

The Social Skills of Autistic Children in Inclusive Elementary Schools

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Abstract. This study aims to get a complete description of the social skills of autistic children when socializing and interacting in inclusive elementary schools. Autistic children are children who cannot adapt, interact, or socialize with the environment, and have problems communicating with others, so they need appropriate educational services. This study uses a qualitative descriptive research method. Data collection techniques through interviews, documentation, and observation. To obtain accurate data by conducting data triangulation. The study was conducted on two autistic children at the Putra Harapan Purwokerto Integrated Elementary School, with as many as two first-grade autistic children who had mild and moderate autism categories. The results of research on two autistic students have different social skill abilities. Schools, teachers, and parents should provide as many opportunities as possible for children with autism in carrying out activities, to hone their social skills.

Keywords: autism, inclusion, social skills

1. Introduction

Autistic children are children who have disorders of inability to interact with others, language disorders indicated by delayed language acquisition, echolalia, mutism, sentence reversal, the presence of repetitive and stereotyped play activities, strong memories, and obsessive desires to maintain order in their environment. Autism can also be defined as the condition of a person who has his world. [1]

Autistic children are different from children in general who can quickly absorb and understand what is in their environment. They need the right stimulus with their age development and need experiences that can stimulate the five senses. Autistic children have labile behavior that sometimes shows hyperactive behavior and at other times passive behavior so with this behavior it is more difficult to socialize with other people / their environment, in addition to the limitations of their communication skills.[2]

The habits of autistic children are very disturbed physically and mentally, often they are isolated from their environment and live in their world with various mental and behavioral disorders. Behaviors that often arise are often acting as they want to be unruly,

undirected behavior (pacing, running, climbing, circling, jumping, flapping, shouting, aggressive, self-harm, tantrums (tantrums), difficulty concentrating, and repetitive behavior. [3]

Based on the mandate of Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities that the state guarantees full rights to them, including the right to obtain quality education services. This shows that children with special needs, including autistic children, are also entitled to the same opportunities as other (regular) children in education.

Basic education for children with autism gets the same opportunity to learn together in regular schools through the service of inclusive education programs. Inclusive education is an education service system that involves children with special needs learning together with their peers in regular schools closest to where they live, through inclusive education programs, special education students learn together with normal students in the same class and are taught by the same teachers assisted by special education teachers.[4]

Inclusive schools are educational services provided for children with special needs in regular or public schools. This policy is based on Law Number 20 of 2003 Article 32 and Permendiknas Number 70 of 2009, namely by providing opportunities and opportunities for children with special needs to receive education in public schools or regular schools.

Some realities have emerged from observations in Putra Harapan Purwokerto Integrated Primary School, Bantarsoka, Banyumas, Central Java which show that at the beginning of primary school teachers or auxiliary teachers need to be given greater assistance and attention for mild autistic children and moderately autistic children. They have distractions and obstacles in getting along with peers, less social interaction, less focused vision obstacles in communication, tend to withdraw from their environment, have their world, do not care, have difficulty cooperating, tantrums are less controlled when what is desired is not appropriate, so they need an environment that can stimulate and provide comfort to them.

Every child needs to have positive relationships with peers in middle and late childhood. Such as engaging in positive interactions with peers, resolving conflicts, and having friendships. The positive relationships built in inclusive elementary schools are not only among fellow students with special needs but also positive relationships with all students, both autistic students and regular students.[5]

Social skills are a person's ability to interact and behave appropriately in certain situations. Social skills are the ability to interact with others in a particular social context in certain ways that are socially acceptable or valued and at the same time personally beneficial, mutually beneficial, or beneficial especially to others. In addition, social skills such as social acceptance, and learning behaviors allow a person to interact effectively with others and to avoid unacceptable social responses.[6]

Social skills include the ability to communicate, establish relationships with others, respect yourself and others, listen to opinions or complaints from others, give or receive feedback, give or receive criticism, act according to applicable norms and rules, and so on.[7]

Social interaction is a process in which a person acquires the social ability to be able to adjust to social demands, this is closely related to the social development of children. Social interaction is one of the important aspects of child development because childhood is a transition period from the family environment into the school environment and community environment [8].

As social beings, autistic children can be influenced, require influence, and require social roles. Through education, you will get the opportunity and have the ability to carry out social roles so as not to be affected by bad things [9]. Autistic children when joining normal children in general in inclusive schools will develop social skills which are the ability to carry out social interactions both verbally and nonverbally that can be accepted or responded to (responded) and beneficial to themselves and others and one's ability to balance the ability of culturally expressed thought processes, such as sharing, helping someone in need and expressing sympathy. Autistic children need social skills interventions with effective methods to improve mood in autistic children, both for individuals with and without clinical levels of depression and anxiety. Although speculative, it is possible to reduce the development of clinical depression and anxiety in the future. Social skills interventions aim to teach social skills through active participation in small groups with examples of social etiquette, practical activities, and role-playing. [10]

The existence of inclusive schools for autistic children is a good place to be able to instill and hone social skills such as communication skills, adaptability, confidence, social involvement, making friends, and overcoming problems. Autistic children are expected to be more familiar with and accustomed to learning, interacting, playing, and socializing with their normal peers. Inclusion education also has a positive influence on other normal students such as honing their social skills, building empathy, compassion, responsibility, cooperation, caring, gratitude, being able to interact, and getting to know the situation of autistic children.[11]

Inclusive primary schools are education for students at the elementary level that integrates students with special needs in regular classes joined by other students. Inclusion is a practice of educating all students, both regular students and students who experience severe and multiple barriers in public schools that are usually entered by regular students. Students who experience obstacles and intelligence or special talents have the same rights as other students in general in getting an education according to student needs. Schools are often considered ideal places for a child's social skills training because they provide opportunities for teaching, modeling, and skill practice. [12]

Inclusive elementary schools are places of education for students at the elementary school level that combine students with special needs and regular students to develop the potential of each student. Inclusive primary schools have their benefits for students. Inclusive primary schools have their benefits for students with special needs, namely obtaining social play therapy with peers or groups Indirectly, this play therapy will have a significant influence to improve academic abilities and social skills for children with mild to moderate autism disorders, which are not accompanied by other comorbidities but still allow them to receive and understand instructions and information from others simply [13].

Autistic students who are in inclusive elementary schools can build positive relationships and behaviors that are more accepted by others. Placement of students who experience barriers in general education classes can provide several advantages, including a more positive self-image, better social skills, more frequent interaction with peers including regular students, more appropriate behavior in class, academic achievement that is equivalent or, even higher to the achievement achieved when placed in special classes.[5]

Research related to child inclusion has been conducted by Rina Diahwati et al who revealed that the social skills of students with special needs are different.[5] Ray Yulia Ardha revealed that the ability to interact with students with intellectual disabilities with other students is open. However, some children are introverted. For students with intellectual disabilities who can adjust and interact, their social skills are quite good, while for students with intellectual disabilities who cannot adjust and withdraw, their social skills tend to be less good or the same as when they first entered school, even declining.[14] Fatimah Azzahra revealed that social skills interventions can improve children's social skills. Some indicators of improvement were shown by the increase in subjects taking the initiative to greet others with high-fives and shaking hands. This suggests that modeling not only teaches new behaviors to autistic children but also in promoting, generalizing, and maintaining those behaviors.[15] However, research on social skills, especially in autistic children who are in Inclusion schools, has never been conducted.

Sekolah Dasar Terpadu Putra Harapan Purwokerto is one of the included schools that have two first-grade autistic children who have mild autism (SYP) and moderate autism (RYN) categories. Based on the description in the background above, it is necessary to reveal the social skills of autistic children who directly interact with regular children in inclusive elementary schools. Specifically, this study examines how the social skills of SYP mild autistic children and autistic children are RYN when they first enter school, the process of adapting and interacting with other students, and their social skills during inclusion school.

2. Research Methods

The method applied in this study is a qualitative descriptive method, that is, the results of this study are analyzed in the form of a description of a phenomenon. The qualitative descriptive research method is a method used by a researcher to gain knowledge or theory of research at a certain time. [16] This research uses a case study type of research. The presence of researchers in this study is a key instrument. Researchers act as planners, observers, and data processors which are then used as research reports.

Qualitative descriptive research has the following characteristics: carried out in natural conditions, descriptive, emphasizing process rather than results, inductive data analysis, and more emphasis on meaning.[17]

This research was conducted at one of the schools providing inclusion education, namely Putra Harapan Purwokerto Integrated Elementary School located on Jalan Pasiraja Number 22 Bantarsoka, West Purwokerto District, Banyumas Regency, with two research

subjects, namely mild category autistic children (SYP) and medium category autistic children (RYN) who were in first grade with class teacher respondents and accompanying teachers. Data collection techniques are carried out by observation to obtain physical and activity data, in-depth interviews to obtain oral data, and documents to obtain written data. Checking the validity of findings is carried out by triangulation of sources and methods. The data analysis used in this study is qualitative descriptive analysis. Data analysis is done by organizing data, reducing data, and presenting data.

Data analysis in qualitative research generally begins with preparing and organizing data, then reducing data to themes through the process of coding and summarizing codes, and presenting data. The data analysis process aims to present data on the proposition of research results related to the social skills of autistic children in inclusive elementary schools.[18] Researchers carry out interpretations or conclusions (propositions) in case study data analysis as a result of research conducted by reviewing prominent patterns in the data obtained.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Mild Autistic Child (SYP)

Overall, the social skills possessed by SYP are better developed than at the beginning of school.

- a. The self-introduction aspect of SYP can recognize himself, introduce self-identity in front of the class with his friends, including full name, gender, nickname, home address, family members, school address, and get to know his friends in class.
- b. Have good cooperation and be very enthusiastic when working on assignments, picket classes, or tasks done together, however, it must be with clear and easy-to-understand instructions. The ability to follow rules, and routines, stand in line, and be patiently waiting for your turn is better because there is no need to be redirected back. Examples: queue for ablution, line up to take food, line up to wash dishes and brush teeth.
- c. Social relationships with friends, SYP tends to be happier to see and observe his friends playing than to join in playing together, prefers to sit while looking at friends and their environment even though they have been invited and persuaded, but for congregational prayer activities, praying together, eating together to join other friends. SYP is used to sharing food, helping friends, lending stationery, and helping teachers.
- d. Aspects of SYP communication skills are being able to interact by greeting teachers, peers, and people around them, daring to ask questions and being able to answer other people's questions, being able to refuse if not according to their wishes, being able to express pleasure and displeasure, and being able to establish relationships with others

(teachers and peers) both socially at school and in doing the tasks given, Can respect yourself and others, and is willing to listen to friends' stories, willing to give or receive help, can obey the rules or learning contracts that exist in the class.

In following good and communicative learning activities, independents such as SYP can search for material or pages that are being discussed, only sometimes daydreaming and not concentrating. Specific questions or communications should be heard once or twice (repeated instructions) delivered, then understand the intent. In solving written questions the teacher is independent and can answer and write the answers himself. SYP dared to ask questions when some questions were not understood.

- e. Responsibilities are well developed such as SYP being willing to tidy up his stationery, checking school equipment when he wants to go home so as not to be left behind, eating his catering, washing dishes, and brushing his teeth after lunch at school.

3.2. Moderately Autistic Child (RYN)

Moderately autistic children/RYN tend to have lower social skills, compared to SYP, however, in general, have fairly good development from prior or early schooling.

- a. The self-introduction aspect of RYN has been able to recognize himself by introducing self-identity in front of the class such as mentioning his name, gender, address, family members, school identity, where he attends, his class, and his friends with assistance from the teacher, not knowing all his friends in the class.
- b. Having cooperation with other people or friends is still difficult, tends to withdraw from the classroom environment, does not understand the concept of cooperation if combined in group assignments to do assignments, RYN prefers to just observe, not participate enthusiastically. Example: when praying in congregation, friends are already conducive, but RYN is still at will. Do not want to imitate friends who have calmed down, such as studying together, not wanting to sit in a group, carrying out class pickets together. The ability to follow rules, and routines, and wait for your turn is still lacking, must be done with clear and repeated instructions and assistance from the teacher.
- c. Social relationships with friends, RYN tends to be engrossed in playing alone, does not want to greet others first, rarely joins friends, cares less about friends, never precedes giving help to others, has not been able to chat or communicate properly, and correctly. RYN is a child who is very attentive and meticulous to the surroundings even though he doesn't seem to care if something is not appropriate or something happens, so he will always convey and ask questions to the teacher. RYN has low self-control and will tantrum if his desires are not understood by others.

- d. Communication in learning activities tends to be passive, willing to do the task well or finish. However, it must be with repeated and clear instructions. Questions or communication directed to RYN, very active, but not yet able to be active in classical or joint communication. RYN has never started doing a particular activity that allows her friends to support her, withdraw more and be quiet.
- e. Responsibility is still lacking. When doing writing tasks still depends on the mood, busy playing alone so they don't do the task. Responsibility for the goods he has is also still lacking. For example, socks are left behind, and stationery is scattered, but when returning home, RYN's equipment must be collected, and this often causes tantrums and anger if something is missing. On the other hand, there is independence and confidence at lunch, willingness to wash dishes and brush teeth like other friends, willing to be a priest and prayer leader. But in personality, his character is good, upright, and will express if something is not appropriate.

3.3 Discussion

When entering an inclusive elementary school, it is the beginning of adapting autistic children to other children in school. Based on the results of research autistic children have different adaptive abilities, some develop faster and some develop slowly. Children with mild autism develop faster in interacting and adapting to their friends compared to children with moderate autism.

Based on the results of data analysis and research findings, children with mild autism can recognize themselves, and express self-recognition, such as introducing self-identity in front of the class with their friends, including full name, gender, nickname, home address, family members, school address, and get to know their friends in class. It's just that for moderate autism who still need more guidance and stimulus.

Children with mild autism can cooperate with others better than children with moderate autism. They are given the same opportunities as other children. Children with mild autism can follow the rules and routines of activities such as lining up to wait their turn, while children with moderate autism are less likely to follow the rules in daily habituation at school. Moderate autistic children when they want to carry out must be with intensive assistance from the class teacher / accompanying teacher.

Children with mild autism and moderate autism children have less social interaction, they tend to observe or see rather than join in a group activity or play, and withdraw from the environment. Interaction with others can be done by inviting and instruction from repeated teachers with continuous assistance.

Communication skills of mild autistic children are better than moderate autistic children, such as greeting teachers and friends first, being willing to listen to friends' stories, being able to answer other people's questions, active in completing tasks, while autistic children are more silent, withdrawn, willing to communicate when invited individually by others.

The responsibilities that mild autistic children have to develop better, while moderate autistic children are still lacking. In doing assignments from teachers, children with mild autism complete tasks faster, pay more attention to equipment or belongings always check so as not to miss school. On the other hand, they have independence and confidence that continues to grow, dare to appear in front of the class, dare to ask or answer, and do habituation at school can be done alone without the help of others. Social skills learning models can be used as alternative models for social skills learning for autistic children who mostly have difficulty communicating and need help to live independently, autistic children need help in education, recreation, and work.[14] This shows the same results as the researchers, namely that autistic children in inclusive schools, will get the same activities as other children or regular in both learning and non-learning.

One of the integrated treatments carried out for autistic people can be done by using socialization therapy at regular schools and play therapy which aims to make autistic children always have a cheerful and happy attitude, especially in being with their peers. This is very useful to help children with autism can socialize with other children [19]. This is to the results of research conducted by researchers in inclusion schools.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the above research on aspects of social skills of autistic students in inclusive elementary schools, it can be concluded that in general the social skills of SYN with RYN are different. Students with mild autism SYN tend to have better social skills and development. Whereas moderately autistic RYN students tend to have some aspects of low social skills. However, their existence in inclusive elementary schools experiences a fairly good development of social skills, they are given learning opportunities and carry out school activities with the same learning and non-learning as other children (regular), this can be seen from the introduction of themselves and the surrounding environment, cooperation, social relations, communication and responsibilities that are better than before at the beginning of entering elementary school.

Inclusive schools should maximize the service of children with autism by providing opportunities and activities similar to children in general or regularly so that they are trained in social skills, and looking for alternative methods of therapy and approaches for children with autism who have cognitive abilities to develop their potential. In addition, the involvement of parents and other family members also encourages the development of children's social abilities and skills, providing support for the development of positive emotions, strong personalities, and concern for others. This is by the results of Siller and Sigman's research found that the development of communication and interaction skills of children with autism disorders can be predicted by how intense the involvement of parents or caregivers/teachers in interactions and relationships with children's activities. [20]

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