

THE APPLICATION OF MONTESSORI PRINTED MATERIAL TO IMPROVE THE READING ABILITY OF PRESCHOOL STUDENTS WITH SLD

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Abstract: The purpose of this case study research was to observe and describe preschool students' reading ability after being taught with Montessori printed material. The writer wanted to know whether or not there was any improvement in the student's reading ability after six months of the material application. The material was applied to teach the student from July up to December 2022. The research area was one of the bilingual preschools in Banyuwangi and the participants were a teacher and a 7-year-old student of kindergarten 2 (K2) with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Observation and interviews were done to obtain the data. The writer then developed a narrative to describe the findings. It was revealed that the student could read simple words with two syllables smoothly in six months. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the utilization of Montessori printed material has demonstrated a positive impact on improving the reading abilities of students with SLD over a six-month period. However, the student still got difficulty focusing while reading the material, especially when he was reading with his friends. It shows that the process of assisting the student to improve his reading ability needs attention and patience. Moreover, long-term training for teachers is needed to increase teachers' understanding of inclusive education, how to deal with students with special needs accurately, and how to get their parents involved in their children's learning.

Keywords: inclusive education, preschool student, reading ability, SLD

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education promotes active participation of children with special needs in the preschool education process, aiming to foster their engagement and inclusion (Özsirkıntı and Akay, 2019). The process of implementing inclusive education necessitates careful attention, consistent effort, and patience (Bulut, 2021). Kalinina et al. (2022) states that in early childhood education, an inclusive setting safeguards children from segregation and shields them from negative attitudes exhibited by others.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the topic of inclusive education, exploring various aspects across different institutional and proficiency levels. However, upon reviewing the existing research, it became evident that there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the utilization of printed material specifically for students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Consequently, this study aims to address this gap by focusing on the application of Montessori printed material for preschool students with SLD. The writer assumes the role of an observer, ensuring impartiality by refraining from direct involvement in the teaching and learning process.

Literature Review

Inclusive Education

According to UNICEF (2023), inclusive education entails the inclusion of all children, including those with disabilities and speakers of minority languages, in the same classrooms and schools, providing equal learning opportunities for historically marginalized groups. Meanwhile, Okongo et al. (2015) states that inclusive education involves adapting the home, school, and broader community to create an accommodating environment for individuals with special needs.

Preschool Students

Zabeli and Gjelij (2020) categorize the preschool age into two groups: children from birth to five years old are considered part of preschool education, while children aged five to six attend pre-primary or preparatory education. According to Oğuzkan and Oral (1995, cited in Bulut, 2021), preschool students refer to children from birth until the start of primary school.

Specific Learning Disabilities

Yılmaz and Melekoğlu (2022) provide a broad definition of specific learning disabilities (SLD) as a diverse range of disorders exhibited by individuals with special needs. SLD encompasses difficulties in reading, writing, and mathematics. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2023), SLD is characterized as neurodevelopmental disorders that are commonly identified in early school years but may also be identified later in adulthood.

Previous Studies

Many experts have conducted research on inclusive education due to its current significance as an important topic. The research conducted by Okongo et al. (2015) sought to determine the impact of the availability of teaching and learning resources on the implementation of inclusive education in pre-school centers located in Nyamira North sub-county. The study suggests that adequate resources and increased funding for Special Needs Education materials are recommended for effective implementation.

Southward and Goo (2019) conducted a study to assess the efficacy of a repeated reading intervention for secondary-level students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities. The visual analysis of the data revealed that repeated reading had a beneficial impact on the students' oral reading fluency, particularly with passages they had not previously practiced.

In Chu's (2021) study, the focus was on investigating the implementation process of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) practices within inclusive settings for young children with disabilities. The results indicate that the presence of professional support and a collective sense of teaching efficacy play pivotal roles in successfully implementing CRT practices in inclusive environments.

In their research, Murray, Brown, and Barton (2021) aimed to gain insights into the implementation of Montessori principles in a distance-learning environment. Overall, the study suggests that Montessori distance-learning arrangements aimed to strike a balance between virtual experiences and offline engagement.

Tonegawa (2022) conducted a study to investigate the current implementation of inclusive education for children with disabilities. The research findings indicated that special schools successfully addressed the students' requirements through the provision of life-skills courses, additional study time, and the creation of a safe learning environment.

Yılmaz and Melekoğlu (2022) conducted a study with the aim of creating a reading comprehension program specifically designed for second, third, and fourth grade students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). The program, developed as printed material, incorporated a variety of text types including expository and narrative texts, as well as poems. The research indicated that primary school programs utilizing these materials facilitated the acquisition of certain reading comprehension skills among the students.

METHODS

Research Context

The research was conducted in bilingual preschool located in Jajag, Banyuwangi, where both English and Indonesian are used for communication and instruction. Prior to commencing the research, the writer sought permission from the head of foundation and principal of the school. Once approval was obtained, the writer established contact with the teacher, whose class was observed for data collection, marking the beginning of the research process.

Research Design

The objective of this research was to observe and describe the reading ability of preschool student who was taught using Montessori printed material. To achieve this purpose, the writer opted for a case study design. A case study involves a comprehensive and in-depth examination and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriam, 1998). It is highly valuable for investigating and gaining a comprehensive understanding of a specific phenomenon within a particular area (Kumar, 2011).

According to Yin (2003), there is no universally accepted structure for case study reports. Bassey (1999) suggests that the investigation technique employed in case studies can vary and encompass both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Research Participant

The participants in this research included one Bahasa Indonesia teacher and one student diagnosed with SLD in that school. Both the teacher and the student were selected using purposive sampling as the writer held the belief that they possessed the potential to provide adequate information (Mack et al., 2005; Kumar, 2011).

Data Collection Method

To collect the data for this study, a combination of observation and interviews was employed. According to Yin (2003), case studies often rely on direct observation as a means of gathering evidence. Thus, in this particular study, the primary data collection method utilized was observation. Additionally, face-to-face interviews were conducted to further supplement the data-gathering process.

Data Analysis Method

The writer took brief notes during the observation to capture key interactions, and shortly after completing the observation, detailed notes were made in narrative form to describe the findings in depth. Additionally, the writer incorporated the results obtained from interviewing the teacher into the narrative description.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results revealed significant improvement in the student's reading skills after six months of using Montessori printed material. The student demonstrated the ability to read simple two-syllable words fluently within this timeframe. To enhance the teaching and learning process, the student attended additional resource room sessions twice a week, lasting 45 minutes each. These sessions were found to be effective in supporting both the teacher and the student (Yazçayır and Gürgür, 2021). The teacher noted that the duration of each session was sufficient, as longer periods could lead to student disengagement. During the resource room meetings, the teacher focused on teaching the student to read and write simple words.

The teacher utilized a Montessori book as a primary teaching resource, which contained familiar pictures and corresponding vocabulary. To promote accurate reading, the teacher instructed the student to underline each word based on its syllables, ensuring no letters were left unread. Considering the student's difficulty in maintaining focus with multiple materials present, the teacher provided only one page of the book per session. Additionally, when the student faced challenges concentrating, the teacher implemented a technique where

the student closed their eyes and counted slowly from one to ten. This strategy effectively helped the student regain focus.

However, despite the progress observed, the student still experienced difficulty maintaining focus while reading, especially when reading with peers in the classroom. Given the limited training the teacher received in dealing with students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) and the time constraints of the resource room sessions, the involvement of the student's parents at home became crucial. Parental involvement has been shown to play a vital role in supporting their child's educational progress (Baş, 2022). Moreover, the teacher faced challenges in effectively addressing the student's needs without active parental participation (Yetkin, Orum-Çattık, and Çattık, 2022). These findings underscore the importance of continued support from both teachers and parents in facilitating the improvement of students with SLD in their reading abilities.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the utilization of Montessori printed material has demonstrated a positive impact on improving the reading abilities of students with SLD over a six-month period. The process of supporting students in enhancing their reading skills requires the dedicated attention, proper treatment, and patience of teachers. However, it is essential for teachers to receive further training in this field to address any feelings of inadequacy and to enhance their abilities in working with students with special needs (Leblebici and Türkan, 2021; Vural, Pişkin, and Durmuşoğlu, 2021).

To ensure effective implementation of inclusive education, schools should prioritize providing long-term training programs for teachers. Such training initiatives aim to enhance teachers' understanding of inclusive education principles, equip them with accurate strategies to cater to students with special needs, and foster meaningful parental involvement in their children's learning (Duncan, Punch, and Croce, 2021; Alharbi, 2022; Efendi et al., 2022). By investing in long-term teacher training, we can anticipate an improvement in their self-efficacy, attitudes, skills, and knowledge, all of which are crucial components of the inclusive education process (Hoskin, Boyle, and Anderson, 2015; Ediyanto et al., 2021; Yakut, 2021; Donath et al., 2023).

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