

The Implementation of a Pocket Book as a Family-Based Early Intervention Guide for Children with Autism

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Abstract

Early intervention plays an important role in supporting the development of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), especially through active family involvement. However, parents' limited understanding of the characteristics of autism and early support measures remains a challenge. This study aims to explore parents' needs and describe the development and implementation of a pocket guide on early intervention for children with autism as a family-based guide. The study uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques including in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies of parents of children with suspected autism and related practitioners. The developed pocketbook contains the characteristics of autistic children in terms of communication, social interaction, behavior, and sensory aspects, presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner. The pocketbook was developed based on a family-centered practice approach that places parents as key partners in the early intervention process. In addition, the pocket book is equipped with practical guidelines for parents when their children are suspected of having autism, including behavioral observation steps, early stimulation strategies at home, and directions for accessing professional services. The results of the study show that this pocket book helps improve parents' understanding, readiness, and involvement in the early support of children with autism.

Keywords: *early intervention; autism; pocket book; family-centered practice; qualitative.*

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INTRODUCTION

Research on early intervention in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) consistently shows that family involvement contributes significantly to the success of intervention (Dawson et al., 2010; Zwaigenbaum et al., 2015). Several studies emphasize that interventions based on the child's natural environment, particularly at home, have a positive impact on the communication and social interaction development of children with autism (Odom et al., 2013; Schreibman et al., 2015). In this context, parents are positioned as the main agents involved in the implementation of daily intervention strategies (Karst & Van Hecke, 2012).

The family-centered practice (FCP) approach has been widely used in early intervention and special education services because it emphasizes collaboration between professionals and families and empowers parents in decision making (Dunst et al., 2007; Espe Sherwindt, 2008). Research shows that the application of

FCP can improve parental competence, reduce parenting stress, and strengthen parent child relationships (Trivette & Dunst, 2014; Woodman et al., 2015). In interventions for children with autism, FCP has proven effective when parents are equipped with applicable knowledge and strategies (Brookman Frazier et al., 2012).

Several studies have also examined the use of educational media for parents of children with autism, such as modules written guides, and home-based training (Pickard et al., 2016; Stadnick et al., 2015). Concise print media is considered helpful for parents in understanding their children's characteristics and intervention strategies that can be carried out independently (Bearss et al., 2015). However, most of the available guides are still oriented toward professionals or are written in a format that is relatively complex for parents with diverse educational backgrounds (Ruble et al., 2013; Zablotsky et al., 2018).

In Indonesia and other developing country contexts, research on practical family-based media for early autism intervention remains limited. Existing studies tend to focus on the effectiveness of clinical therapies or the roles of teachers and therapists, while systematic investigations of simple, parent-usable media from the early indication stage of autism are still scarce.

Based on a review of previous studies, several research gaps can be identified. First, although the family-centered practice approach has been widely recommended, its implementation in the form of concise and user-friendly practical media for parents, particularly during the pre-diagnostic or early indication phase of autism, has not been sufficiently explored. Second, most available early intervention guidelines do not explicitly integrate an understanding of the characteristics of children with autism with concrete, actionable steps that parents can independently and consistently apply at home. Third, research examining the development and application of pocket books as family-based early intervention media, especially qualitative studies that explore parents' needs and experiences remains very limited.

Therefore, this study offers novelty by developing an early intervention pocket book for children with autism that is specifically designed using a family-centered practice approach, focuses on the real needs of parents, and serves as an initial guide when a child is indicated to have autism. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of the characteristics of children with autism, family-centered practice principles, and contextual practical guidance within a single, concise medium that is easily accessible to parents.

Based on the above rationale, this study aims to describe the development and implementation of a family-centered practice-based early intervention pocket book for children with autism, as well as to explore its role in assisting parents in understanding the characteristics of children with autism and providing early support when a child is indicated to have autism.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with an exploratory descriptive design. This design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of parents' needs for early intervention guidance for children with autism, as well as to describe the process of developing and implementing a pocket book based on family-centered practice. This approach allows researchers to examine phenomena contextually based on the experiences and perspectives of participants, without manipulating the research variables.

Research Procedure

The research procedure was conducted in several stages as follows:

1. Initial Needs Identification

This researcher conducted a needs assessment to map parents' understanding of the characteristics of children with autism and early support strategies. This stage aimed to identify information gaps and the types of guidance required by parents.

2. Design of the Early Intervention Pocket Book

The pocket book was developed based on the results of the needs assessment and a review of relevant literature on early autism intervention and family-centered practice. The content of the

pocket book included characteristics of children with autism, the objectives of family-based intervention, and practical guidance for parents when a child is indicated to have autism.

3. Limited Implementation of the Pocket Book

The pocket book was distributed to parents to be used as a guide for early support at home over a specified period. Parents were asked to read and apply the guidance according to the child's condition and needs.

4. Evaluation and Reflection on the Use of the Pocket Book

The researcher collected data on parents' experiences in using the pocket book, the perceived benefits, and the challenges encountered during its implementation.

Data Sources or Participants

The data sources in this study consisted of parents of young children with suspected autism spectrum disorder and related practitioners, such as special education teachers and child therapists. Participants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) parents who have young children with indications of autism or who are undergoing early intervention services, and (2) practitioners who have at least two years of experience in treating children with autism. The number of participants was adjusted according to the depth of data required to reach data saturation.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using several techniques, as follows:

1. Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

Interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions, experiences, and needs of parents and practitioners related to the characteristics of children with autism, the role of the family in early intervention, and the use of the pocket book as a guiding resource.

2. Non-Participant Observation

Observations were carried out to examine parent-child interactions and the implementation of early intervention guidance in the home environment.

3. Document Analysis

Documentation included child development records, parents' reflective notes, and other relevant supporting documents related to the early intervention process.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively by following the steps of thematic analysis. Data obtained from interviews and observations were transcribed verbatim and then coded to identify main themes. The analysis process included data reduction, code grouping, theme identification, and drawing conclusions that reflect the relationship between the characteristics of children with autism, the family-centered practice approach, and the function of the pocket book as a guide for parents. Data analysis was carried out repeatedly and simultaneously during the data collection process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study resulted in the development of an early intervention guidebook for children with autism intended for parents and teachers as primary users. The guidebook was evaluated through qualitative feedback collected from multiple respondents with diverse backgrounds, including individuals with special education knowledge, parents, and laypersons without formal training in special education.

Overall, the results indicate that the guidebook was perceived as highly informative, practical, and easy to understand. Most respondents stated that the content was concise, focused on essential topics, and presented using simple language, making it accessible for parents and beginner teachers. Several reviewers highlighted that the guidebook effectively covered key areas such as basic understanding of autism, characteristics, sensory issues, and behavioral challenges, particularly tantrums.

In terms of design, the guidebook was generally rated positively. Respondents described the visual appearance as minimalist, attractive, and not overly decorative, allowing readers to focus on the content. However, some reviewers reported visual discomfort, particularly related to color variation in the table of contents and certain pages. Suggestions included the use of softer, more consistent color tones and clearer visual hierarchy to reduce eye strain.

Despite the positive overall evaluation, constructive feedback was also identified. Reviewers noted the need for clearer explanations of autism, tantrum, and meltdown; greater consistency in terminology and numbering; better alignment between the table of contents and page content; and more detailed explanations of early identification and intervention strategies. Several respondents additionally suggested incorporating step-by-step procedures, visual support examples, and brief case illustrations to strengthen practical understanding.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the developed guidebook aligns with contemporary principles of early intervention and family-centered practice in autism education. Positive feedback regarding the use of simple and non-technical language supports previous research demonstrating that parents benefit more from practical and accessible information than from theory-heavy materials, particularly during the early stages of understanding autism (Brookman-Frazee et al., 2020; Odom et al., 2021).

Reviewers' concerns about the clarity of autism definitions reflect a well-documented issue in autism education. Parents' initial understanding of autism plays a critical role in shaping their engagement, emotional adjustment, and consistency in implementing interventions (Karst & Van Hecke, 2022; Zwaigenbaum et al., 2022). Therefore, clearer explanations supported by concrete examples are essential to prevent confusion and promote effective caregiver involvement.

A major theme emerging from the feedback relates to the explanation of tantrum and meltdown. Recent literature consistently distinguishes tantrums as goal-directed behaviors, whereas meltdowns are understood as responses to overwhelming sensory or emotional input (Mazefsky et al., 2021; Nuske et al., 2022). Insufficient differentiation between these behaviors may lead caregivers to apply inappropriate strategies, potentially exacerbating emotional dysregulation. The reviewers' feedback reinforces the importance of explicitly clarifying these concepts in parent-oriented intervention materials.

Suggestions to include step-by-step guidance for handling tantrums and meltdowns are supported by recent evidence indicating that structured, caregiver implemented interventions are more effective than general recommendations alone (Schreibman et al., 2020; Bearss et al., 2022). Procedural clarity enhances parental confidence and reduces the risk of inconsistent or potentially harmful responses.

Feedback related to sensory processing aligns with recent studies highlighting the strong association between sensory differences and emotional regulation difficulties in autistic children (Green et al., 2021; Lane et al., 2023). Sensory overload has been identified as a significant trigger for meltdowns, supporting the need for expanded sensory explanations and practical coping strategies within the guidebook.

Design related critiques regarding color usage, font size, and layout consistency reflect principles of cognitive load theory and instructional design. Research suggests that excessive visual variation can increase cognitive load and reduce comprehension among adult learners (Mayer, 2020; Sweller et al., 2023). Revising the visual presentation using softer color tones and consistent formatting is therefore expected to improve readability and user comfort.

Furthermore, reviewers' recommendations to include content on parental acceptance, emotional adjustment, and myths about autism align with family-centered intervention frameworks. Recent studies emphasize that parental mental health and acceptance significantly influence intervention effectiveness and child developmental outcomes (Rivard et al., 2021; Neece et al., 2022). Addressing psychosocial aspects alongside technical strategies strengthens the holistic value of early intervention resources.

Implications

The results of this study imply that early intervention guidebooks for children with autism should integrate clear conceptual explanations, consistent terminology, structured step-by-step intervention strategies, and user-friendly visual design. Incorporating systematic user feedback enhances both scientific rigor and practical relevance. The revised guidebook has strong potential to function as an effective resource for parents and teachers, supporting early identification, appropriate behavioral responses, and inclusive caregiving practices. This study contributes to the development of accessible, evidence-informed educational resources that bridge scientific knowledge and everyday practice in autism intervention.

CONCLUSION

This study resulted in the development of an early intervention guidebook for children with autism, intended for parents and teachers as the primary users. This guidebook is designed to bridge scientific knowledge with daily parenting and educational practices through the presentation of material that is easy to understand and relevant to the needs of users. Although the guidebook shows potential as an effective resource, this study still has limitations in terms of the depth of the material, consistency of presentation, and visual design. Therefore, further research could develop this guidebook by refining the evidence-based content, improving the visual quality, and testing its effectiveness in a broader context of use.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Herlina Yuni Setyowati, Rifqi Farabi Al-faruq : Abstract, Introduction and Method. Jihan Rahma Indah Puspa Sari, Fatma Avia Sholehah: Results, Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare no known financial conflicts of interest or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this manuscript.

DECLARATION OF ETHICS

The authors declare that the research and writing of this manuscript adhere to ethical standards of research and publication, in accordance with scientific principles, and are free from plagiarism.

DECLARATION OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that Generative Artificial Intelligence and other assistive technologies were not excessively utilized in the research and writing processes of this manuscript.

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