

Life Skills Development Strategy to Support the Independence of Autistic Children at SDN Ketintang II Surabaya

Endang Pudjiastuti Sartinah, Zilya Ghaida Safrina, Rajwa Naila Arrochman, Sofa Hanum Kanaya, Tamara Damayanti Ma'ruf, Nazwa Arfianti, Mochammad Zharif Wildan Az

Pendidikan Luar Biasa, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Negeri Surabaya

24010044012@mhs.unesa.ac.id, 24010044013@mhs.unesa.ac.id, 24010044086@mhs.unesa.ac.id,
24010044090@mhs.unesa.ac.id, 24010044092@mhs.unesa.ac.id, 24010044133@mhs.unesa.ac.id.

Abstract

This study aims to describe the assessment results and life skills development program for a child with autism at SDN Ketintang II Surabaya. The subject, A (10 years old), was studied using a qualitative descriptive approach through observation and interviews. The results show that Irfan is independent in daily activities such as eating, bathing, and dressing but still struggles with counting, emotional control, and turn-taking. The program focuses on training in money counting, time reading, emotional regulation, and improving independence and concentration. This program is expected to support the child's adaptation and independence in an inclusive school environment.

Keywords: life skills, autistic child, independence, inclusive school

INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neuropsychiatric developmental condition characterized by limitations in social interaction, communication difficulties, and repetitive and limited behavior patterns. This condition begins to be detected from an early age and has a significant impact on various aspects of children's lives, such as adaptive abilities, cognition,

social interaction, and academic achievement. Children with autism have special needs that require attention and different learning approaches compared to normal children in order to achieve optimal development.

One of the important aspects that must be developed in children with autism is life skills. *Life skills* are a set of abilities that support a person in living and overcoming the challenges of daily life effectively. These skills include practical, social, emotional, and intellectual aspects aimed at shaping independent, productive, and responsible individuals. In autistic children, the development of life skills is the main foundation to support independence and adaptability in the social and academic environment.

At SDN Ketintang II Surabaya, there are children with special needs, including autistic children, who need a life skills development program that is tailored to their characteristics and abilities. The program aims to train basic independence such as self-care, routine management, and social interaction. With the right interventions, it is hoped that autistic children can acquire skills that help them face daily activities more confidently and independently, as well as contribute positively to school and society.

According to Ansya et al. (2024) and Hamdani (2024), life skills are important abilities that include practical and social skills that autistic children must have. The development of these skills includes self-care, problem-solving, communication, and learning skills that must be trained repeatedly with an individualized and consistent approach. Studies show that effective life skills programs are those that provide hands-on experience and involve aspects of simulation, social interaction, and inclusive environmental support.

Various studies support the importance of a holistic approach in developing life skills in autistic children, involving teachers, parents, and the child's social environment. Through this collaboration, children can be given maximum support to internalize social and emotional skills that are the key to independence. A relevant and adaptive approach to learning allows autistic children to understand social rules, manage emotions, and actively participate in the surrounding environment.

Local research at SDLB Harapan Bunda Surabaya by Maharani and Ardianingsih (2018) also showed the success of the implementation of *the daily living skills program* in autistic children. The program focuses on independence in daily activities such as hygiene, dressing, basic communication, and timing. The results of this study provide an important basis in designing life skills programs that are suitable for the context of public elementary schools such as at SDN Ketintang II Surabaya.

Based on the background and literature review, the objectives of developing *life skills* for autistic children at SDN Ketintang II Surabaya are:

1. Identify the basic needs and abilities of autistic children in academic and non-academic aspects through in-depth observation and assessment.
2. Developing and implementing *life skills* development programs tailored to the characteristics of autistic children to increase independence and social adaptability.
3. Analyzing the results of the implementation *of the life skills program* on improving the practical, social, emotional, and academic abilities of autistic children.
4. Concluding the effectiveness *of life skills development programs* as the basis for the preparation of learning recommendations and follow-up interventions in inclusive elementary schools.

With the implementation of a life skills program that is structured, gradual, and supported by an inclusive school environment, it is hoped that autistic children at SDN Ketintang II Surabaya can develop independence and better social and academic adaptation to improve their quality of life.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with the aim of describing the ability and development of life skills in children with autism spectrum disorders in an inclusive elementary school environment. The subject of the study is a student named A who is 10 years old and sits in grade IV of SDN Ketintang II Surabaya.

The data collection method consists of interviews with classroom teachers to gather additional information about children's behavior, academic and social abilities. Academic and non-academic observations, including reading, writing, arithmetic skills, communication, independence, emotional control, and social interaction, were used. In addition, children are observed directly in learning activities and activities at school. The research process consists of three stages:

1. **Initial observation** to determine children's abilities and needs in academic and non-academic contexts
2. **In-depth assessment**, in order to obtain a complete picture of the child's strengths and obstacles.
3. **The preparation of the life skills *development* program** is carried out based on the theory of *life skills* development proposed by Ansyah, Rahman, & Sari (2024), and strengthened by UNICEF (2023) regarding life skills education for children with special needs. This theory emphasizes that the development of *life skills* needs to go through several systematic stages, namely:
 1. **Identify basic skills needs**, including personal, social, and academic aspects that are priorities for children.
 2. **Planning of individual learning programs**, by determining objectives, materials, and learning methods that suit the characteristics of autistic children.
 3. **The implementation of the program is gradual and consistent**, using a hands-on approach (*experiential learning*), simulation, and habituation of routine activities.
 4. **Evaluation of learning outcomes and program adjustments** is carried out through observation of children's development in aspects of independence, emotional control, and adaptive social skills.

This approach also emphasizes that *daily living skills* training is effective when carried out through structured, repetitive, and real-life learning based on children's real experiences. Based on this theory, the *life skills* development program in this study is directed to increase children's independence and social adaptability in an inclusive school environment.

Data analysis was carried out descriptively by interpreting the results of observations and interviews to obtain conclusions that describe the child's abilities and recommendations for the development of relevant programs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of course, this research aims to describe the results of assessments and *life skills development programs* for autistic children at SDN Ketintang II Surabaya. The results of the assessment conducted through observation and interviews showed a varied ability profile, where there were strengths in the aspects of personal independence but also significant challenges in the cognitive, functional and socio-emotional aspects. These findings are the basis for designing a systematic and targeted intervention program.

The results of the observations showed that the subject, A, had achieved a good level of independence in daily self-care activities. Children are proven to be able to perform essential activities such as eating, bathing, and dressing without needing assistance. This ability is a fundamental modality that is crucial for the further development of independence. In the academic realm, subjects also show progress in basic skills such as reading, writing, and the ability to understand simple instructions.

However, the assessment identified several weaknesses that required intervention. The main challenges are found in the ability to calculate, specifically in terms of counting money, as well as difficulties in time management and reading the clock. From the socio-emotional domain, subjects still show difficulties in controlling emotions and understanding fundamental social concepts such as *turn-taking* in interactions. This profile confirms that the development of *life skills* in children with autism requires a holistic approach that focuses not only on physical independence, but also on adaptive and social skills.

Life Skills Program Development

The *life skills development program* is prepared based on the results of assessments and theories of life skills development from Ansya, Rahman, & Sari (2024) and UNICEF (2023). The theory explains that the development *of life skills* is carried out in stages through the process of identifying needs, planning, implementing, and evaluating.

1. **Identification of skill needs** is carried out to determine priority areas, namely the ability to count money, read time, control emotions, and the ability to wait for turns.
2. **Program planning** is prepared with classroom teachers by setting learning objectives, supporting activities, and learning media such as toy money, visual clocks, and emotional cards.
3. **The implementation of the program** was carried out during several individual sessions in the classroom and daily school activities using *experiential learning* and *behavioral modeling* approaches.

4. **The evaluation of learning outcomes** was carried out by observing changes in children's behavior and abilities after participating in each training session.

This approach is in line with Maharani & Ardianingsih (2018), who emphasized that life skills training in autistic children must be structured, consistent, and based on real activities.

The development program is designed in the form of money counting exercises, reading time, and controlling emotions. This is a direct response to the identified needs. This approach is in line with research by Maharani and Ardianingsih (2018), which shows the successful implementation of *the daily living skills program* in autistic children. More so, the program adopts the learning principles recommended by Ansya et al. (2024) and Hamdani (2024), which emphasize the importance of repetitive exercises, an individualized approach, and the involvement of simulations and social interactions for the internalization of skills.

Thus, the interventions implemented not only aim to fill skill *deficits*, but also to build a solid foundation for the subject's independence and adaptability in an inclusive school environment. The implementation of programs that are structured and supported by a positive environment is expected to improve children's adaptive abilities and overall independence, which will ultimately contribute to improving their quality of life.

The implementation of *the life skills program* is carried out systematically through structured and consistent individual intervention sessions. This approach is designed to ensure that each skill is taught explicitly and repeatedly, a method that has proven effective for children on the autism spectrum. The intervention focused on areas identified as key challenges for the subjects.

To overcome weaknesses in counting and time management, the intervention uses simulation methods and routine-based learning. Money counting practice sessions involve using toy money in simple buying and selling scenarios to build functional understanding. Meanwhile, time reading training is integrated into the subject's daily schedule, using a visual clock to associate time with specific activities (e.g., break hours, home-school hours). The results of this implementation show gradual progress. Subjects began to show improvements in recognizing instructions involving sequence and routine, although the ability to generalize numeracy and time skills in new contexts was still limited.

Meanwhile, emotional control and understanding of social rules are the focus of interventions in this domain. Implementation is carried out through visual strategies, such as emotion cards and social stories, to help subjects identify appropriate feelings and responses in social situations. Nonetheless, the results of the observations show that emotional control and

the ability to wait for turns remain significant challenges. Behavioral manifestations such as frustration when unfulfilled desires still often arise, indicating that the internalization of socio-emotional skills requires long-term exposure and practice in a natural social context.

Overall, the program's impact is positive but diverse. The most significant progress was seen in aspects of independence associated with structured and routine tasks, such as self-care and environmental recognition. This indicates that the subject responds well to both concrete and repetitive learning. However, areas that demand cognitive flexibility and abstract social understanding, such as functional numeracy and social interaction, show slower progress. These findings confirm that the development of *life skills* in autistic children is an ongoing process that requires adaptive and consistent interventions over time.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of studies and discussions related to the development *of life skills* for autistic children at SDN Ketintang II Surabaya, it can be concluded that:

1. **The results of the identification of children's needs and abilities** showed that subjects had strength in aspects of personal independence such as eating, bathing, and dressing, but were still weak in numeracy, time management, emotional control, and social skills such as waiting for their turn.
2. **The life skills *development program*** , which was prepared based on the results of the assessments and theories of Ansya, Rahman, & Sari (2024) and UNICEF (2023), has proven to be relevant and effective in implementing. The program includes exercises in counting money, reading time, controlling emotions, and improving social interaction through simulation methods and hands-on experiential learning.
3. **The results of the program implementation** showed a gradual improvement in children's practical and adaptive skills. Subjects began to be able to recognize simple amounts of money, understand the time of daily activities, manage emotions with the help of visual cards, and interact more patiently in turn-based activities.
4. **The effectiveness of *life skills development programs*** can be seen from increasing children's independence and social adaptability in an inclusive school environment. This program is also a learning model that can be adapted by teachers and parents to support the development of autistic children in a sustainable manner.

Overall, the development *of life skills* that is carried out in a structured, consistent, and real-needs manner has been proven to be able to improve the adaptive abilities of autistic children in both academic and non-academic contexts. This approach focuses not only on functional independence, but also on strengthening the social and emotional aspects of children so that they can participate more actively in the school environment and society.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings of the research, it is recommended that the life skills development program for autistic children such as A at SDN Ketintang II be implemented gradually and consistently with full support from teachers and an inclusive school environment. Practical actions that need to be taken include individual training to improve the ability to count money, read time, take turns, control emotions, adjust to the rules, and increase independence and focus in completing tasks. The development of new theories can be directed towards the improvement of teaching methods that are more adaptive and responsive to the specific needs of autistic children in inclusive elementary schools. In addition, follow-up research is highly recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of this program in the long term and adapt intervention strategies according to the development of children's needs.

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