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SPECIAL FOUNDATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN LEARNING

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental right for all citizens, including children with special needs (ABK), as mandated by Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution. However, the implementation of education for students with intellectual disabilities (tunagrahita) requires specific approaches and strategies due to intellectual and adaptive behavioral barriers. This study aims to describe the role of special education teachers in building conceptual and practical foundations, as well as implementing educational services tailored to the characteristics of students with intellectual disabilities. This study highlights the importance of teachers' understanding of special learning principles-including principles of affection, individual services, readiness, demonstration, motivation, group work, skills, and attitude cultivation-as a foundation for designing effective learning programs. The main problem identified is that many teachers and schools have not yet provided appropriate educational services due to a lack of knowledge in recognizing the characteristics and classification of intellectual disabilities (mild, moderate, severe, and profound). Through an analysis of special service needs, this article emphasizes that teachers play a crucial role in designing modified learning strategies, media, and evaluations. The findings indicate that teachers' mastery of competencies in understanding special foundations and the varied needs of students with intellectual disabilities is crucial for the success of students' social and academic adaptation, enabling them to achieve optimal and independent development.

Keywords: special education; teacher; students with intellectual disabilities; instructional strategies; educational services

1. Introduction

Education is every citizen's right, as mandated in Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution. This right also encompasses education for students with special needs. Implementing education for students with special needs naturally differs from implementing education for general students. Therefore, careful planning is required, particularly in determining appropriate learning approaches and strategies, so that the educational process can take place optimally.

Children with special needs require specific educational services that differ from those of average children due to barriers in their learning and development. Educational services for children with special needs must be tailored to each student's learning needs, abilities, characteristics, and individual conditions. Consequently, the preparation of learning programs must be grounded in strong foundations to help students develop their potential to the fullest.

The development of learning approaches for students with special needs must adhere to several core principles: (1) affection, (2) individual service, (3) readiness, (4) demonstration, (5) motivation, (6) group work, (7) skills acquisition, and (8) the cultivation

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and refinement of attitudes (Efendi, 2006). These principles serve as an essential foundation for educational practitioners in designing learning programs suitable for children with special needs, including students with intellectual disabilities.

Students with intellectual disabilities experience limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, necessitating special education and services to support their developmental milestones. Properly designed special needs programs can help students adapt to their surrounding environment, minimize barriers, and enhance their ability to complete tasks, interact, and communicate. However, developmental delays in intelligence can cause these students to face various obstacles in meeting daily needs. The degree to which these needs are met depends on the severity of the intellectual disability and the support provided by the environment.

This situation presents a challenge in delivering educational services tailored to the individual needs of students with intellectual disabilities. In reality, many teachers and schools do not fully understand or provide appropriate special education services due to limited knowledge in recognizing the traits and characteristics of intellectual disabilities. Therefore, enhancing knowledge and skills through specialized training for both active and prospective teachers is essential to identify the characteristics, traits, and educational needs of students with intellectual disabilities.

Generally, students with intellectual disabilities can be classified based on their intelligence levels: mild intellectual disability (IQ range 50–70), moderate intellectual disability (IQ range 35–49), and severe or profound intellectual disability (IQ below 35). This variation demonstrates that each student has unique needs and capabilities. Consequently, educational services with specialized approaches are crucial to address each student's specific requirements.

The degree of intellectual disability directly impacts the learning process. The more severe the impairment, the greater the support and instructional adjustments required. In this context, special education teachers must possess the skills to comprehend the principles and types of educational services for students with intellectual disabilities. Teachers must also be capable of formulating learning strategies, selecting appropriate media, and determining suitable evaluation methods. Delivering appropriate educational services is expected to help students with intellectual disabilities develop optimally across academic, skill, social, communication, and independence domains.

2. Method

Based on the background description, education for students with intellectual disabilities requires special attention, particularly in choosing approaches, strategies, media, and evaluation forms that align with their characteristics and needs. A deeper examination of education for children with intellectual disabilities is essential to provide a comprehensive picture of appropriate educational services that support their development. Therefore, this article discusses education for children with intellectual disabilities based on relevant research findings and scientific literature.

To obtain comprehensive information, this article was prepared using a qualitative approach with a library research method. Library research involves collecting, examining, and

analyzing information from relevant sources (Sugiyono, 2013). The secondary data used in this article were obtained from previous studies, books, scientific articles, and other literature relevant to education for children with intellectual disabilities.

The data collection process involved searching and gathering relevant literature. Once collected, data reduction was performed by selecting, sorting, and identifying information directly related to the focus of the discussion while discarding irrelevant data. The selected data were then presented descriptively and analytically. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the analysis of the presented data.

This method was selected because it aligns with the purpose of the article, which is to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics, needs, approaches, strategies, and types of educational services appropriate for children with intellectual disabilities through a comprehensive review of available literature.

- Formulating the research questions This study reveals 2 questions as follows: How to improve special education services for students with intellectual disabilities in learning.
- Searching for references (studies) Literature search in this study uses various indexed international journal articles.
- Selecting references The author understands the abstract and identifies the relationship of variables or issues with research keywords. Relevant journal articles can be used to be examined more deeply to answer the research questions. The following is an inventory of articles used in this Systematic Literature Review.
- Extracting data Using a form to filter and write down what interesting things need to be revealed from the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

Based on the literature review, several findings were identified regarding the characteristics, social life, educational services, and learning strategies for children with intellectual disabilities.

Children with intellectual disabilities are defined as individuals with significantly below-average intellectual capability, characterized by limited intelligence functions and impairments in social interaction. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) defines intellectual disability as a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning (IQ 70–85 or below) and in adaptive behavior. In Indonesia, experts commonly classify intellectual disabilities into three major categories: mild, moderate, and severe/profound.

Soemantri (2007) states that general characteristics of individuals with intellectual disabilities include: (1) intellectual limitations, (2) social limitations, and (3) limitations in other mental functions. These conditions require specialized educational programs distinct from those designed for neurotypical children.

Table 1. Classification and Characteristics of Intellectual Disabilities

Category	IQ Range	Primary Characteristics
Mild Intellectual Disability	50–70	Mild intellectual limitation; capable of learning basic academic and life skills
Moderate Intellectual Disability	35–49	Moderate intellectual limitation; requires intensive guidance and training
Severe & Profound Intellectual Disability	<35	Severe intellectual limitation; requires continuous full support and care

The general characteristics of children with intellectual disabilities encompass:

- Intellectual limitations: Intellectual functioning significantly below average (IQ ≤ 70–84).
- Social limitations: Difficulty in interacting and adapting to the social environment.
- Emotional disturbances: Easily disturbed emotions, frequently exhibiting anger or crying.
- Low self-confidence: Resulting from repeated failures in social interactions.
- Weak memory: Short-term memory limitations; easily forgetting recently performed tasks.
- Language barriers: Difficulty understanding spoken language, requiring repeated explanations.
- Academic learning difficulties: Low academic capability requiring intensive, structured support.

Social life is a fundamental aspect of human life because humans are social creatures who depend on each other. However, children with intellectual disabilities experience various barriers in social life, including:

- Difficulty socializing with peers. Children with intellectual disabilities find it difficult to socialize with other friends due to limitations in social interaction.
- Negative thoughts toward peers. Children with intellectual disabilities think that no friends like them and no friends enjoy playing with them.
- Difficulty trusting others. Children with intellectual disabilities do not easily trust people; however, if that person has treated them well or given them something they like, they will become close friends with that person and always remember the good things others have done for them.
- High dependence on those closest to them. A lack of self-confidence causes children with intellectual disabilities to find it difficult not to depend on those closest to them.
- Repeated failure in socializing. Failures in socializing cause their mental state and self-confidence to decrease further.

- Excessive emotional reactions. Because the emotions of children with intellectual disabilities are easily disturbed, when friends tease or bother them, they will respond with anger accompanied by crying.
- Weak memory. Children with intellectual disabilities have a weak memory, so when doing something or placing something, a few hours later they will forget what they have done.
- Lack of care for others. What other people do will have no effect unless it concerns themselves.
- Language limitations. Children with intellectual disabilities find it difficult to understand or digest words spoken by others to them, thus requiring repeated explanations.

Referring to Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 5 paragraph (1) states that every citizen has an equal right to obtain quality education. Paragraph (2) emphasizes that citizens who have physical, emotional, mental, intellectual, and/or social abnormalities are entitled to special education. Thus, Indonesia has given attention to citizens with special needs to obtain an education equal to people in general. Children with intellectual disabilities greatly require special education and services that differ from children in general. There are several special education and services provided for children with intellectual disabilities, namely:

Table 2. Types of Educational Services for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

No	Service Type	Description
1	Special School (SLB-C/C1)	Specialized education in a dedicated school setting. SLB-C serves mild intellectual disability, while SLB-C1 serves moderate to severe intellectual disability.
2	Home Schooling Program	Home-based learning assisted by special education teachers or therapists who conduct tailored home visits.
3	Inclusive Education	Students with intellectual disabilities learn in regular schools alongside peers, supported by regular teachers and special education teachers.

3.2 Discussion

Rearranging the learning environment is not only limited to activities using materials tailored to the conditions of children with intellectual disabilities, but also includes studies to develop their perception and sensory faculties. Environmental conditioning not only allows the child to develop in terms of movement, but they also learn continuously to develop other potentials. Therefore, they require psychological strength to practice practical matters. Thus, the learning method for children with intellectual disabilities cannot be guided step-by-step as adults teach normal children, because they are not normal children or adults. Furthermore,

Theodor Ballauf (1989:42) explains that a good environment for children with intellectual disabilities is as follows: "For the environment of children with intellectual disabilities, developmental tools need to be prepared (which are determined based on well-founded scientific experiences and not based on philosophical ideas), then giving freedom to the child to develop with these tools. In this way, every child with an intellectual disability will find their own choice and enjoy exercises using materials they like, which little by little can guide their thinking development." The meaning of environment for the education of children with intellectual disabilities has long been recognized. We ourselves always create for ourselves an environment that suits us and can provide benefits for our self-development. This environment consistently shapes us, we adapt to it, and we change ourselves. On the other hand, the environment for children with intellectual disabilities is somewhat different, because it is created according to the child's needs; it must not dominate the child, but must be truly harmonious with the child's needs. That is the importance of creating an environment adapted to the conditions of children with intellectual disabilities, where they can find tools useful for their development.

Learning strategies that emphasize active student participation, for example, will prioritize the use of discussion, seminar, or group work methods rather than lecture methods. In other words, learning strategies are also linked to learning models and methods.

Learning Models A learning model that can possibly be applied in teaching children with intellectual disabilities is the Behavioral Model (The Behavioural Model). By using this model, learning activities for children with intellectual disabilities can take place according to the learning stages that have been strictly arranged by the teacher in line with the individual child's level of ability. In addition, through this model, reinforcement from the teacher is constantly obtained by the child, so that children with intellectual disabilities whose mental development is delayed can increase their participation in teaching and learning activities through continuous guidance and reinforcement according to the child's condition individually.

Determining Learning Strategies An effective and efficient learning strategy for all types of learning objectives, instructional materials, and student characteristics actually does not exist; because each learning strategy has its own advantages and disadvantages. Thus, in learning strategies, four components should be considered as stated by Romiszowski A.J. (1984:16), namely "(1) learning objectives, (2) student characteristics, (3) available resources and facilities, and (4) characteristics of the learning strategy itself". The learning strategy used to achieve learning objectives to increase motor and perceptual skills will differ from the learning strategy used to achieve learning objectives that provide opportunities for students to possess mathematical thinking abilities. Similarly, for students with low intellectual abilities such as children with intellectual disabilities, the learning strategy used will differ from students who are bright and creative.

Learning Strategies for the Education of Students with Intellectual Disabilities Learning strategies in the education of children with intellectual disabilities are in principle not much different in implementation from education in general. In essence, the learning strategy must pay attention to student characteristics, learning objectives, and resource availability. For children with mild and moderate intellectual disabilities, it may be more effective to use learning strategies that emphasize practice and "drill" that do not demand too

much complex thinking ability. Although strategies emphasizing repeated practice are indeed less suitable and very boring for children with high intellectual abilities, learning strategies for children with intellectual disabilities learning together with normal children in public schools will differ from learning strategies for those learning in a group of children with intellectual disabilities in a Special School for Intellectual Disabilities (SLB-C).

The role of special education teachers in the implementation of special needs programs. In the implementation of special needs programs, only the special education teacher and the student themselves are involved, because this program is already individual in nature, so the classroom teacher usually does not participate in the execution. For the implementation of programs for children with intellectual disabilities, namely self-care skills (bina diri), it is conducted in a special room, where the child usually brings their own equipment from home, such as trousers, socks, clothes, or eating utensils. The method used is usually demonstration, where the teacher provides explanations and directly demonstrates them; if the child cannot do it, the teacher will provide assistance.

The role of special education teachers in identification and assessment activities for special needs programs. Identification and assessment activities are carried out at the beginning of the new academic year, where parents who have recognized and accepted that their child has special needs can complete administrative data such as medical tests and psychological tests. Identification activities are not only carried out by special education teachers, but regular teachers also help, because if a child is not identified at the beginning, it will become increasingly visible during ongoing learning activities and consulted with special education teachers, so that an assessment is subsequently conducted. Meanwhile, for children experiencing developmental barriers in communication, social, emotional, or behavioral domains, assessments can be carried out through observation during learning activities; this also requires assistance from various parties such as parents as well as medical personnel like doctors or therapists.

The role of special education teachers in evaluation activities for special needs programs. The learning provided by special education teachers can be said to be successful if students can achieve the learning objectives well. And to know that a learning program has provided a good impact on student development is through an evaluation process. In the developmental progress evaluation process, it should measure the achievements of short-term goals that have been established. Evaluation methods include written tests, oral tests, teacher observation notes, and comparing with previous learning results. Based on the results of interviews and observations, assessment activities are quite capable of measuring the success of the applied special needs programs. Some evaluation activities are conducted after learning is completed, while others are carried out while the learning process is ongoing. In addition, the role of classroom teachers in evaluation activities is also important, because students with special needs spend most of their learning time inside the classroom while at school. Therefore, the involvement of classroom teachers and parents is very important. Parents can see the results of the program implemented at school and can apply them at home to support the success of the special needs program.

4. Conclusion

Providing educational services for students with intellectual disabilities requires a deep understanding and a solid foundation to accommodate their intellectual and adaptive behavior challenges. Given the diverse characteristics of these students, educational services must remain flexible and adaptable through curriculum modification and supportive learning environments.

Optimizing student development can be achieved by selecting suitable educational placements (such as Special Schools, home schooling, or inclusive education), employing structured strategies like the Behavioral Model, and utilizing repetitive drill techniques and educational play to enhance concrete, social, and self-care skills.

The role of the Special Education Teacher is essential across all stages, including identification, assessment, intervention implementation, and evaluation. Achieving holistic and sustainable educational success requires active collaboration among regular teachers, special educators, therapists, and parents to support students with intellectual disabilities toward achieving independence.

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