

Implementation of the Market Fun Learning Program to Improve the Social, Independence, and Academic Skills of Students with Intellectual Disabilities at SLB Tunas Kasih

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to enhance the social, independence, and academic abilities of students with intellectual disabilities through a contextual learning program called Market Fun Learning. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through observations and interviews with one sixth-grade student with an intellectual disability and one accompanying teacher at SLB Tunas Kasih Surabaya. The study produced a learning design integrating three main aspects: social interaction, daily living independence, and basic academic skills (multiplication). The program applies peer-mediated intervention, role play, and the Concrete–Representational–Abstract (CRA) approach to create interactive and meaningful learning experiences. This program is expected to strengthen students' social and academic competencies while fostering independence through enjoyable, real-life learning activities.

Keywords: intellectual disability, social skills, independence, contextual learning, Market Fun Learning

INTRODUCTION

Daily life skills are fundamental abilities that enable children with intellectual disabilities to adapt and live independently. These children often face cognitive, social, and communication barriers, requiring a learning approach that is contextual and suited to their individual characteristics (Schalock et al., 2021). In special education, developing social and independence skills must be prioritized, as these directly impact quality of life (Embregts et al., 2022). However, learning practices in special schools often focus excessively on abstract academic aspects, while functional and social skills receive less emphasis. As a result, students face challenges in interacting with peers and performing simple daily activities independently (Hwang & Hughes, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for a learning model that integrates social, independence, and academic development simultaneously. One relevant approach is context-based learning, which connects academic concepts to real-life experiences (Rahmawati, 2022). Based on this approach, the researchers developed the Market Fun Learning program—an innovative learning model designed as a mini-market simulation to stimulate social, independence, and academic abilities among students with mild intellectual disabilities.

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Analyze the social and independence skill needs of students with mild intellectual disabilities at SLB Tunas Kasih Surabaya.
2. Describe the design and implementation of the Market Fun Learning program as a contextual learning model.
3. Identify the potential impact of the program on improving students' social, independence, and academic abilities.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design. The research subjects were one sixth-grade SDLB student with a mild intellectual disability and one accompanying teacher at SLB Tunas Kasih Surabaya. Data were collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Observation was conducted to identify students' social and independence skills before and after the program implementation. Interviews were carried out to obtain detailed information regarding learning strategies and students' responses during the activities. Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2015). Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation. The findings were then used to design a contextual market-based learning intervention that integrates social, life skills, and basic numeracy training.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Strengthening Social Interaction Skills

Students with mild intellectual disabilities often struggle to build social relationships due to difficulties understanding social cues and low self-confidence. Within the Market Fun Learning program, social interaction is strengthened through peer-mediated intervention and role play. Watkins et al. (2015) stated that peer-mediated interventions effectively enhance social initiation among students with special needs. Role play provides children the opportunity to practice social skills in enjoyable and structured situations. Zhang et al. (2024) confirmed that structured role-play activities can improve communication and social acceptance among children with special needs. Through mini-market simulations, students learn to take turns, communicate politely, and understand social roles, thereby increasing self-confidence in interacting with others.

2. Strengthening Independence (Life Skills)

Students' independence is trained through contextual activities such as dressing, maintaining personal hygiene, and practicing simple buying and selling transactions. Contextual learning enables students to understand the purpose and usefulness of each skill being taught (Suryani & Dewi, 2023). This activity applies the principles of modeling, prompting, and positive reinforcement (Barudin, 2019), which effectively shape adaptive behavior gradually. In the mini-market simulation, students prepare goods, conduct transactions, and manage money with guidance from teachers and peers. These activities help foster responsibility, discipline, and simple decision-making abilities.

3. Strengthening Academic Skills (Multiplication)

Academic abilities were enhanced through arithmetic activities using the Concrete–Representational–Abstract (CRA) approach (Miller & Hudson, 2007). This strategy assists students in understanding multiplication concepts gradually—from concrete objects to abstract symbols. Additionally, the constant time delay method was used to strengthen the accuracy and automatization of arithmetic facts (Browder & Snell, 1997). Through buying and selling activities, students calculated prices, quantities, and total payments, making mathematics learning more meaningful and applicable.

4. Integration of the Three Aspects

The integration of social, independence, and academic training is the core strength of the Market Fun Learning program. Rahmawati (2022) emphasizes that group-based activity learning integrating social play and functional skills can enhance self-confidence and communication skills among students with mild intellectual disabilities. This program offers a contextual, enjoyable, and life-relevant learning experience. Although the implementation is still at the design and simulation stage, observations and interviews show that this approach has great potential to improve students' social, independence, and academic abilities comprehensively.

CONCLUSION

The Market Fun Learning program was developed as a contextual learning model integrating social, independence, and academic skills for students with mild intellectual disabilities. Through mini-market simulations, students are trained to interact, take responsibility, and perform arithmetic within meaningful situations. The application of peer-mediated intervention, role play, modeling, and CRA strategies has proven relevant for enhancing adaptive abilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers and parents are encouraged to implement this program continuously while adapting activities to each student's individual needs. Regular evaluations should be conducted to measure the program's effectiveness and its impact on students' development. Future studies are recommended to involve more participants to provide a broader understanding of the program's effectiveness and to serve as a reference for inclusive learning development in special schools.

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