

Strategy for the Implementation of Autistic Children's Vocational Programs in Special Schools

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Abstract: This study aims to determine the strategy for implementing a vocational program for autistic children at Mitra Ananda Autism Special School. This research is qualitative research with a case study approach. Informants in this study were class teachers and vice principals. Informants were taken using the purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using interview, observation, and documentation techniques, with Miles & Huberman interactive model data analysis. The results showed that the program's implementation consisted of 1) planning, including initial ability assessment, class placement, and program preparation. 2) The learning steps include implementing the online-offline system, using time, methods, facilities, prompt-reward giving, thematic approaches, and entrepreneurship. 3) Evaluation includes evaluation of the process, results, and parent consultation.

Keywords: Autism, Strategy, Vocational

Autism is a complex neurological developmental disorder that includes disturbances in aspects of social interaction, communication, and language, as well as behavior that appears before the age of 3 years (Yuwono, 2019). This developmental disorder makes it difficult for autistic children to socialize and build relationships with other people. This is clarified by Biran and Nurhastuti (2018) that autistic children have an interest in their own world. The existence of three aspects of developmental disorders that occur greatly affects the lives of autistic children and adults. Howlin (Sarri, 2021) states that adults with autism face challenges and difficulties throughout their lives and even show poor work results in various fields.

The increasing prevalence of autistic children is not proportional to the employment rate for adults with autism, this shows that it is important to have strategies that can be done to help autistic children prepare to be able to work in the future. Based on the results of research by Baio, et al (2018), 1 in 59 children was diagnosed with autism, while the results of research by Maenner et al (2020) also showed an increase in autistic children, namely 1 in 54 children diagnosed with autism. While the employment rate for adults with autism is based on the survey results of The Australian Bureau of Statistics (Flower et al, 2019) the unemployment rate for people with autism is 31.6%. This figure is

three times the unemployment rate for other disabilities (10%) and six times the unemployment rate for non-disabled people in Australia (5.3%). Another survey result from the Office for National Statistics UK (2021) states that people with autism occupy the lowest employment rate compared to other disabilities, namely 21.7%. There is an increase in the prevalence of autism, which is not matched by the level of independence of autistic children in work, Sarri (2021) concludes that services and support, especially in vocational programs, are needed for autistic children to prepare themselves for the world of work.

Based on Prayoga's research (2014) the (vocational) skills given at the Fredofios Special School (SLB) Yogyakarta can improve motor skills and can be used as motor therapy for autistic children. Another study by Titisari (2016) that the implementation of batik skills at SLB Autism Dian Amanah Yogyakarta can improve the obedient behavior and vocational abilities of students, so that it helps in preparing themselves for the world of work.

Vocational programs are educational programs that lead to certain job skills and aim to make students capable and independent after graduating from school (Umma and Sopandi, 2021). This program is important to teach children with autism so that they can have independence in the world of

work and not always depend on others. The importance of vocational programs for autistic children is supported by the opinion of Mentari and Fatmawati (2021) that autism will grow up and not always be accompanied by parents and teachers, so they must be equipped with skills that have selling points to be able to be independent in the future. Santrock (Rezeika & Wahyuno, 2018) also states that autistic children are reluctant to interact and communicate with other people who make it seem like they are living in their own world, so there is a vocational program planning that can help them explore their achievements, potential, and career in the future.

In Indonesia, the implementation of vocational programs is also given to children with autism through formal education at special schools, although in practice there are still problems. Hiller, Fish, Cloppert, & Beversdorf (Prayogo, 2019) stated that efforts to implement vocational programs for autistic children still often fail.

The results of a preliminary study conducted in several special schools that handle autism in Surakarta show that not all special schools carry out vocational programs for autistic children. This condition has become increasingly difficult after the Covid-19 pandemic, new habits related to health protocols, and the concerns of parents and teachers about the health conditions of students. In addition, the teacher admitted that he still had difficulty determining the type of vocational program that could be given to autistic children, considering that autistic children have different characteristics and developmental stages.

Based on the problems that occur, it is necessary to have a strategy so that vocational programs can still be implemented for children with autism. The existence of a good learning strategy can help teachers ensure that the implementation of vocational programs is carried out properly, effectively, and efficiently while still instilling meaningful learning for students. This is in line with Majid's (2016) opinion that the selection of learning strategies aims to assist students in carrying out learning activities effectively and efficiently.

METHOD

This research is qualitative research with a case study research design. The sampling technique was

purposive sampling. The informants in this study were three classroom teachers and one deputy principal at SLB Autism Mitra Ananda. Data collection techniques include interviews conducted with four informants, observation of the implementation of vocational programs in three classes, and documentation. The data validity test technique used is a triangulation of sources, methods, and time, as well as a member check. Meanwhile, data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman data analysis model which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is done by sorting the information and interview results. The result of data reduction is presented so that it is easy to understand and draw conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

a. Vocational Program Planning

The process of implementing vocational programs starts with planning. The planning process includes an assessment of the initial abilities of students, class division, and the preparation of programs based on the potential of students.

b. Initial Ability Assessment

The initial ability assessment is the initial strategy carried out by the school to determine the ability of students. The initial ability assessment aims to make it easier for teachers to design educational programs needed by students. The assessment is carried out by a team of experts consisting of orthopedagogie, psychologists, and therapists. The assessments carried out included assessments of gross and fine motor skills, cognitive abilities, self-development abilities, and children's behavior. In addition, in this assessment stage, interviews were also conducted regarding the history of the child's growth and development from the pregnancy to the treatment and therapy that had been carried out. The results of this initial assessment produce data on the ability and history of children's growth and development that have been carried out by a team of experts to be used for class placement or study groups according to the abilities and educational programs of students.

c. Class Placement

The next stage of the planning process is class placement. Placement of classes or study groups at Autism Mitra Ananda Special School is carried out according to the results of the initial ability assessment of students. The strategy used in a class division for students is different from that used in other schools, namely that it is based on the abilities and needs of each individual's educational program, not on the level of education and age of the students. There are three categories of study group division which include basic classes, intermediate classes (focused on academics and skills), and classes that only focus on skills.

This research was conducted in a skills class (vocational), which consisted of two male classes and one female skill class. These three skill classes have different programs and education, namely, there is one skill class that is only filled by female students, and the program focuses on self-development and women's skills. The second class is the male skill class, which is still classified as having intermediate abilities, so the academic portion and skills provided are the same. The third class is the men's skills class, which only focuses on the skills program.

d. Interest and Ability Assessment

The vocational program at Autism Mitra Ananda Special School is a class program given to students based on the ability of students. The determination of the type of vocational program is carried out based on an assessment carried out by the teacher by paying attention to the daily lives of students and the development of their abilities during the implementation of activities in the classroom so that they can find out the interests and abilities of students.

This interest and ability assessment is carried out continuously, even during program implementation. This is due to the difficulty of knowing the interests and abilities of students, so the teacher provides several programs that students can do according to their abilities and to explore their potential and interests.

e. Teacher Arranges Program

The skills program provided is not only one type of skill, but through several programs provided, the teacher can find out the interests and potential of students who are more dominant to be developed. In preparing skills programs, especially for children with autism, teachers have things that must be considered, which include security,

convenience, and land/place of implementation. The types of skills taught at SLB Autism Mitra Ananda are simple skills such as washing shoes, packing snacks, washing cars, and making simple meals. The selection of this type of skill is adjusted to the abilities of autistic students at Mitra Ananda Autism Special School.

The preparation of the program does not only consider the type of program to be implemented, but also the implementing teachers, the curriculum used and the preparation of the lesson plans so that learning can run according to the goals that have been set. This program is implemented by classroom teachers, there are no special skills teachers who teach vocational to students. In practice, one class has 2 to 3 teachers and/or therapists with 4 to 5 students in the class, this is to make it easier for teachers to carry out optimal supervision and learning on autistic students who have different characteristics. The therapist is tasked with assisting teachers in learning, especially for students who still need therapy.

The curriculum used in the vocational program is the 2013 curriculum, which is modified to suit the conditions of students, while also adjusting to the situation and conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. In implementing the program, teachers develop RPP skills with a 1-sheet RPP model in accordance with the recommendations of the Minister of Education and Culture on simplifying RPP. Vocational program RPP is not only used in one lesson but can be used for an unlimited time because the implementation is repeated until students are able to complete the program completely and independently.

f. Learning Steps (Implementation)

Steps for learning or implementing vocational programs at Autism Mitra Ananda Special School are carried out online and offline. The selection of this implementation strategy is carried out by taking into account the abilities of students. Vocational programs began to be implemented again after the Covid-19 pandemic, including making salted eggs, washing shoes and packing snacks.

The implementation of offline vocational programs is carried out by direct practice, while the implementation of vocational programs using the online method is a new method that was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic.

g. Online Implementation

The implementation of vocational programs during the Covid-19 pandemic is carried out by taking into account the development of cases of the

spread of the Coronavirus, the health conditions of students and teachers, permission from parents and regulations from the government regarding the implementation of learning during the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the strategies used by teachers in implementing vocational programs is by implementing an online learning system. Online learning is carried out by teachers by providing material and practical assignments that have been previously taught in schools. Students send the results of vocational practice videos to teachers via Whatsapp Messenger.

Learning time in vocational programs with an online system is carried out with flexible times, meaning that students have time freedom in their work. This is because in the implementation of vocational programs there needs to be parental supervision, so that time flexibility and parental cooperation are needed in the implementation and success of online vocational learning..

h. Offline Implementation

The vocational program was carried out offline during the Covid-19 pandemic, only after the Limited Face-to-face Meeting (PTMT) was held. The implementation of this program is carried out by observing strict health protocols and complying with applicable regulations.

The time for implementing vocational programs, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, offline experienced a reduction in learning time. This is due to the anticipation of teachers and parents in preventing the spread of the Corona virus so that teachers must be able to divide their time in utilizing learning time. Although the implementation of vocational programs does not always require students to continue working, there is still free time while waiting for the cooking process in the culinary arts. This free time is used by the teacher to carry out activities outside the vocational program with the aim that there is no free time. This free time is used by the teacher to invite students to do other activities such as fishing, sensory and motor training in the school garden.

In practice, teachers teach vocational programs with direct practice and provide opportunities for students to take part in each stage of the vocational program. Teachers use direct learning strategies that are teacher-centered and ensure the involvement of students. While the learning methods used are demonstration methods and problem based learning.

Prompts and rewards are also given to be used in the implementation of the program. Prompts are carried out verbally, namely by directing or motivating students and touching, besides that, rewards are carried out with praise every time students are able to complete tasks properly and correctly.

The implementation of vocational programs using the 2013 curriculum cannot be separated from the thematic approach. The thematic approach makes it easier for teachers to implement other subject matter in practice, such as mathematics for calculating materials and Indonesian in learning to read and write.

The implementation of vocational programs does not only end in the implementation process, but also continues with entrepreneurship programs to introduce students to work practices. Entrepreneurship is carried out by peddling, selling products, or providing services to school residents. Students learn to practice buying and selling and manage finances. From the sales proceeds which are then handed over to the class teacher.

The facilities and infrastructure used at Mitra Ananda Autism Special School can support the implementation of vocational programs. The selection of facilities and or media in the implementation of programs for autism is very important, especially in terms of security and supervision in its use.

i. Program Implementation Evaluation

Evaluation of vocational programs for children with autism can be done during the learning process or at the end of learning. The selection of vocational program evaluation methods is adjusted to the abilities of students. Evaluation at Mitra Ananda Autism Special School includes process evaluation, evaluation of results and consultation with parents

j. Process Evaluation

Process evaluation is carried out by providing direct evaluation in the implementation of the program which can be in the form of verbal prompts and touch.

k. Result Evaluation

Evaluation and assessment based on the results of the production of vocational learning that has been carried out.

l. Consultation with Parents

Consultation with parents regarding the development of students and the sustainability of the program to be implemented. Use the contact book to report activities to parents on a daily basis.

In the implementation of the vocational program, teachers experienced several obstacles, such as ineffective lesson hours, different conditions for students, and parental concerns about implementing the program with PTM after the Covid-19 pandemic.

DISCUSSION

An initial assessment is needed in order to determine the abilities, potential, and needs of students. The results of this assessment are used to make decisions about the services to be provided to children with autism (Sofyan & Yuwono, 2014). Furthermore, Purnomo and Haryana (2018) explain that the assessment process is an activity to find more accurate information related to children's strengths, weaknesses, and difficulties, which will later aim to determine placement and educational programs or assistance services needed for autistic students. The assessment process carried out at SLB Autism Mitra Ananda is in accordance with Levinson's transdisciplinary transition model, the initial step in planning the transition of students is an assessment of student skills and individual needs, the assessment includes cognitive, academic, social, independence, and physical conditions.

Class division aims to facilitate teachers' implementation of learning according to the abilities and conditions of students. Rejokirono (2020) explains that the implementation of vocational programs can be based on groups learning the same type of skills, although at different grade levels, and that the material provided is adjusted to the abilities of each student. This application is also strengthened by Megawati (2020) that the class division for autism is adjusted based on individual abilities, not on class or age, because each autistic individual has different conditions.

The determination of the type of skills and the preparation of the program are carried out by the class teacher based on the development of students in the class. This is in accordance with the research results of Muffidah, Efendi and Sulthoni (2019) that in determining the types of skills that are suitable for the condition of students, teachers do not conduct a written assessment, the assessment is carried out by observing the characteristics and abilities of students. Challen (2021) also states that vocational assessments can be carried out in various ways, namely track reports, interviews, student observations, learning styles, abilities, motivational assessments, behavior, life skills, assessments in

environmental situations which in practice not all of these assessments must be carried out.

The results of Mutiah's research (2021) state that vocational assessments to determine the type of skills are carried out by skills class teachers and involve parents so that the program can run smoothly in accordance with the goals that have been determined together. In addition to this, the selection of the type of skill takes into account convenience, and gender. The determination of the types of skills in the Mitra Ananda Autism Special School is in line with the results of Prayogo (2019) research that in developing the types of skills based on the following considerations (a) parental requests based on daily observations at home and the condition of students (b) conformity to gender (c) ease for students to follow.

The type of skill given is not just one type of skill, but several types of skills to find out the interests and talents of students and are carried out according to their abilities. Challen (2021) also states that the results of vocational assessments do not require pursuing one career skill, but on the contrary, the results of vocational assessments suggest various options that might interest students, which can be studied more deeply and can help identify students' interests and career development.

Suryani, et al (2020) argue that the selection of the types of skills developed in SLB is the authority of the school based on the needs of students and the potential of the school. The potential of schools that are intended based on the implementation of vocational programs at SLB Autism Mitra Ananda is the ability of schools to provide services to students through the types of skills they develop. The selection of this class teacher is due to the characteristics of autistic children, who have to adapt again if they are with other teachers and make students confused and have tantrums due to teacher changes. This condition is in accordance with the opinion of Yuwono (2019) that autistic children have rigid routine behavior, namely the behavior of autistic children who tend to follow a certain pattern or sequence and if the pattern changes, some autistic children show unpreparedness for the change.

The implementation of the skills program is also inseparable from the curriculum and lesson plans. The curriculum used is the 2013 curriculum which is modified according to the abilities of each individual student. Each student has a target ability of each - although through the type of skills (vocational) the same. According to Jayanti (2014) children with special needs are a diversity that has different levels of severity, so it is necessary to have

a variety of educational services, one of which is a learning strategy that is in accordance with the conditions and needs of students or the so-called individual learning program (PPI). Based on this, the implementation of the vocational program at SLB Autism Mitra Ananda has implemented the PPI although not in writing.

The role of parents has an important role in the success of learning for autistic children. The results of Primasari and Suprena's research (2020) show that the role of parents in assisting children regularly during online learning and home visits and inviting activities is very important and can help autistic children understand their routines.

The implementation of the vocational program is carried out using demonstration methods, modeling and best learning projects. The choice of this learning method is given to the characteristics of students who mostly have a visual learning style so that learning uses a lot of direct practice. The results of research by Yolanda and Mukhlis (2020) stated that the highest learning style of autistic students was the visual learning style with an average value of 80%.

Autistic children have different abilities and characteristics so that teachers must adjust in giving assignments and delivery methods for each student. The teacher maximizes by using gestures and commands to students who do not understand communication with language. Meanwhile, students who are able to understand the teacher's language use verbal and invite students to discuss. Achmad and Jeremy (2019) in their findings reveal that the communication patterns of teachers and children with autism use verbal communication and non-verbal communication that are adapted to the

absorption and understanding abilities of each student.

Rejokirono (2020) explains that the implementation of vocational programs can use a functional thematic approach by selecting functional materials that are by the types of skills that are integrated with vocational learning which aims to make academic materials able to support skill competencies.

The implementation of vocational programs is also integrated with entrepreneurship subjects such as those in the 2013 curriculum. The results of snack packaging, food processing, and salted egg making not only stop the production process but also provide opportunities for students to learn entrepreneurship. Priyanti, Sudariyah, Mahmudah, et al (2016) explain that entrepreneurship can be integrated through vocational activities that emphasize marketable practices and production results.

Kurniati (2016) that in the concept of special education adequate learning facilities must be recreational (providing a play space for autistic children), functional (supporting integrated learning), guidance (pictures and practical instructions), and security (storage and supervision of use).

In the implementation of the evaluation of the vocational program, Zuliensyah & Hasan (2018) stated that evaluation in the vocational program can be done by evaluating the work and providing assistance to students. In addition, Sarimanah, Wasliman, and Mulyadi (2020) stated that the assessment during the learning process includes attitudes toward the material, teachers, and the learning process which can be seen in report cards and product results.

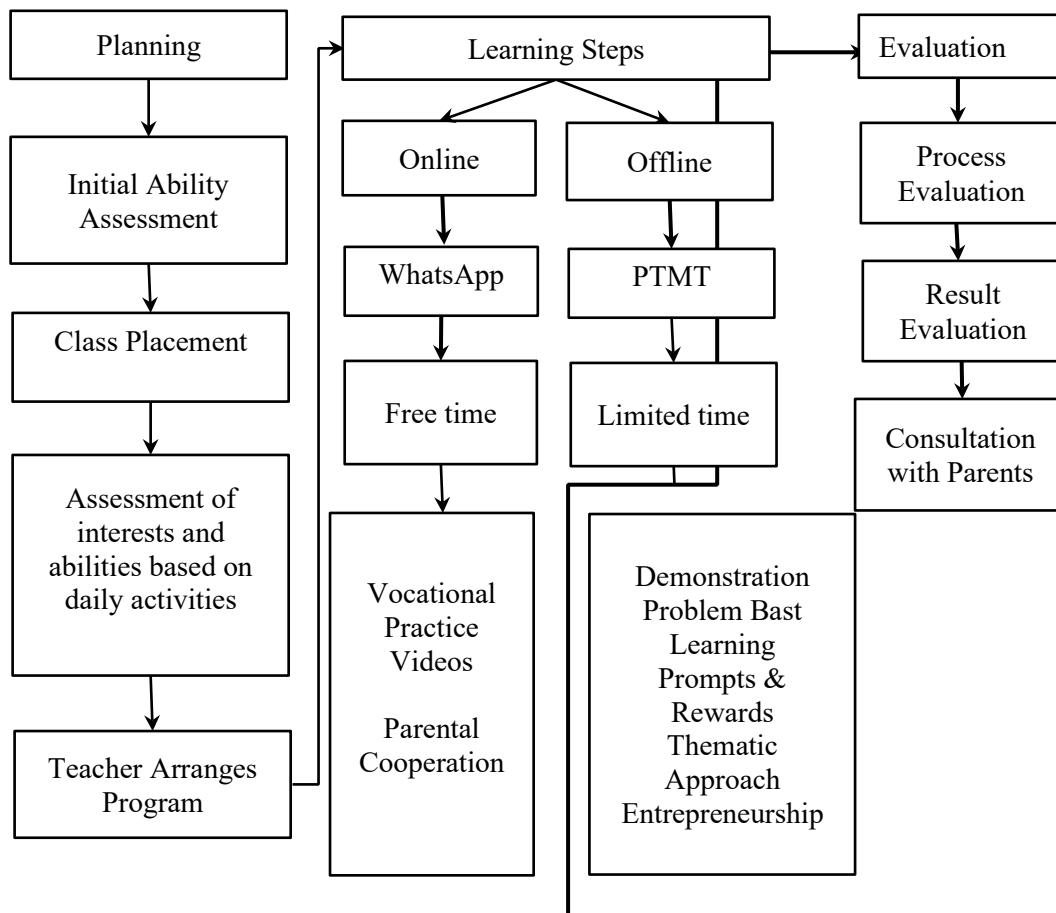


Figure 1. Model of Autism Vocational Program Implementation Pattern

Meanwhile, Rezeika & Wahyuno (2018) also stated that the evaluation of work results is indicated by daily processes, exams, and practices. Rezeika & Wahyuno (2018) stated that program evaluation can be carried out by holding joint meetings between teachers, school principals, and guardians of students.

In addition, an interesting finding in the evaluation of learning outcomes is the existence of a liaison book between teachers and parents which is given every day so that parents can monitor the activities and development of students through the book and can develop the skills that have been taught at school. The following is a model of the pattern of teacher strategies at the Mitra Ananda Autism Special School in implementing vocational programs for autistic children).

CONCLUSION

The teacher's strategy in implementing vocational programs at SLB Autism Mitra Ananda is divided into three parts, namely planning which includes an initial ability assessment, determining

study groups, determining the type and preparation of programs to selecting teachers and the curriculum used. Meanwhile, in the learning step (implementation) stage, the teacher conducts an online and offline system. The implementation of online learning is done by sending practice videos via WhatsApp by building collaboration with parents. Meanwhile, in face-to-face meetings, learning is carried out using demonstration methods, problem-based learning, giving prompts and rewards, thematic approaches and entrepreneurial practices. Evaluations given to vocational programs include process evaluation, evaluation of learning outcomes and parental consultation.

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