

Teachers' and Parents' Effort in Character Building of Students with Autism in Public Special School A Cimahi

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(Received: 05-09-2021; Reviewed: 08-12-2021; Accepted: 29-12-2021; Published: 30-12-2021)

Abstract: This study attempts to encourage character building of students with special needs, especially the character of independence. Being independent serves as one of primary education goals for children with autism to reduce dependence towards others and to raise sense of responsibility in their daily lives. Qualitative method is applied in this study in which the researcher investigates natural objects and plays a role as the key instrument. Data collection technique was done through triangulation, data analysis was performed inductively, and research findings highlighted more on the meaning instead of generalizability. The data collection technique is tentative in nature. During the research process, research questions were solved through collecting and analyzing information gathered from related participants. The interview technique is generally distinguished into 2 namely 1) structured interview and 2) unstructured interview. The finding of this research reveals that the character of being independent in children with special needs can be promoted by habituation to involve children in daily activities as well as during online learning.

Kata kunci: Effort; Teacher; Parent; Students with Autism; Online Learning

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan agar anak berkebutuhan khusus mampu memiliki suatu karakter yang mandiri, Karakter mandiri bagi anak autisme merupakan tujuan yang harus dicapai agar tidak berharap terhadap orang lain dan juga dapat bertanggungjawab untuk kehidupannya yang dilakukan sehari-hari. Penelitian ini menggunakan Metode penelitian kualitatif, dimana metode tersebut merupakan sebuah metode yang digunakan peneliti pada kondisi obyek yang alamiah, disini peneliti sebagai instrumen kunci, teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan secara triangulasi, adapun analisis data yang bersifat induktif, dan hasil penelitian kualitatif lebih menekankan pada makna dari pada generalisasi. Teknik pengumpulan pada data penelitian kualitatif bersifat tentatif.; dalam proses riset ini, persoalan hendak terjawab dengan metode mengumpulkan serta menganalisis informasi yang dikumpulkan dari orang-orang yang bisa menolong menanggapi persoalan. Teknik wawancara, secara garis besar dibedakan atas 2 yakni: 1) wawancara tersusun dan 2) wawancara insidental. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa anak berkebutuhan khusus dapat membentuk karakter mandiri dengan pembiasaan dalam melibatkan anak dalam aktivitas sehari-hari, sama dengan saat anak ABK melakukan pembelajaran daring.

Kata kunci: Upaya; Guru; Orang Tua; Siswa Autis; Pembelajaran Daring

INTRODUCTION

Children with special needs are those who suffer from disabilities in their physical performance, mental condition, intelligence, or emotion. Children with special needs should receive special education as they commonly encounter learning difficulties or disabilities (Riadin et al., 2017, p. 22). Communication impairment which frequently occurs to children with autism is verbal communication (Sidqi, 2018, p. 83). Despite their unusual traits, parents are responsible to take care of them and play a crucial role in those children's lives (Siwi & Anganti, 2017, p. 185).

A study by Boham (2016, p. 13) states that communication in children with autism slows down causing their talking ability to delay. Those children are not capable of balancing the way they communicate, and at times they unconsciously talk to themselves. Moreover, they often use words or language which is hard to understand, thus repetition is needed. A study reveals that there is a negative correlation between stress and social support towards mothers with autistic children (Saichu & Listiyandini, 2018, p. 3).

The mode of learning practice for children with special needs is different from that for normal kids (Dermawan, 2018, p. 869). Children with autism do not have the ability to learn together with normal children (Noor, 2017, p. 4).

Special schools aim to administer an education program for children with special needs (Lewis-Beck et al., 2016, p. 68). Special education teachers are those who help homeroom teachers to escort children with autism during the learning process (Lazar, 2020). The main duty of special education teachers is increasing learning motivation and cognitive ability (Haqiqi, et al., 2017, p. 23).

This Covid-19 pandemic era has presented its challenges for educational institutions. Students are obliged to involve in online learning practice, and this becomes a dilemma for teachers at special schools. Parents have not gained a full understanding on how to handle autistic children. Thus, the characters which have been established at schools will be hard to maintain if they stay at home for too long.

Theoretical Review

The character of being independent in this study refers to how a certain behavior is formed within individuals to not depend on other people anymore. This independence character is visible in each individual's behaviour in daily life (Susanto, 2017, p. 25). Being independent means that children have the ability to accomplish routine activities such as taking shower, drinking, eating, dressing up, etc (Wijayanti, 2018).

Individual confidence can be developed by treating children positively to encourage their freedom, and the tasks given to them are adjusted to their corresponding capabilities (Aprianti et al., 2018, p. 23). Early intervention method which is mostly implemented in Indonesia is applied behavior analysis. Using this method, children are accustomed to achieve various skills crucial for social life such as communicating, interacting, talking, etc (Asrizal, 2016, p. 5).

In order to simplify interaction and express opinions, autistic children commonly perform body language (Naviah, 2016, p. 11). Special education teachers can create a relaxing atmosphere which the children prefer where those teachers can deliver learning materials. The teachers are also required to be able to control students' emotion by giving reward for both students' success and failure (Karlina, 2021).

According to Havighurst as quoted in Suprayitno, independence is divided into some aspects covering (1) Emotion, not depend on their parents (2) Economy, not to expect that all their needs are fulfilled (3) Intellectual, to solve their problems (4) Social, not to wait for other people's action (Suprayitno & Wahyudi, 2020, p. 54).

Research Method

Qualitative method is implemented to investigate natural objects in which researchers serve as the key instruments, data are collected using triangulation technique, data analysis is inductive, and research findings highlight on meaning rather than generalizability (Sugiyono, 2017, p. 9).

Data collection technique in qualitative research is tentative in nature. During the

process, research questions are answered by collecting and analyzing information gathered from relevant participants. Interview technique is generally divided into 2 namely 1) structured interview and 2) unstructured interview. Structured interview aims at stockpiling information according to the initial planned goal (Bagus, 2016, p. 4).

Research Findings and Discussion

This study was conducted at Public Special School A Citeureup Cimahi in Sukarasa Street No.40 RT 04 Rw 11, Citeureup, North Cimahi District, Cimahi City, West Java with the post code of 40512 and telephone number of 0226649170. The geographical location of the school can be described as follow. Public Special School Citeureup was established in 1984 as partial classes of Pajajaran Public Special School, Bandung City. Referring to the decree of the Minister of Culture and Education, Republic of Indonesia No.0885/0/1986 on 22-12-1986, it officially changes its status as Public Special School A Citeureup, Cimahi.

Students' Character of Independence

The researcher carried out an interview towards the teachers and parents on Tuesday, 27th of October 2020 at 09.32-10.11 WIB at Special School A Citeureup Cimahi. AR cited that character of independence was important as it served as the learning target for those children with special needs. When children achieved some skills, they would not be dependent on others. In addition, UK mentioned that what they aimed for was children's self-development, which played a vital role for the children themselves. NA revealed the importance of being independent for students during online learning as academic, financial, and daily independence became the ultimate goals in special needs education. SS as a student's parent also expressed the same opinion as NA.

Effort in Promoting Independence

Referring to the interview towards teachers and parents conducted on Tuesday, 27th of October 2020 at 09.32-10.11 WIB at Special School A Citeureup Cimahi, AR

explained that children did not depend on their surrounding people. Children had to achieve the skills we taught them, for example, putting on pants properly.

UK stated that she asked parents to do habituation to their children and family to provide care to the children as parents and family had a very crucial role. Teachers only transmitted some knowledge and directed the children to what was the best for them. For example, when children needed to use the toilet, they had to be able to do that as it was a routine and accompanied by teachers or parents.

NA mentioned that as long as students had not gained their confidence, they would depend on others. For example, parents did not train their children to get used to take their own drink as they were afraid that the kids would break the glass.

Interview and documentation were accomplished virtually on Wednesday, 4th of November 2020 at 12.15-12.25. SS as a parent of a student named NZ stated that her child played and did tasks, but the kid was not independent yet. She still needed instruction and help. For example, food was still provided to eat, and she needed help to put on clothes. The kid was able to put the pants on but not for shirts.

Effort to Promote Responsibility on Students

Based on the interview carried out on Tuesday, 27th of October at 09.32-10.11 WIB at Special School A Citeureup Cimahi, AR revealed that responsibility should be applied to trivial things like tidying up stationary after learning, washing dishes after eating, keeping own money, and going to stores. It needed a long time to teach the kids that money was important to them.

UK expressed the same opinion as AR, mentioning that habituation for children gave them chance to responsibly accomplish their daily routine. For example, children should arrange their chairs at school before going home, throwing the trash, putting their books in their bags, washing their hands, and putting on their shoes. It was hard, but it encouraged habituation in children.

NA stated similar views with AK and UK in which she proposed the following responsibility traits for autistic children. Children should be given opportunities to do small things on their own, like putting on their shoes, to allow them to be responsible for their tasks and not expect help from their parents. We should let the kids responsible at times. Though initially they would cry or throw tantrum, they would get used to it. For example, they maintained their hygiene by brushing their teeth.

SS as a parent gave her ideas on online learning during interview and documentation on Wednesday, 4th of November 2020 at 12.15-12.25. She confirmed that her kid followed her instruction during accomplishing tasks from teachers, but the kid found difficulties in reading and writing. While at home, it was hard for the kid to concentrate as he often got distracted and played with his sibling. He was not able to be responsible for anything yet.

Teachers' and Parents' Role in Controlling Students' Emotion

Referring to the interview regarding online learning towards teachers and parents carried out on Tuesday, 27th of October 2020 at 09.32-10.11 WIB at Special School A Citeureup Cimahi, AR stated that she did an observation together with the parents, and gathered information on what the children like and dislike. For example, a kid wanted to go home in the middle of learning hours which caused him to throw tantrum, cry, etc. She applied a special method. She rolled the kid using a mattress until the kid ran out of energy, and he felt tired. When feeling so, the kid would be hungry and asked for food. By then, his focus would be back. There was a time when parents rejected the method. They asked for our reason of applying the method. We explained that the main factor was the excessive energy, and we needed to transfer the energy into some rough motoric movements. This could be done by running or throwing and catching balls. In the end, parents gained their understanding.

UK also told the researcher the process to deal with emotional kids. Teachers were supposed to be creative to transfer hyperactive parts of the body, like hands, as a way to

transfer kids' emotion. As long as teachers had various techniques and abilities to control children's emotion, it would not be hard to control the emotion. She let children do exercise such as sit up, push up, jumping, rolling, climbing, etc to make the children tired from physical movement, leading them to lessen the emotion.

NA applied a different method from AR and UK. NA revealed that she usually gave what the kids wanted first. She asked the kids to recall what had happened and upset them. Autistic kids were not skillful communicators, and it upset them. For example, it had become their habit to close the door before leaving home for school. At one time, they forgot to do it. Usually, they would throw a tantrum at school due to that incident as they knew it was their errand to do. It actually depended on each individual's needs. Some children needed physical affection, while others did not. For those who hated physical touch, NA usually let them run in the field or play trampoline. On the other hand, for those preferring physical affection, NA gave them 'bear' hug or rolled them using big blankets.

SS also mentioned if children threw tantrum in crowded places, she took them to the quiet one to control their emotion. SS rubbed them on their back and gave them understanding of the situation. Children were, at the time, fine to be invited everywhere as they controlled their emotion better. Some kids were not yet good at talking causing her to fail to understand what they wanted leading the kids to be upset. It happened in daily basis.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The curriculum applied to autistic children is not rigid. If the target material is too hard to achieve, the level will be lowered. Special program which is implemented to autistic children covers development on their communication, social interaction, and behaviour. It is similar to a study by Winaya (2019) who mentions that individual service should be adjusted to their needs, and ability and privilege are modified, meaning that children with special needs participate in a learning with homeroom teachers, subject teachers, and special education teachers who actively implement individual program

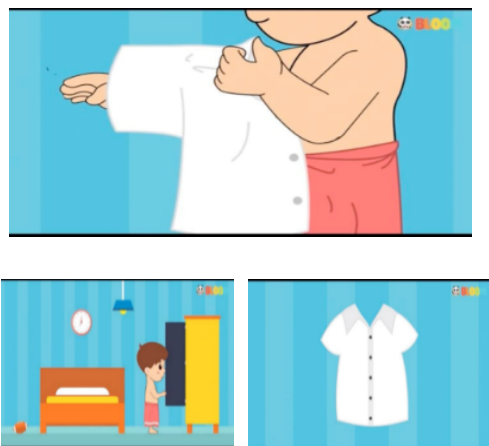


Figure 4.1
Student Worksheet

Furthermore, Mardini et al. (2016, p. 27) state that the curriculum for children with special needs is adjusted to be in harmony with other children. The curriculum is formulated in a way that allow children with special needs to be in accordance with other regular students (Directorate of Special Education and Special Services). Teachers guide their learning according to individual learning program. Meanwhile, parents are the most prominent educators at home who should maintain their patience to accomplish their duties well. However, they still need teachers' assistance. This is an actualization of parents' responsibility that children's education depends on parents' effort in educating children's mental, attitude, and knowledge (Syah. 2020, p. 340).

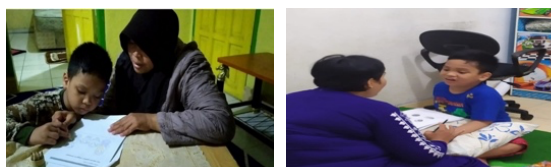


Figure 4.2
Online Learning Process with Parents

Teachers had prepared the online learning process by summarizing the learning materials and handing them out to the parents to be delivered to the kids. The method applied

during those times was virtual face to face through video call. Parents became the primary focus to deliver the instruction from teachers to children.

During the online learning, teachers were given a special training like zoom meeting, photography, cinematography, and distant learning as autistic students understand visual learning more easily. Teachers and parents were given free internet quota by the government with a hope that the learning process could be optimum. Wardhani (2020, p. 157) agrees with the above idea that parents and counsellors hold a crucial role to handle children's condition.

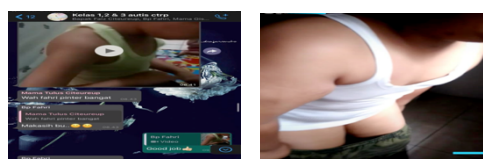


Figure 4.3
Whatsapp Application Used During Online Learning

In line with the previous view, Isadona (2019, p. 26) states that everything needs to be adjusted to children's needs. It includes assessment model, covering qualitative and quantitative assessment. In carrying out the assessment, teachers have to consider the balance between children with special needs and other regular children. It is essential to do since children with special needs possess variously different capabilities compared to their regular peers. It demands teachers' seriousness in the assessment. Teachers can hand out practices or direct questioning. Assessment is also performed in the middle and end of semester with the instrument being adjusted to students' capacities. The final result is in the form of evaluation with remedial (Putri. 2019, p. 9).

Another congruent opinion from Mauludya (2020) proposes that many students with mental. limitation experience delay or setback in thinking process because assistance towards students is. absence during. online learning. During online. learning, teacher assistants are off duty so. that students are back to their parents.

Promoting Students' Independence Character

Character of independence is the main target to reach to allow children to achieve certain skills. Susanto (2017, p.25) expresses similar opinion stating that independence is identified as a wise attitude, being able to make decision, fulfilling own individual needs, and satisfying own wants.

Moreover, Sopingi (2018) declares that being independent here means that children are capable of assisting themselves in daily routine such as eating, drinking, taking a shower, using the toilet, dressing up, etc.



Figure 4.4

Process of Promoting Children's Independence Character in Dressing Up

Aprianti et al. (2018, p. 23) agree with the previous idea that acquiring confidence is an effort to promote independence towards others, by treating them positively through tasks with appropriate level of difficulties. By habituation method, children get to achieve useful skills in their social life indirectly, such as talking to others (Asrizal, 2016, p. 5).

Fauziah (2020) shows her approval on the previous opinion on giving real or functional activities in daily lives. Program should be carried out pieces by pieces. Islam (2018, p. 7) affirms that habituation can promote independence character. However, if children get accustomed to bad things, it will affect the children's independence character.

Conclusion and Suggestion

1. Independence in autistic children is an expected goal so that they are not dependent on others and are responsible to themselves. Effort to promote responsibility in autistic children can be achieved through habituation by involving them in daily routine.

2. Parents and teachers experienced hardships during online learning. The effort which can be made is through cooperation between teachers and parents to increase students' learning motivation.
3. The effort done by school was distributing internet quota to teachers and children, formulating a curriculum adjusted to each individual's needs, and conducting training for teachers in using relevant learning applications to support teachers during online learning.

Suggestion

1. Each teacher is suggested to use a wider variety of learning applications and methods and to guide parents in using the learning applications.
2. Each parent has to be knowledgeable of techniques in delivering learning materials to their children according to their level with guidance from teachers.
3. More extensive socialization and communication are necessary between school and parents.
4. For researchers, further discussion on this topic is crucial, especially in promoting independence character by direct observation or collecting further information.

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