



The Factors Influencing Students' English Language Acquisition at Special Needs School in Palangka Raya

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya memahami faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi pemerolehan bahasa Inggris pada anak-anak dengan disabilitas intelektual, mengingat mereka menghadapi tantangan unik dalam proses pembelajaran. Anak-anak dengan keterbatasan kognitif memerlukan metode pembelajaran yang disesuaikan untuk memaksimalkan pemerolehan bahasa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kemampuan mereka dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di SLB Negeri 1 Palangka Raya dengan melibatkan 7 siswa sebagai subjek penelitian. Metodologi yang diterapkan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Observasi dilakukan untuk mengamati interaksi siswa dalam proses pembelajaran, sementara wawancara dilaksanakan dengan pendidik untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai dukungan yang diberikan. Serta dokumentasi terkait dengan proses pembelajaran. Hasil penelitian mengindikasikan bahwa ada dua faktor yang teridentifikasi yaitu faktor eksternal, seperti dukungan orang tua dan lingkungan belajar yang kondusif, memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap akuisisi bahasa Inggris. Yang kedua, faktor internal seperti motivasi belajar dan kapasitas kognitif siswa juga berperan penting dalam proses pembelajaran. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya pengembangan program pengajaran bahasa Inggris yang lebih inklusif dan disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan spesifik anak dengan disabilitas intelektual.

Kata Kunci: Faktor, Disabilitas Intelektual, Pemerolehan Bahasa Inggris

Abstract

This study is motivated by the importance of understanding the factors that influence English language acquisition in children with intellectual disability, given that they face unique challenges in the learning process. Children with a cognitive disability require customized learning methods to maximize language acquisition. This study aims to identify the factors that influence their ability to learn English. This research was conducted at SLB Negeri 1 Palangka Raya involving 7 students as research subjects. The methodology applied was a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interview, and documentation. Observation was conducted to observe students' interaction in the learning process, while interviews were conducted with educators to gain a deeper understanding of the support provided. As well as documentation related to the learning process. The results indicated that two factors were identified: external factors, such as parental support and a conducive learning environment, have a significant influence on English language acquisition. Secondly, internal factors such as learning motivation and students' cognitive capacity also play an important role in the learning process. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of developing English language teaching programs that are more inclusive and tailored to the specific needs of children with intellectual disability.

Keywords: Factor, Intellectual Disability, English Language Acquisition

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INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition involves a complex cognitive process that develops gradually through four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. For children with intellectual disability, this process presents unique challenges due to limited verbal abilities and below-average memory capacity (Jankowska, 2014). Traditional teaching methods are often less effective, requiring innovative approaches tailored to optimize learning outcomes.

In second language learning, children with intellectual disability face significant additional barriers. These barriers mainly include slower information processing than typical children, as well as greater difficulty in understanding and applying abstract language structures (Vicari, 2016). When dealing with complex linguistic concepts, they take longer to process and integrate new information into their existing understanding. This calls for a teaching approach that is not only individualized and interactive, but should also be designed with each student's learning pace in mind, using concrete and structured methods, and providing repeated opportunities to practice language skills in meaningful contexts to optimally improve their language proficiency.

This research focuses on students with intellectual disability at SLB Negeri 1 Palangka Raya, a special education institution that has long been dedicated in providing quality and comprehensive education services for students with special needs. As an educational institution that has extensive experience in dealing with a variety of special learning needs that has developed a variety of learning programs and methods tailored to the individual needs of each student. The main objective of the research is to identify and analyze in depth the various factors that influence English language acquisition in students with intellectual disability. Through a systematic and comprehensive research approach, this study seeks to understand the complexity of the English language learning process in a special education context. The factors examined fall into two main groups: internal and external factors. Internal factors include various aspects inherent to the student, especially cognitive capacity which includes memory ability, speed of information processing and level of conceptual understanding. Meanwhile, external factors include various supporting elements outside the student, such as the level and quality of parental support in the learning process, as well as various aspects of the student's learning environment including learning facilities, teaching methods applied, and social interactions in the learning context.

METHOD

This research method uses a descriptive qualitative and case study approach to explore the factors that influence English language acquisition in students with intellectual disability at SLB Negeri 1 Palangka Raya. The descriptive qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand social phenomena in depth based on the perspectives and experiences of the research subjects. A case study was used because the research focused on a specific context in one location with unique characteristics-students with intellectual disability-so as to produce detailed and in-depth insights. The research subjects consisted of 7 grade IX students with intellectual disability at SLB Negeri 1 Palangka Raya Junior High School, with the main informant being the grade IX teacher who has direct experience in assisting the students' learning process. Inclusion criteria include students who have been diagnosed with intellectual disability, while exclusion criteria include students with intellectual disability who have not been recorded. Data collection techniques used observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted in a non-participant manner to observe student interactions during learning, focusing on communication patterns, responses to instructions, and the level of student participation using a pre-designed observation guide. Interviews were conducted in two forms: structured interviews with teachers to explore learning strategies and challenges faced, and unstructured interviews with students using a simple and interactive approach to understand their experiences. Documentation includes collecting photos of the learning process, student work and relevant learning notes. The research instruments

included observation guides with specific indicators such as students' responses and level of engagement in learning, interview guides with open and closed questions to explore information about language acquisition factors, and documentation sheets to record the results of observations, interviews, and supporting documents. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman interactive model which consists of three stages. First, data reduction through simplifying interview, observation, and documentation data by selecting relevant information through repeated reading and thematic coding. Second, data presentation in the form of tables, diagrams and narratives to facilitate interpretation of the patterns of influence of internal and external factors. Third, drawing conclusions based on the data that has been presented, which is verified through triangulation of methods and member checks with key informants to ensure the validity of the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews conducted by researchers with teachers at SLB Negeri 1 Palangka Raya, the teacher said: in the process of language acquisition of students with disability, there are two main factors that affect their ability to learn English. These factors can be categorized into two groups, namely external factors and internal factors. Both factors play a very important and interrelated role in determining the level of success of students with disability in mastering English as a foreign language.

External Factors

Based on the results of the researcher's interview with the teacher, external factors that influence language acquisition in students with disability are divided into two categories. The first category is the influence of the students' surrounding environment, especially interactions with family at home. The second category is the increasingly widespread use of gadgets or electronic devices in the digital era, which has a significant impact on children's language development, including children with intellectual disability.

The Influence of The Student's Surrounding Environment

In the researcher's interview with the teacher, it was explained that: "the learning context of children with intellectual disability requires more intensive attention and support, especially in the home environment". Home is the first and main place for these children to gain meaningful learning experiences. Therefore, the role of parents and other family members is crucial in creating a conducive learning environment that supports children's development.

The teacher also said that: "the learning process of children with intellectual disability starts from things that are closest to their daily lives. They tend to absorb new information and skills through direct observation and interaction with the surrounding environment." In this case, the development of language skills is a very important and fundamental aspect. Language is not only a means of communication, but also the foundation for children's cognitive and social development. Therefore, consistent and appropriate language stimulation in daily activities at home can have a significant positive impact on the overall development of children with intellectual disability.

According to the teacher's view, "the role of family members has great significance in the process of children's language acquisition." This is undeniable considering that the family is the first and main environment where a child begins to learn to communicate. Unfortunately, many parents do not realize or even tend to ignore the importance of this. They often rely too much on the formal education system facilitated by schools, but neglect to provide adequate stimulation and support when children are at home.

This situation becomes even more crucial for children with special needs. This is generally the case for children with severe intellectual disability, who require a much more intensive approach and deeper familiarization in their language learning process. Without proper support from the family, these children may experience greater difficulties in developing their language skills. The teacher also added the important statement that "the biggest challenge often faced is the fact that many of these children are still not able to speak

fluently in their own mother tongue." This is a very serious problem that requires special attention. If this condition continues to be ignored, it will become a very significant obstacle in their overall language development, which in turn can affect other aspects of their cognitive and social development.

Faced with this kind of situation, the teacher added that: "educators and parents need to work together to create effective strategies." The main focus of learning in such cases is geared towards mastering the first language or mother tongue first. This is a very important and fundamental step before children can be introduced to a second or foreign language. By building a strong foundation in the mother tongue, it is hoped that children will have a better basis for learning other languages in the future.

The quality and quantity of language input a child receives comes from various sources in the surrounding environment, especially at home-such as parents, caregivers, educators and other individuals. The quality of language input includes the accuracy, complexity, and mode of instruction of the language used around the child, while the quantity refers to the frequency and duration of such language exposure. This is reinforced by (Miller-Graff LE, 2020) who emphasized the importance of family and caregiving factors in child development. Their research revealed that these contextual factors have a profound influence not only on language development, but also on overall developmental characteristics - including in children with significant developmental challenges such as mild to severe intellectual disability.

The Influence of Gadgets

On the other hand, in interviews with teachers, they said that: "the use of gadgets or electronic devices is one of the factors that greatly affects the learning process of children with disability, especially in language learning." These devices have two different sides, the success of which depends on how parents implement, manage and supervise their use in their children's daily lives. Both sides include positive and negative aspects that can affect a child's overall cognitive, social and emotional development. Just like other children, gadgets have a significant impact on the lives of children with intellectual disability. On the positive side, if parents are wise and careful with their digital intake, gadgets can be an effective and engaging learning tool. According to teachers, children with intellectual disability find it easier to absorb and understand lessons that are presented visually, interactively and repetitively through media such as gadgets. This is very beneficial for their vocabulary development and language skills.

The use of gadgets or electronic devices in children with intellectual disability is an issue that requires special attention. Parents or caregivers need to closely monitor the use of gadgets to ensure that they provide positive benefits for the child's development. However, it is important to remember that gadget use also has a negative side that needs to be watched out for and anticipated. The teachers emphasized that unrestricted and poorly supervised use of gadgets by parents or caregivers can cause serious long-term problems. The most prominent negative impact is the reduction of children's focus and concentration in conventional learning. They may become overly dependent on visual and interactive stimulation from gadgets, thus losing interest in learning through traditional methods. As a result, children may become reluctant or even refuse to participate in learning activities without gadgets. This can hinder their social and emotional development due to the lack of direct interaction with teachers, peers and the surrounding environment.

In the application of technology in children with special needs, research conducted by (Pontikas, 2020) revealed important findings that technology applied appropriately and planned can provide significant benefits in helping children with intellectual disability to improve their cognitive abilities. The study showed that the use of digital tools that are specifically designed and implemented with the right approach can have an overall positive impact. In particular, these devices were shown to increase students' learning motivation, help develop fine motor skills through targeted digital activities, and effectively support their socialization process through interactive and engaging educational applications.

Internal Factors

An internal factor identified as a significant influence in English language acquisition in children with intellectual disability is the students' relatively weak cognitive abilities. This substantially affects their speed and effectiveness in understanding, remembering and applying the various language concepts and structures learned.

The Influence of Students' Cognitive Abilities

In the interview, the teacher said that: "cognitive ability includes memory, analytical ability, and speed of information processing". Students with suboptimal cognitive abilities tend to have difficulties in internalizing grammar rules, remembering new vocabulary, and applying language patterns in different contexts. As a result, their language acquisition process is slower and requires greater effort compared to students who have stronger cognitive abilities.

In the interview, the teacher also said that: "intellectual disability are classified into three types based on the level of intellectual intelligence (IQ)." This classification plays an important role in understanding the needs and potential of individuals with intellectual disability. There are three classifications of intellectual disability, first, mild intellectual disability with an IQ range of 51-70, characterized by the ability to learn basic skills and adapt to the social environment. Second, moderate intellectual disability with an IQ range of 36-51, where individuals require more intensive support in learning and daily life. Third, severe intellectual disability with an IQ range of 20-35, which requires constant assistance and supervision in almost all aspects of life. (Urszula Sajewicz, 2022)

The teacher also added that "the type of intellectual disability greatly affects students' learning patterns. This can be seen in various aspects of the teaching and learning process." Students with mild to moderate intellectual disability still show a good ability to cooperate during classroom learning. They can respond well to instructions and show positive learning development over time. However, the learning process for these students requires more time and a more specialized approach than the average student. This emphasizes the importance of patience, creativity and deep understanding of educators in dealing with students with special needs. On the other hand, students with severe intellectual disability face much greater and complex challenges in the learning process. Based on the interviews, the teachers said that: "students with severe intellectual disability often have significant difficulties in responding to and following conventional learning methods applied in regular schools." These difficulties cover not only academics, but also social skills, communication, and daily independence. As a result, they require a more intensive and specialized approach than other students.

This finding is in line with research conducted by (Ali, 2023), who highlighted the importance of cognitive development in the context of language development. In their study, these researchers revealed that cognitive development has a greater and significant influence on language development, especially in children with intellectual disability. This underscores the importance of understanding and considering cognitive aspects when designing language learning interventions or strategies for children with intellectual disability.

Educators and educational psychologists have observed that these students have not been able to master basic skills such as reading, writing and simple arithmetic - skills that are generally mastered by children their age. This gap is even more pronounced when compared to peers who do not have intellectual disability. They also have difficulty understanding abstract concepts, recalling long-term information and applying knowledge to new situations. This condition raises the need for a specialized, structured and individually tailored learning approach for each student. The approach needs to consider their academic needs as well as aspects of their physical, emotional and social development. In interviews, teachers also said that: "an effective learning program requires a combination of various methods, including experiential learning, consistent repetition, and the use of visual aids." In addition, close collaboration between educators, therapists and students' families is key to ensuring consistency and sustainability of the learning process.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the researcher interview with the teacher, external factors that influence language acquisition in students with disability are divided into two categories. The first category is the influence of the students' surrounding environment, especially interactions with family at home. The second category is the increasingly widespread use of gadgets or electronic devices in the digital era, which has a significant impact on children's language development, including children with intellectual disability. This study reveals that English language acquisition of students with intellectual disability in SLB Negeri 1 Palangka Raya is influenced by two main factors: external and internal. External factors include parental support and the learning environment at home which play an important role in students' language development. The use of gadgets also has a significant impact - it can be an effective interactive learning medium when appropriately supervised, but potentially negative if its use is uncontrolled. Internal factors include students' cognitive abilities, such as memory and information processing, which affect their speed and effectiveness in learning a language. Overcoming these challenges requires inclusive, structured and personalized learning methods-for example, the use of visual aids, repetition of material and experiential approaches. Practical implications of the findings include the need for parents' active role in creating a conducive learning environment at home, wise supervision of gadget use, and collaboration between educators, families and therapists to ensure consistency of learning. The development of special English learning programs for children with intellectual disability, including educator training and provision of adequate facilities, is a strategic step in improving learning effectiveness. The findings confirm the importance of an integrated and collaborative approach in supporting the language acquisition of students with special needs.

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