

Teacher Skills in Communicating with Students with ASD in Inclusive Schools

Muhammad Nurul Ashar
 School of Education and Social Works
 The University of Sydney
 Sydney, Australia
 muhammadnurulashar@gmail.com

Wagino
 Faculty of Education
 Universitas Negeri Surabaya
 Surabaya, Indonesia

Abstract—The aim of this research is to describe the teacher's ability to interact with students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in several aspects namely: speaking skills, writing skills, listening skills, and nonverbal communication. This research applied descriptive qualitative research design. Data were collected through interview and observation. Data were analyzed by applying interactive model. Findings report that in terms of speaking teachers still have difficulty understanding the spoken words of students with ASD but have applied the right principle of speaking. Written communication is not yet to be implemented. In terms of listening skill, the teacher is patient enough in waiting and understanding the response of ASD students. The nonverbal communication and communication using visual media have not yet been implemented.

Keywords—*teacher's skills; communication; students with ASD*

I. INTRODUCTION

The term of autism is firstly introduced by Leo Kanner and his colleague Leon Eisenberg, where both of them found a group of children who had the same characteristics, namely being unable to communicate and interact with other individuals, and showing a tendency for repetitive routines [1]. Furthermore, The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development explains that autism is a complex neurobiology developmental disorder that occurs during the lifetime of an individual, as well as having problems in social interaction and communication, they also often do things repeatedly [2]. Whereas according to Peeters [3], autism is a developmental/pervasive obstacle and not a form of mental illness. Moreover obstacles on this development include: barriers in aspects of social communication and interaction, as well as behavior.

Autism in its development before 2013 was the part of pervasive developmental disorders along with Asperger and PDD-NOS disorders based on the Revised DSM-4. Furthermore, in line with the release of the DSM-5 in 2013, pervasive developmental disorders turned into the autistic spectrum, so that the terms autism, asperger disorders, and PDD-NOS were no longer being used, instead ASD disorder (ASD) is now being used to refer this conditions [4]. Characteristics of students with ASD based on DSM-5 [5] are having difficulties both in the aspect of social communication, and behavior.

BPS (Indonesia's Bureau of Statistic) estimates that from 2010 to 2016 there were around 140,000 children under the age of 17 who have the ASD [6]. Similar data were conveyed by the Director of the Ministry of Health's in 2013 which estimated that there were 112,000 children with ASD with ages ranging from 5-19 years [7]. Furthermore, the agent of research and consultancy, SPIRE, estimates that there are 139,000 children with ASD from 400,000 children with special needs [6].

The conditions experienced by children with ASD implies the need of special education services. In Indonesia based on National Strategic Plan for Education [8], it is declared that education for children with special needs including children with ASD can be obtained through two available education services including: special school services and inclusive school services.

Furthermore, students with ASD in practice are more emphasized in obtaining inclusive education services [9] except if the special needs condition experienced is severe and requires special handling.

Inclusive schools are based on the principle of Education for All. In inclusive schools, the school adapts to the needs of all students, and is ready to accept whatever the conditions of the students [10]. This certainly has implications for the need for adaptation and reform of instrumental input and environmental input in the school education system that implements an inclusive education system. One important aspect of the education system itself is the learning process.

It is known that in every class including in inclusive schools there must be problems and disturbances that arise when learning is happening. This is in line with the opinion of LaCaze, et al [11] who revealed that all classes must have problems and it is important for teachers to immediately address the problem. Furthermore Witcher and Minnor [12] include the classroom management skills in 6 characteristics that must be possessed by effective teachers. Moreover, Evertson [11] explains that classroom management is an important competency that must be possessed by a teacher and some class management variables have a positive correlation with student achievement. Furthermore the output of learning is directly related to the learning environment in the classroom created by the teacher during the learning process [12]. Based on these idea, it is clear that

the classroom management is essential and should be thoroughly implemented by the teachers. Classroom management has a crucial and vital role in supporting learning. Particularly for students with ASD, classroom management is important, because less structured classes can lead to undesirable behavior [1].

In classroom management, teacher interaction with students becomes an important aspect because it is related to regulating behavior, discipline, interest/attention, passion for learning, and group dynamics. Often effective classroom management is a direct impact of good interaction between teachers and students. Further aspects that are of concern in teacher interaction with students are mastery of four skills which include: speaking skills, writing skills, listening skills, and non-verbal communication. While speaking teacher should apply several important principles so that communication with students can run well and on purpose [13], [14]. Moreover, the writing skills are related to the delivery of important and complex messages [13]. In other words meaning of the message is better delivered in writing rather than verbally. These written messages can be in the form of a notification, or a warning to students. The principle that must be considered by the teacher in writing skills are same as the principle of speaking skills, while in terms of writing it should be easy to read and clear.

In addition to speaking skills, listening skills are also important to be mastered by the teacher when managing the class [14]. In addition to talking and listening, communication can also take place non-verbally. Non-verbal communication can be described as wordless communication [13]. The communication is carried out through various forms of body signals. To be a good communicator, the teacher needs to master non-verbal communication skills [13], [14].

Therefore the aim of this research is to describe the teacher's ability to interact with ASD students in the aspects: speaking skills, writing skills, listening skills, and nonverbal communication.

II. METHOD

Written agreement for conducting this research was received from the school's principal. Teachers have been agreed to be involved in this research. The research was approved by the Faculty of Education, Vice Dean of Academic and Students Affairs.

This research applied a qualitative research approach with descriptive research types. The research was conducted at one inclusive elementary school in Surabaya, Indonesia. This school was chosen because it has quite a large number of students with ASD and is spreading from grade one to grade six. The subjects in this research were 6 teachers from grade one to grade six.

The research process started from the preparation (research permit, and set for schedule), followed with data collection, data analysis, conclusion and suggestion drawing. Data were collected through structured interview, and non-participant observation. Non-participant observation was implemented during the learning over two times in grade one to grade six using observation instruments. Interview was conducted in-depth with key informants as many as 6 teachers. The interview use open structured instruments.

The research design is shown in Figure 1. This design includes: preliminary research, data collection process, data analysis, data validation, analysis data after validation, conclusion drawing and suggestion. Data were analyzed with Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model [15], through three steps namely: condensing the data (merging and strengthening data), data presentation, conclusion drawing and verification.

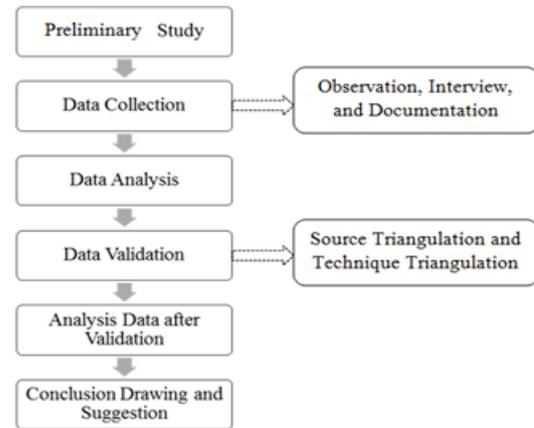


Fig. 1. Research Design

Moreover, data were validated with implementing triangulation. Triangulation type used is source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is done through asking the same question to different informant to get valid data. Technique triangulation was done by comparing data of interview, and observation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning in classroom certainly involves interaction between teachers and students. Although both receptive and expressive communication skills are the main obstacles experienced by students with ASD, teachers must communicate with them. The teacher's skills in communicating with ASD students are explained as follows:

A. Speaking Skills

Related to speaking skills, based on the results of interviews, almost every teacher has difficulty speaking with students with ASD. Even so, the observations show that all teachers arch have applied the principles of speaking with students with ASD such as: Speaking using simple sentences [1], [16], simplifying the instructions given and delivered clearly [1], [16], avoiding abstract, figurative words, multiple meanings, sarcasm, and nicknames [2], and using words commonly heard by children and appropriate context [17].

Furthermore, other speaking principles that must be applied by teachers to students with ASD are to provide students options or indirectly instruct students to do certain things [17]. As for all teachers except one teacher, they have applied this principle. This principle is applied through offering assignments, learning activities such as presentation, and reading books. While the other teachers immediately gave instructions to students with ASD without giving options.

In addition to applying the recommended principles the teachers also apply principles including: repetition, firmness,

eye contact, punishment, using praise, body language/gestures, applying intonation, and speaking gradually.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that all of the teachers do not use recommended visual media such as PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) [1], [16], [17]. All of them immediately spoke verbally.

B. Writing Skills

An alternative to replacing verbal communication with students with ASD is through written communication. Based on the interview, written communication for students with ASD has not been applied in this school. Furthermore, based on the results of observations, this is because there are many students with ASD who are not able to read and write. As for only one student with ASD who able to read and write, but the teacher still does not apply written communication, instead she prefers verbal communication, because it is considered more effective.

Furthermore, even though the teacher does not apply written communication, all teachers can convey written information clearly and readable [16] related to learning material and other information such as giving rewards. The teacher does not prepare the media for written messages, except the whiteboard that is already available.

C. Listening Skills

Students with ASD are still struggling in expressive communication skills, although students with ASD are able to respond to the conversation delivered in a language that has been mastered before. Therefore, it is important for teachers to have good listening skills, so that communication can be maintained.

Some of the teachers in the interview revealed that they had difficulty understanding the words that were conveyed by the students, even though all the teachers were still waiting for the students' with ASD response. This is in line with the results of observations where all teachers await students' with ASD responses for at least 10 seconds [16], [18]. The teacher waits for the response of students with ASD when given questions related to learning material or simple questions to practice communication. The teachers are also patient in responding to the talk delivered by students with ASD, even though the content is sometimes just to attract teachers' attention.

Visual media such as PECS are also recommended to be used as a medium for students with ASD to respond to speech [1], [16], [17]. Unfortunately, all teachers do not use visual media to respond.

D. NonVerbal Communication Skills

Communication besides being done verbally and in written form it can also be done non-verbally through facial expressions, eye communication, and touch. Even so for students with the ASD, this communication skill is not too emphasized, because of the barriers of students with ASD to understand hidden curriculum or unwritten social regulations.

The results of interviews with all teachers expressed diverse opinions. Some teachers have been able to understand non-verbal communication delivered by students with ASD, while there are teachers who do not understand

the non-verbal communication of students with ASD in the classroom. As for some teachers, they also revealed that students with ASD rarely use nonverbal communication.

Similar to the results of the interview, the results of the observations also show various things even though they are consistent with the results of the interviews. As for only one teacher who is able to apply all the principles of non-verbal communication with students with ASD namely applying eye expression and communication, applying touch, using silent communication and understanding the meaning of non-verbal communication delivered by students with ASD [13], [14]. Two teachers have applied expression, eye communication, touch, understand non-verbal communication in students with the ASD, but have not implemented silent communication. Furthermore, one teacher has applied expressions, eye communication, and touch, but has not understood the nonverbal communication delivered by students with ASD. While two teachers only apply eye expressions and communication, while one teacher has not applied touch, silent communication, and has not understood the nonverbal communication of the students with ASD.

IV. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the skills of teachers in inclusive schools to interact with students with ASD is appropriate. In terms of speaking teachers still have difficulty understanding the speech of students with ASD but they applied the right principle of speaking. Furthermore, written communication is still not implemented because most of the students with ASD are still learning to read and write. In terms of listening, the teacher is patient in waiting the response of students with ASD. The nonverbal communication and communication using visual media have not yet been implemented. It is suggested that the future research might focus on the same topic but on the wider population.

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