped by curriculum demands, available resources, and judgments of pedagogical legitimacy. This interpretation extends the discussion of puppets as pedagogical tools (Kröger & Nupponen, 2019) by focusing on how teachers negotiated the conditions of their use. Studies of teacher agency during curriculum reform in Vietnam, Finland, and Rwanda similarly draw attention to the interaction between teachers’ initiative and organizational conditions; their different settings and methods preclude assuming equivalent mechanisms here (Dinh & Sannino, 2024; Hyrkkö & Kajamaa, 2025; van de Kuilen et al., 2025).

The findings align with studies describing puppetry as a resource for oral participation, supportive interaction, and imaginative language learning (Aridasarie & Rohmah, 2024; Bravo & Cisterna, 2020; Karaolis, 2023). Teachers in the present study reported that pupils who were hesitant to speak often responded more readily to puppet characters and participated in vocabulary exchanges or storytelling. A plausible explanation is that the character creates

some distance between the learner and the social pressure of speaking directly to others. This may help teachers make classroom talk feel less threatening, although it remains an interpretation of teachers' accounts rather than a demonstrated psychological mechanism. Teachers also associated puppetry with moral stories, feelings, and peer interaction, consistent with educational work connecting puppetry with narrative and social engagement (Hong & Hong, 2022; Karaolis, 2023). The study cannot establish reductions in anxiety or gains in language proficiency because neither pupils' responses nor learning outcomes were measured independently. The speaking-oriented emphasis also parallels Fauyan et al. (2026), although their mixed-methods evidence concerns a wider repertoire of instructional strategies rather than puppet-assisted English lessons.

At the instructional level, teachers described using puppets for storytelling, question-and-answer exchanges, language modeling, and routine-based dialogue. These practices resemble activities reported in primary-school EFL research (Aridasarie & Rohmah, 2024; Khasanah & Burhan, 2022; Mogollon, 2024). The present accounts add detail about the multifunctional roles of puppets: the same character could introduce vocabulary, support role-play, remind pupils of classroom expectations, or guide transitions between activities. This suggests pedagogical integration, in which a creative medium connects linguistic, relational, and classroom-management purposes rather than appearing only as occasional entertainment. The distinction matters because teachers' decisions about when and why to use puppets are part of the instructional process. However, the interviews do not show whether this integration was sustained over time or improved pupils' speaking accuracy, fluency, or behavior; those outcomes would require additional evidence. Marshalina (2026) likewise documents flexible multimodal and scaffolding strategies in Indonesian elementary international classrooms; unlike the present study, that research combines interviews with observations and lesson-plan evidence. Digital-puppetry research (Karakaş, 2023; Thames & Aziz, 2023) suggests additional delivery formats but should not be conflated with the hand-puppet practices described by participants.

In contrast to the perceived pedagogical promise of puppetry, teachers described limited institutional recognition and professional validation. Several reported that puppetry was absent from planning documents or was regarded by colleagues as appropriate mainly for kindergarten. They also perceived an emphasis on textbook coverage and assessment targets. These accounts suggest that institutional expectations shape not only whether puppetry is used but also whether it is treated as serious, assessable instruction. Importantly, research on early-years puppet play has already identified perceived barriers and benefits (Timmins & King, 2024); the contribution here is more specific to in-service elementary EFL teachers negotiating curricular expectations and professional recognition within the participating Indonesian private schools. The study thus identifies a perceived lack of pedagogical legitimacy, not a verified

institutional policy shared by all nine schools. School documents and leadership perspectives were not collected to independently substantiate these reports. This distinction resembles accounts of bounded teacher agency under curriculum frameworks in primary education (Mercier, 2024; Nally et al., 2026), while Dao et al. (2025) describe acceptance, adaptation, and resistance in a different EFL policy context.

Material and technical limitations further shaped teachers' choices. Participants reported making puppets from inexpensive or recycled materials and described limited access to training and collegial learning opportunities. These accounts foreground the additional preparation work involved in sustaining a creative practice when resources are not routinely provided. Resource constraints should therefore not be treated as a neutral background condition: they can shift the time and effort required for innovation onto individual teachers. The point is compatible with Timmins and King's (2024) attention to educators' perceived barriers, although the institutional settings differ. The present study cannot determine the scale of teachers' out-of-hours workload or compare resources across schools. However, it shows how participants connected material access and professional development with the feasibility of puppet-assisted instruction. The practical significance of resources and confidence is consistent with Timmins and King's (2024) survey of early-years educators, while van de Kuilen et al. (2025) show how organizational context shapes teachers' agency in basic education. Neither comparison establishes how widespread the reported constraints were across the participating schools.

The pedagogical dilemmas uncovered in this study were most visible when teachers sought to reconcile puppet activities with syllabus coverage and assessment preparation. Some described postponing activities when they fell behind in the textbook, while others embedded puppet dialogue in grammar drills, vocabulary review, or quiz preparation. These adaptive strategies suggest what may be called pedagogical translation: teachers reframed a creative activity in terms of curricular objectives that could be justified within their schools. This preserves opportunities for imaginative interaction while helping teachers respond to institutional accountability. However, the same process may narrow the exploratory and expressive aspects of puppetry when activities must closely follow predetermined learning targets. The finding does not establish that all teachers lacked autonomy; it illustrates how the interviewed teachers perceived and negotiated competing instructional demands. The adaptation of puppetry to grammar drills is comparable in form, though not in subject or setting, to agency expressed through curriculum-related adjustments in Dao et al. (2025) and Dinh and Sannino (2024).

The contribution of this study lies in its teacher-centered account of puppet-assisted English instruction. Much of the literature cited above examines

instructional designs or learner-related outcomes, whereas the present interviews illuminate professional judgments about classroom implementation, materials, and institutional expectations. The findings support a contextually grounded interpretation of creative pedagogy as institutionally mediated practice, shaped by teacher agency but not reducible to teacher enthusiasm alone. In the participating schools, creativity under constraint involved three connected processes: integrating puppets into ordinary instruction, justifying their use against recognized curricular purposes, and personally adapting materials when formal support was limited. These are analytical insights from nine teachers' accounts rather than a newly tested theory or evidence that the same processes operate in every Indonesian elementary school. Asrivi (2025) documents creative processes in Indonesian elementary teacher education through a batik activity, providing a useful contrast: the present study focuses on the institutional conditions surrounding in-service language teachers' creative decisions rather than on the stages of producing an arts-based outcome.

The findings have implications for elementary English teaching, teacher education, and school-level planning. Schools could provide modest material support, opportunities for teachers to share puppet-based activities, and planning guidance that links storytelling or dialogue to explicit language objectives. Professional development could address puppet preparation alongside strategies for adapting activities to lesson time, vocabulary targets, and pupils' participation needs. Such steps follow logically from teachers' reported concerns, but their effects have not been evaluated in this study. Future research should examine additional school types, include pupils' and school leaders' perspectives, and combine interviews with classroom observation and suitable learning indicators. These approaches could establish whether the forms of pedagogical integration described here are sustained and how they relate to pupils' experiences and outcomes. Evidence from a meta-analysis on professional development for inclusive education suggests that practical relevance and active learning can facilitate transfer, although the intervention evidence should not be treated as a direct evaluation of puppetry training (Donath et al., 2023).

These interpretations should be considered alongside the study's limitations. Participants were nine purposively selected teachers from urban private schools who already had experience using puppets; their accounts may therefore differ from those of teachers who had rejected or never tried puppetry. The interviews provide detailed descriptions of professional experience, but the study did not include classroom observations, interviews with pupils or school leaders, institutional documents, or independent measures of language learning. Reported changes in confidence, participation, or classroom routines cannot be attributed causally to puppetry, and teachers' descriptions of school expectations were not independently verified. The findings are intended for contextual interpretation and possible analytical transfer, not statistical generalization.

## 5. Conclusion

This study examined how elementary English teachers implement puppet-assisted instruction and negotiate the institutional, material, and pedagogical constraints they encounter. Interviews with nine teachers showed that puppets were used for storytelling, dialogue, vocabulary practice, classroom routines, and value-oriented activities. Teachers perceived these practices as encouraging pupils' willingness to speak and participate, although these perceptions were not independently assessed. Participants also described limited institutional recognition, restricted materials and professional development, and pressure to prioritize syllabus coverage and assessment targets. In response, they adapted puppet activities to fit established instructional objectives rather than abandoning creative teaching.

The study contributes a teacher-centered understanding of creativity under constraint, showing how creative pedagogy operates as a situated professional practice shaped by teachers' judgment, curricular expectations, material conditions, and pedagogical legitimacy. These findings suggest that sustaining puppet-assisted instruction requires not only teacher creativity but also appropriate institutional recognition and practical support. In elementary EFL education, schools and teacher educators could strengthen curriculum planning, materials provision, and professional development opportunities to enable teachers to integrate creative activities into regular lessons. Nevertheless, the study draws on interviews with nine purposively selected teachers in urban private schools, without classroom observations or independent measures of pupils' learning. Consequently, the findings cannot establish causal effects or support broad generalizations. Future research should include pupils' and school leaders' perspectives, classroom observations, and comparative school settings to examine the implementation and sustainability of puppet-assisted instruction.

## Declarations

All authors approved the final manuscript and declared no competing interests. The study adhered to ethical standards, obtained informed consent from participating teachers, and ensured confidentiality of interview data. Grammarly supported academic language refinement and citation consistency. No research data or findings were AI-generated. The authors verified the manuscript and retain full responsibility for its accuracy, integrity, and scholarly content.

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