

Students with Intellectual Disability in Special Needs School: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract— Although individuals with intellectual disabilities have limited intellectual functions and adaptations, teachers are expected to understand the uniqueness of students so that teachers are able to educate and teach students by developing ideas and innovations that they have. This qualitative descriptive study aims to describe the situation of students with intellectual disabilities in a special needs school. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 8 participants selected by a purposive sample method, who consisted of 3 teachers, 3 parents, and 2 students with intellectual disabilities. The data collected in this study was analyzed using thematic analysis. Therefore, there are 3 (three) themes resulted from the description of the situation of students with intellectual disabilities in the special needs school: 1) the barriers of children with intellectual disabilities; 2) the expectation for students; and 3) teaching methods in class. Thus, it is expected that teachers can understand the characteristics of each student with intellectual disabilities so that they can use right approaches in providing teaching to facilitate student understanding.

Keywords— Special needs school, intellectual disability, teachers, students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Intellectual disability (intellectual developmental disorders) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by limitations in intellectual function and adaptive function. This disorder includes three domains covering conceptual, social and practical skills [1]. Intellectual disability term is a new term used by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) to replace the term of mental retardation used in DSM-IV. In Indonesia, children with intellectual disabilities are included in the category of children with special needs where children with special needs are children who have extraordinary physical or mental, intellectual, social, or emotional limitations [2].

In the United States, for example, the prevalence survey results in children aged 3 to 17 years who were diagnosed with intellectual disability did not experience significant changes from 2014 to 2016. In 2014, the prevalence was 1.10%, whereas in 2015 it increased to 1, 34%. However, in 2016 it fell again to 1.14%. Intellectual disability is developmental disability with the lowest prevalence when compared to the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders and other developmental disabilities [3]. In Indonesia, there are no exact

data on the number of children with intellectual disabilities. However, in 2016 the Center for Education and Cultural Statistics of the Republic of Indonesia recorded that there were 69,403 students with intellectual disabilities. This number increased in 2017 to 71,411 students attending special needs schools. Specifically, students with autism, deafness, blindness, physical disability, and multiple disabilities make the highest number [4].

Teaching students with intellectual disabilities is a special challenge in which a teacher, besides teaching, must understand the conditions of each student who are certainly different from each other. The teacher must be able to innovate and use appropriate teaching methods to overcome the difficulties of students with intellectual disabilities. According to Angelka and Goran (2018) in general, children with intellectual disorders have special learning problems [5]. As a result, having limitations in academic ability will affect their ability to adapt to the home, school and community environment [6]. Appropriate teaching methods in the classroom are very important for children with intellectual disabilities so that the lessons given by the teacher can be accepted and understood by the students.

Teachers can utilize various technologies to help students with intellectual difficulties in learning, for examples tablets, smartphones, computers, and music players. Given that students with intellectual disabilities have excellent abilities for visual association, teachers can also use media such as pictures and videos to effectively encourage learning. [5][7]. However, these students need support from parents and teachers, as well as learning facilities to develop their skills and abilities in learning.

For this reason, in order to improve student health and learning success, Schools of Nursing have a very important role in providing education and health services as well as counseling for teachers and children with special needs.

II. OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to describe and explore the lives of students with intellectual disabilities in a Special Needs school in Rasau Jaya district, Kubu Raya Regency, Indonesia.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research is a descriptive qualitative research. This method is used to provide an overview and summary of daily events [8]. This research was conducted at a special needs school, *Sekolah Luar Biasa* (SLB) Rasau Jaya district, Kubu Raya Regency, West Kalimantan Province Indonesia. This research was conducted from January 2020 to February 2020 with a total of 8 participants consisting of 3 teachers, 3 parents and 2 students with intellectual disabilities. Samples were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The criteria for participants are parents who have children with intellectual disabilities, are able to read and write. Whereas the teacher participants are teachers who have been teaching at Rasau Jaya SLB for over 1 year. As for students, the sample selection criteria are that students can communicate well, get approval from the teacher and parents.

This research has passed the ethics test on the ethics committee of the Pontianak Muhammadiyah Nursing School Number: 8 / II.LAU / KET.ETIK / I / 2020. In conducting research, the researcher always followed the procedures established by the ethics committee and complied with research ethics such as maintaining confidentiality and information provided by participants, applying honesty values, considering the benefits of research for respondents, respecting human dignity by giving participants freedom to make choices in participating in this research. At this stage the researcher provided information sheets and consent forms for the participants before engaging in the research process.

The instrument for data collection was a set of interview guides that was developed based on the research objectives. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face using a recording device during the interview process. The interview process lasted for 30 to 40 minutes. Some questions asked during the interview include: 1) What are the barriers of children with intellectual disabilities?; 2) What are your expectations for students with intellectual disabilities?; 3) What is your technique in carrying out the learning process in the classroom?; and 4) What are your expectation for children with intellectual disabilities. In addition to interviews, the researcher conducted observations on student and teacher activities in the classroom.

The data obtained were then analyzed using thematic analysis technique. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify, analyze, and report themes in data with the stages transcribed in verbatim. Afterwards, the next processes are encoding the texts line by line, looking for themes, reviewing themes, determining and naming themes, and then generating the reports [9]. Rigor was ensured by observing key principles of qualitative interviewing consistent such as building trust and good relationship with the key informants. The researchers also conducted triangulation and members-checking to confirm the results of interpretation with 6 key informants.

IV. RESULTS

This study generated 3 themes regarding the life scenarios of students with Intellectual Disabilities in Special Needs School, which consisted of: 1) the barriers of children

with intellectual disabilities; 2) the expectations for students; and 3) teaching methods in the classroom;

Theme 1: The Barriers of children with Intellectual Disability

In this study teachers and parents have understanding that children with intellectual disabilities are children who always need assistance in learning, easily forget what they have been taught about, and so that they need to be taught repeatedly. As what the following participants said:

“... when asked to read and to count he cannot do it by himself if a teacher does not help him, so he needs to be assisted and encouraged in learning so that he can do it...”(T1)

“...when teaching them (students with intellectual intelligence) we cannot only do it once, it can be two or three times, even more so that they understand and can do something, but after that when asked to repeat, they have forgotten again...”(T2)

“... if there is homework I sometimes help him do it, I even help him write it because otherwise the school assignment cannot be finished...”(P1)

“...when reading he takes very long time, he spells the letters, even if I have helped him to spell the letters, and then ask him to re-read the sentence, he is not able to recall it again even though I have just mention the letters ...”(P2)

In addition, one of the participants explained that teaching children with intellectual disability requires extra patience as said in this following expression:

“...their grasping ability is not like students in public schools, so sometimes even if we have explained a lesson many times they still might not understand it, especially mathematics. So, if we are impatient we might be angry, upset or we don't care at all, but we have to understand it, indeed they are very slow to understand, so be patient and take a deep breath...” (T3)

The researcher's observations in class activities show that in the teaching and learning process teachers accompany students while learning by helping and being beside their students, the teachers help students spell letters or numbers and hold students' hands when writing.

Theme 2: The Expectations for Students

Although the students experience intellectual disability, both parents and teachers have positive expectations for the students. Some parents and teachers hope that such children can be independent, and can be like other normal students. As revealed by the following participants:

“...hopefully in the future my students who have intellectual disabilities can in general be like other normal students, they

can read, write and finish their education until they graduate...” (T3)

“...what I hope is that for him to be independent, he can be like any other normal children and does not need to be ordered when doing something. Knowing when he needs to take a bath, study, and eat by himself. It would be a relief that when he grows up he can get a job, at least he can support his own life....” (P3)

In addition, children with intellectual disabilities also have hopes for their parents such as equality in treatment and affection. This was revealed by the children as follows:

“In order for my mom and dad can love (us) equally...” (C1)
“...they don't discriminate when at home and at school...” (C2)

Theme 3: Teaching Methods in Class

In teaching children with intellectual disabilities the teachers apply the teaching methods using teaching aids and skills guidance, as revealed by the teachers below:

“...In addition to academic skills, our students are also trained to develop their talents or skills such as embroidery, making bags or souvenirs, and sewing for their future real life support in the community...” (T3)

“...me, when teaching I bring media or direct examples so that it is easy for them to understand. Sometimes I bring pictures to show them while teaching...” (T1)

Observations in the school environment show that there are a number of student handicraft products such as bags, wallets, paintings, clothing, and souvenirs of students' work. The products are used not only to participate in competitions but also to sell to the public.

V. DISCUSSION

Teaching children with intellectual disabilities has its own challenges for teachers and parents. Teachers must have extra patience in teaching because children with intellectual disabilities have weak memories and they forget easily, so they need to be taught repeatedly. This is in accordance with the characteristics of intellectual disability in which individuals who have intellectual disabilities will experience decreased ability to read, write, do mathematics, reason, understand science, and store memories [1]. In addition, people with intellectual disabilities experience limitations or weaknesses in intellectual functioning and have difficulty understanding abstract concepts [10]

Although children and students experience limitations, parents and teachers have positive expectations for the children's future. Parents and teachers hope the children have a good future, can finish school and can be independent in doing activities, especially activities in meeting daily needs such as bathing, eating and dressing. This is in accordance with the results of Ariesta's research (2016) which explains that parents

have a concern for the careers of their children with special needs so that some parents hope that children with special needs can go to school, learn to write, read and develop their potential [11]. The results of previous studies also mentioned that parents must have strong beliefs and optimistic views for the future of children who experience intellectual, physical and learning disabilities. Thus, support is needed from all family members and also teachers at school [12]. Accordingly, the researcher affirms that community, especially parents, expecting for children with intellectual disability to be independent in both career and education is something natural. It is because every parent or teacher wants the best for each child and their students in general. It is not always possible for the children to be together with their parents all the time, so efforts and interventions are necessary to help children become independent such as by providing good education at school and teaching independence at home.

The teacher must have right methods for teaching children with intellectual disability. The right methods will help students easily understand the material presented. Props such as pictures and videos are often used by teachers in teaching. Especially, in this era, various technologies can be used by teachers to help students with intellectual disabilities in learning such as tablets, smartphones, computers, and music players [7]. Besides that, the use of media such as pictures and videos can help students think concretely, thus encouraging teaching and learning processes to take place effectively because students with intellectual disabilities have excellent abilities for visual association while are weak in the ability of auditory memory [5].

VI. CONCLUSION

Teachers and parents play an important role in the development of children with intellectual disability both at home and at school. Children or students with intellectual disabilities can develop well if their teachers apply appropriate teaching methods and media so that some obstacles in the learning process can be overcome. In addition, support from family members and teachers greatly helps the children ability to be independent in the future both in terms of academic independence and independence in carrying out daily activities.

Community nurses can collaborate with school teachers by conducting various efforts or health programs such as counseling, health promotion and regular health checks. For parents, nurses can do nursing care at home visits to families with children with intellectual disabilities by emphasizing promotive, preventive and rehabilitative efforts and encouraging the parents to take their child to health facilities if the child has health problems both physically and psychologically.

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