



English Language Learning for Mild Intellectual Disability Students During Pandemic

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Abstract

The participation of mild intellectual disability children in school is important because it is a crucial problem of how intellectual disability people can get a job, become independent people, and can live without depending on others. This study intends to analyze the ability of mild intellectual disability students in social interaction and determine their ability to use language in one of the special needs schools in Bandung. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. The participants are mild intellectual disability students, English teachers, and school principals in SLB Wartawan in Bandung. The instruments used in this study were observation guidelines, field notes, and interview guidelines. The data shows that two students categorize "poor", ten students categorize "fair", and four students categorize "good" in having social interaction. It can be concluded that most students have a fair category in social interaction. Moreover, the data also reveal that from 16 students, four students categorize "poor", nine students categorize "fair", and three students categorize "good" in their language ability to communicate with others in the classroom. It can be concluded that most mild intellectual disability students have a fair category in their language ability. The result of observation, fieldnotes and interview also show the activity of English language learning for mild intellectual disability students through blended learning during the pandemic.

Keywords: English language learning; mild intellectual disability; pandemic

Introduction

The significance of the English Language in Indonesia cannot be overemphasized. The English Language is mandatory to teach starting from elementary school until higher education. The outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic in early 2020 forced all sectors, including the education sector, to do activity online. In Indonesia, the spread of the Covid 19 viruses began on February 14, 2020. President Joko Widodo, two weeks after announcing patient 01 Covid-19, asked the public to

work, study and do the religious activity at home due to the harmful condition and effort to break the chain of virus spread. Therefore, in the educational sector, almost all Indonesian regions have to hold online learning with all their problems.

Concerning the administration of education in the Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) emergency period, the ministry of education and Culture issued a policy to conduct online learning that stated through the Circular letter Number 4 the Year 2020 starting early of March 2020. The change of learning administration from offline into learning happened at all levels and kind of education unit include education for students with special needs. However, in school for students with special needs, online learning cannot be fully administered because of the limitation of students' condition, especially for the intellectual disability children. Intellectual disabilities diminished cognitive ability that translates into difference in the rate and efficiency with which the person acquires, remembers and uses new knowledge compared to the general population (Shree & Shukla, 2016).

Intellectual disability is divided into three categories: mild intellectual disability, moderate, and severe category (Mumpuarti, 2007). This current research observed the learning activity for mild intellectual disability children, especially in English learning activity. Mild intellectual disability is a category that can participate in education activity where they can learn some simple skills to enter the world of work. Work that is suitable for mild intellectual disability is semi-skilled jobs. The participation of mild intellectual disability children in school is important because it is a crucial problem of how intellectual disability people can get a job, become independent people, and can live without depending on others.

During the pandemic, in special needs schools, the learning activity cannot be fully conducted online. Students with special needs and their parents still need to meet the teacher to consult and have a discussion about the learning activity carried out at home. The situation above makes the learning activity categorized as blended learning. The definition of blended learning under this research is a combination of face-to-face instruction and online learning. The implementation of blended learning maximizes the use of computers, tablets, smartphones, and other technologies in learning activities and combines face-to-face and online activities (Kaur, 2013, Mahmud, 2020). Responding to the situation, Alsarayreh (2020) argues that the implementation of blended learning is an effort to adapt to new teaching and learning circumstances during this unfamiliar period to serve the students.

For mild intellectual disabilities people, education skills are capital resources that can be developed as an element to overcome their intellectual, social, and emotional barriers (Raty et al., 201). Therefore, it is the obligation of all parties, both the government and the private sector or the community, in general, to develop the ability of people with mental retardation to obtain basic education. This is in line with the education policy outlined in Law No. 20 / 2003 concerning the National Education System:

"Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed by them, by society, by the nation, and by state".

Education for intellectual disability people must be adjusted based on their abilities and characteristics. Although intellectual disability people have two levels of a standard deviation below the average, that is, they cannot adapt to their environment during development, but they have the potential to develop (Mutiasari, 2017 & Jiu, 2020).

Intellectual disability people can develop their best potential to help themselves, stand alone and be useful to society, and have a proper inner life. However, students with intellectual disabilities exhibit difficulties in a wide range of academic skills, including acquiring basic academic skills such as literacy and language use (Slikker, 2009). However, this ability needs to be developed so that they can live independently and not be too dependent on others (Lestari et al., 2021). The skills that must be developed are the ability to carry out social interactions and language skills, both Indonesian and simple English. As we know, there is a close relationship between social interaction and language ability that can make mild intellectual disability an independent human being. For this reason, this study intends to analyze the ability of mild intellectual disability students in social interaction and determine their ability to use language in one of the special needs schools in Bandung. Furthermore, because the research was conducted during a pandemic, this study also aims to analyze English language learning for mild intellectual disability students during a pandemic.

Research Methodology,

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design. A qualitative approach is considered useful to achieve the objectives of this study, considering

that the data required requires contextual analysis or testing (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, the eminence of using qualitative research according to Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) is that the qualitative research process is carried out by exploring data in-depth, analyzing emerging phenomena, and finding meaningful values by understanding various variables that arise in the process of research activities.

In terms of the implementation case study design, according to Creswell (2012), a case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection. In the same opinion, Fraenkel et al., (2012) state that a case study is a design that extensively studies an individual, group, and varied data are collected and used to formulate interpretations relating to a specific case or to offer valuable generalizations. The choice of case study design in analyzing the English learning for mild intellectual disability children allows the researchers to understand the process rather than the result.

For some researchers, a case is not just an individual or situation that can easily be identified (e.g., a particular individual, classroom, organization, or project); it may be an event (e.g., a campus celebration), an activity (e.g., learning to use a computer), or an ongoing process (e.g., student teaching) (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The research was conducted in one private special needs school in Bandung, namely SLB Wartawan in Kota Bandung. The selection of research sites was carried out by the purposive sampling method. SLB wartawan provides learning services for children with mild intellectual disability, where it is following the objectives of this study.

The participants are mild intellectual disability students, English teachers, and school principals in SLB Wartawan.

The instruments used in this study were observation guidelines, filed notes, and interview guidelines. Qualitative data such as notes from the field, observation checklists, and open-ended questionnaires provide people's actual words in the study, offer many different perspectives on the study topic, and provide a complex picture of the situation (Creswell, 2012; Heigham & Croker, 2009).

Observation is an activity of paying close attention to the object of the research. Besides, the observation activity aims to record every situation that is relevant to the research objective. According to (Fraenkel et al., 2012), observation

is the process of gathering open-ended, firsthand information by observing people and places at a research site. Furthermore, Fraenkel et al., (2012) stated that observational guidelines list things that an observer will look at when observing a class. Therefore, the observation conducted must follow the observation guidance, and the researcher has to prepare an observational checklist sheet that has been made beforehand. There are two kinds of observation instruments in this research. The first instrument is the observation checklist, and the second is field notes. In this research, the researchers used an observation checklist and field notes to observe the activity of learning English for mild intellectual disability students through blended learning.

The observation was conducted using structured observations, making observations using the list when the observation was done. The observation was also used as a tool to confirm the class activities towards reading test achievement. The researchers made field notes in every meeting using descriptive explanations. The researchers wrote the activities that happen in the classroom into field notes. In educational research, this usually means the detailed notes researcher takes in an educational setting, such as a classroom (Fraenkel et al., 2012). According to Creswell (2012), field notes are text (words) recorded by the researcher during an observation in a qualitative study. Paper and pencil field notes and computer field notes can be used for making field notes. Moreover, fieldnotes must provide any information such as the name of the observer, location of observation, date and time, object, and short title for helping to identify the aim of the observation process (Interaction, 2014).

The next step after collecting the data was to analyze it. In this research, the data were analyzed qualitatively. Based on Miles & Huberman's (1994) opinion, the method for analyzing qualitative data consists of three simultaneous activities: data reduction, data display, and concluding.

Findings and Discussion,

This section provides information to respond to the research objectives stated in the background of the study. Firstly, the section describes the social interaction and language ability of mild intellectual disability students observed in this study. Moreover, the next section informs the strategies implemented in English language learning for mild intellectual disability students during the pandemic.

Social interaction and language ability of mild intellectual disability students

Social interaction is closely related to someone's ability in using language to communicate with others in regular people and intellectual disability people. Kirk, Gallagher & Coleman (2015) propose that the cognitive aspect in mild intellectual disability people has an impact on their adjustment to communicate with their environment and influence their social interaction.

As previously stated, language and intelligence are closely related. Related to the use of language in intellectual disability people, some experts define intellectual disability based on their lack of ability in a language. The term used to describe the use of language difficulties in intellectual disability children is called language deficit. Ingalls (1978 in Patmawati, 2017) argues that a deficit in language skills could be seen as the characteristic that distinguishes regular children with intellectual disabilities children.

The main reason for the difference is that language is a social communication tool that requires intelligent thought to convey ideas. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), in mild intellectual disability children, it can be seen that the social domains in the form of communication, conversation, and language are not in accordance with their actual age. It is natural then that intellectual disability children have obstacles in mastering language use and facing problems in communication. The barriers occur naturally due to their impaired intelligence development. Based on research about difficulties in communication and interaction of mild intellectual disability people, conducted by Khoeriah et al., (2019) it was found that they experience difficulties in having communication with others in many aspects when following work training program after school.

Following up Khoeriah et.al., (2019) research, this study analyses social interaction using the language of mild intellectual disability students. Moreover, this study also evaluates the strategy implemented to teach the English language for mild intellectual disability students in special needs schools during the pandemic.

Based on the result of an observational checklist, field notes, and interview with the teacher, it was found that mild intellectual disability students have difficulties in the following situation:

a) the courage to ask questions related to the lesson; b) the ability to communicate with the teacher about learning material; c) communicate with friends about

learning material; d) ask things they do not understand; e) ask learning agenda; f) inform when they could not attend school; g) convey appropriate greetings; h) explain how to something; i). understand low-frequency words related to the lesson; j) understand the instructions for doing the assignment.

Here is the description of social interaction and language ability of mild intellectual disability students in this study.

Two figures below show the social interaction condition and language ability of mild intellectual disability students when interacting with other people in the classroom.

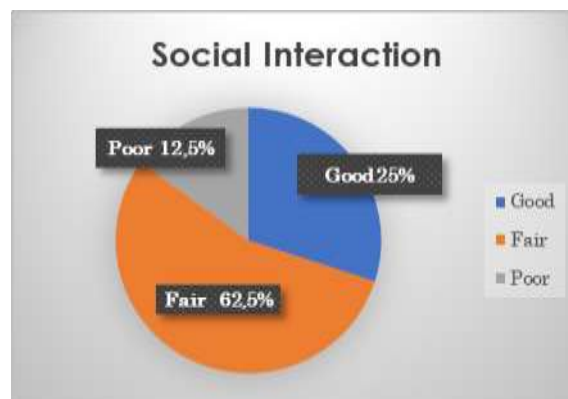


Figure 1.
Social Interaction of Mild Intellectual Disability Students

Figure 1 shows that from 16 students, two students (12,5%) categorize “poor” in having social interaction with others students and teachers in the classroom. Moreover, the figure shows that from 16 students, ten students (62,5%) categorize “fair” in having social interaction with others students and teachers in the classroom. Furthermore, the figure shows that from 16 students, four students (25%) categorize “good” in having social interaction with others students and teachers in the classroom. It can be concluded that most students have a fair category in social interaction. This situation might have happened because they are already accustomed to the academic situation, and have already known each other for some hours. Usually, mild intellectual people face difficulties with other people. However, social interaction might become difficult faced by some mild intellectual disability students because children's development characteristics can cause learning difficulties and school failure (Angelka & Goran, 2018).



Figure 2.
Language Ability of Mild Intellectual Disability Students

Figure 2 shows that from 16 students, four students (25%) categorize "poor" in their language ability to communicate with others in the classroom. Moreover, figure 2 shows that from 16 students, nine students (56%) categorize "fair" in their language ability to communicate with others in the classroom. Moreover, figure 2 also shows that from 16 students, three students (19%) categorize "good" in their language ability to communicate with others in the classroom. It can be concluded that most mild intellectual disability students have a fair category in their language ability. From the figure above mild intellectual disability, students are characterized by many changes in developmental abilities, one of those changes is the different language development and ability (Angelka & Goran, 2018).

From the findings above, difficulties in terms of social interaction and language ability can be overcome by several strategies. The main thing is to educate and provide continuous information for mild intellectual disability students to be brave and have the self-confidence to interact and express opinions. Things to be considered at the time enrolling students with a mild intellectual disability is to evaluate the personality of the child by the team of experts, to determine his developmental abilities, including the assessment of speech development, which further would be the basis for organization and realization of the educational and rehabilitation process (Angelka & Goran, 2018).

As for things that can be done, among others: a) guidance and stimulate students to interact and speak assisted by concrete and functional things in students' surroundings; b) the use of simple, uncomplicated language that does not contain multiple interpretations; c) implement humanistic interactions that bring warm communication between mild intellectual disability students and teachers. The

results of the observation above are used as initial information about strategies that can be carried out by researchers to teach English to mild intellectual disability students.

English learning strategies for mild intellectual disability students during Pandemic

Based on the previous description about social interaction ability and language skills of mild intellectual disability students, researchers made observations about simple English learning strategies for mild intellectual disability students in special needs schools during the pandemic. Learning simple English for mild intellectual disability students is crucial as an effort to train, prepare, and be ready to interact and be independent in their social life.

English language lesson is mandatory in the curriculum for special needs schools for mild intellectual disability students. However, based on different cognitive characteristics, the materials given to them are different from regular children at the same age (Imandala, 2012). For mild intellectual disability students at the senior high school level, the material provided is equivalent to English material for 6th-grade elementary school students regular. The adaptation of material following students' characteristics is crucial. According to Bawa and Osei (2018), the effectiveness of teaching-learning materials to promote the academic achievement of students gives sensory experiences that students need to achieve effective and meaningful behavioral change, mostly for intellectual disability students.

The importance of appropriate material also proposed by Arwanto (2021), who said that the teachers who taught students with intellectual disabilities should be able to recognize the features so that they would be able to classify their students' disability categories and give appropriate educational services, as well as create the methods, media, and evaluations based on their students' disabilities.

Based on observations, field notes, and interviews, information was obtained that the implementation of English language learning for mild intellectual disability students aims to form speech behavior which is composed of language behavior when asking, doing orders, complaining, refusing, and interacting. The stages of implementation are as follows:

- Carry out an assessment of English pre-language skills for mentally retarded students, the scope of the assessment includes eye contact skills because there are some mentally retarded students who gain language experience

through visual imitation. Assessment of language skills at the beginning of learning is followed by assessment at the end of the learning process. As stated by Brown and Abeywickrama (2018) assessment can be done at the beginning, ongoing, and at the end to get comprehensive information.

- Mild intellectual disability children are taught to recognize some nouns in simple English that are used every day.
- Mild intellectual disability students are taught to recognize some English vocabulary that shows simple verbs, adjectives, and adverbs that are used daily. Vocabulary is taught using a total physical response strategy.
- Mild intellectual disability children are trained to combine 2-3 more simple words that are already understood to form simple speech/words.
- Mild intellectual disability students are taught to use English effectively according to a predetermined theme. In doing the exercise students must share turns, be on the same topic of conversation, and the statement of the message conveyed must be clear.
- Mild intellectual disability students are trained to be able to add new information according to the ongoing topic. Students are expected to be sensitive to the needs of the listener by responding appropriately to what is asked.

Learning language difficulty, especially English learning faced by mild intellectual disability students during their education is the difficulty in forming vocabulary concepts and developing them into semantic units. Some of them face difficulty finding English words they want to say. Moreover, they find it difficult to join words together to form a meaningful string of words. For example, when they intend to use the word "explode" they use the word "bomb". According to American Psychiatric Association (2013) in mild intellectual disability students, there are difficulties in abstract thinking skills. The next problem is that mild intellectual disability students have difficulty understanding and distinguishing the meaning of words.

One of the efforts that can be done to overcome this problem is by applying a more effective and attractive learning strategy for mild intellectual disability students. The strategy that is often used is TPR (Total Physical Response) using the real object. al retardation after school. In using the TPR (Total Physical Response) strategy, the important thing that needs to be conveyed to students is

how to do a certain activity in English and see or hold the real things and say the name of the things in English.

During the pandemic period, learning English is carried out in a blended learning manner. Learning cannot be done completely online because there is a need for students to have closeness with the teacher. Likewise, parents need to consult learning activities that must be done at home so that students continue to experience learning activities despite the pandemic.

Blended learning in this study is a combination of learning that is carried out both online and offline. The activities carried out in learning English for mild intellectual disability students are:

- The teacher and parents have a meeting to discuss the material given to the teacher.
- The teacher provides learning modules that will be used during blended learning. The teacher provides information on things that must be considered by parents when learning is carried out.
- The teacher conducts learning in class as an introduction and trigger for other English learning activities that students will do at home.
- Mild intellectual disability students learn English using the media zoom meeting accompanied by their parents. Teacher demonstrate some words using TPR.
- Parents and students work on the English learning modules that have been given by the teacher. Parents demonstrate some words using TPR.
- Teachers and parents conduct communication and assessment through what's app regarding English learning activities that have been carried out by students.

Even though there were some obstacles in learning, the activities continued with continuous coordination between students, parents, and teachers.

CONCLUSION

With the provision of English language learning, it is hoped that they will be able to develop their confidence to interact with other people and have productive work skills in the future. The provision of language education for people with mental retardation focuses on supporting the development of various skills to

produce a product in the form of real objects that are directly beneficial for life. Good language learning activities will support the development of various skills, it is hoped that mild intellectual disability students can gain perceptual experience, appreciative experience

However, following the nature of the intellectual disability, which has an impact on communication barriers and social behavior, sincere support and attention are still needed from the family, the community, including in the context of the world of work, are entrepreneurs.

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