

Vocational Handicraft Activities in Improving Academic Achievement of Students with Deafblindness

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Abstract

This research aims to explore vocational activities in the form of handicrafts carried out by students with disabilities. Students with disabilities often face various challenges in the educational environment. Therefore, non-academic skills are needed to support their achievements in education. One type of non-academic ability in question is to train the skills possessed by students. This research uses a qualitative method with a case study approach to understand the dynamics involved. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and students. The results showed that the improvement of motoric and cognitive skills of students with disabilities significantly correlated with the improvement of their academic achievement. In addition, ongoing support from the family and school environment was also found to be an important factor in strengthening these skills. Based on these findings, the researcher suggests that special education providers are consistent in developing the individual skills of students with disabilities to optimize their academic potential. The findings are expected to provide insights for educators and policy makers in designing more inclusive and effective education strategies for students with special needs.

Keywords: Tunagrahita; Skills; Academic

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, children with special needs have become an exciting focus of study in almost all parts of the world. However, the amount of attention to this topic has also given rise to a variety of terms that are often confusing if not well understood. Some of the terms commonly used to refer to children with special needs include disability, handicap, developmentally disabled, impairment, abnormal, psychopathology, disability, as well as the more recent term difabel, which stands for Differently Abled. (Br. Sinaga, Tri Putri, 2023).

In the world of education, there are children who have a level of intelligence that is significantly below average and experience barriers in adaptive behavior, which are manifested during the developmental period. In Indonesia, these children are known as Tunagrahita (PP No. 72/91). Other terms used include mentally retarded, mental retardation, intellectually disabled, and handicapped. The condition of impairment is not only determined by a low level of intelligence, but must also consider other aspects such as inability in adaptive behavior and the period of occurrence (Fadiana & Citra Dewi Rosalina, 2020).

The definition of deafblindness published by the American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR) states that in the early 60s, deafblindness was defined as limitations in general intellectual functioning and adaptive skills. These adaptive skills include aspects such as communication, self-care, home life, social skills, community participation, self-control, functional academics, leisure, and employment. According to this definition, mental retardation occurs before a person reaches the age of 18 (Dermawan, 2018). Typically, children with disabilities face difficulties in adaptive behavior, which means they are unable to achieve the standard of independence or social responsibility that normal children have. In addition, they also tend to experience barriers in academic skills and communication with their peers (Widiastuti, 2022).

Children with intellectual developmental delays face many difficulties in meeting their needs. Some of them are only able to achieve some of their needs or even less, depending on the severity of the obstacles they have and the attention given by the surrounding environment. This condition certainly poses its own challenges in providing services that suit the needs of each child with a disability (Alhababy, 2016). They also show below-average abilities in reasoning, planning, problem solving, abstract thinking, understanding ideas, and using language. All of these difficulties are encompassed within their intellectual abilities (Vianti, 2021).

Vocational education is an approach that integrates theory with practice to prepare school graduates to enter the workforce according to their fields and interests. The goal of vocational education is to improve the relevance of education in Indonesia, by providing vocational guidance that matches the needs of the labor market, so as to create a prosperous and competitive society (Puspito Rini et al., 2023).

Education for people with disabilities involves not only academics, but also skills that support life skills. In Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB), the main focus of education is on skills development, with the aim that students can graduate with abilities that make them more independent and have use value both for themselves and for the surrounding environment. The implementation of vocational programs for children with disabilities at the secondary and tertiary levels refers to Permen No. 22 of 2006, which states that the determination of Competency Standards and Basic Competencies is left to each educational unit. This means that schools have full authority to design vocational programs for children with disabilities. As a result, vocational programs in each school may differ, both in the types of skills provided and the obstacles faced in their implementation. Therefore, it is important to know an overview of the implementation of vocational programs in schools for children with disabilities (Ratnengsih, 2022).

Skills are a training process for individuals or groups to acquire knowledge and expertise that enables them to produce something useful and applicable in everyday life, such as making mats, tablecloths or souvenirs. According to Hottinger, skills can be divided into two categories: phylogenetic skills that are present from birth and can develop with age, and ontogenetic skills that are acquired through practice and experience from environmental influences (Nurhasanah et al., 2022). Skills play a crucial role in human life because with the skills they have, a person can work or start their own business to fulfill their needs (Oktaviana, 2023).

Education for children with disabilities is essential to improve their academic abilities. This improvement can have a significant positive impact on their ability to participate in society and daily life (Crowe et al., 2022). There are many ways to explore the potential of children with disabilities to stay active and achieve in the world of education, one of which is developing non-academic abilities in the form of handicrafts. Handicrafts are one way to help students develop themselves and achieve independence. Through handicrafts, students can develop their potential, which can support their financial life. These skills can be trained according to students' interests and abilities, and the results of their work can be used for personal use or benefit others. Handicraft products that have a high selling value show that the item is not only useful but also aesthetically pleasing (Putri et al., 2023). As has been done by SLB BCG Sumber Dharma Malang, one of the school's deaf students named Sheila is very active in following and learning handicrafts. Therefore, researchers want to examine more deeply the relationship between non-academic skills and academic intelligence in students with disabilities who are active in developing their abilities

2. Method

This research was conducted at BCG Sumber Dharma Special School in Malang, which is located at Jalan Candi Jago No. 28, Blimbing Subdistrict, Malang City with the target of tunagrahita (C) students. The method used by researchers is qualitative research. Qualitative research is a type of research whose findings are not obtained through statistical procedures and are more about how researchers understand and interpret the meaning of events, interactions and subject behavior in certain situations according to their research perspective (Feny Rita Fiantika et al, 2022) The type of research used is interviews. The interview technique is used to collect subjective data such as opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of sources related to the phenomenon being studied (Hansen, 2020). The resource persons chosen by the researcher were the class teacher and the students concerned.

3. Results and Discussion

In this research, there is one student at SLB BCG Sumber Dharma who has skills in handicrafts. Sheila is a student in grade XI of senior high school. According to her class teacher, Sheila is a student with mild level of tunagrahita. This is because when in class, Sheila is still able to understand the learning material in class except for English. In English learning, Sheila is still quite difficult in remembering vocabulary and also understanding some material.

Even though Sheila is a child with a disability, it does not mean that she does not have proud abilities. In addition to being diligent in class, Sheila is very tenacious in doing handicrafts making several works, such as hand delivery and bouquet. According to her class teacher, Sheila began actively making handicrafts since grade X. When she was in grade X, Sheila had made a mini garden but it was not sustainable because Sheila's talent was in making hand deliveries and bouquets.

Sheila's ability to make crafts makes her more active and cheerful in class. The complexity of making a bouquet or a delivery does not make Sheila's enthusiasm for learning drop, but instead makes her more active in class. Every time there is an agenda for making handicrafts, Sheila is very enthusiastic and increases her enthusiasm for learning in class. Not only able to make, Sheila has also won the handicraft competition at the SLB level in Malang City. This proves that children with disabilities can also compete to improve their achievements.

According to the teacher in her class, thanks to the vocational program in the form of handicraft skills, Sheila's academic performance has improved considerably. This has motivated the school to maintain the vocational program to improve the academic performance of students with special needs at school.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of research in the form of interviews and observations that have been made, it can be concluded that children with special needs can also develop their abilities both in the academic and non-academic fields. This is proven by Sheila, a student of SLB BCG Sumber Dharma who is diagnosed with mild disability. Besides having a talent in handicrafts, Sheila is very active and diligent in class. Every time there is a handicraft agenda, Sheila's enthusiasm for learning increases and can support academic achievement at school.

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