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TEACHING ENGLISH FOR INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study explores the strategies and challenges in teaching English to students with intellectual disabilities at SLB YKK Pacitan. The researchers employed a descriptive qualitative research design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with an English teacher, focusing on techniques used in teaching writing, speaking, listening, and reading. The findings reveal that repetition and imitation are the most effective strategies for memory reinforcement and skill development. However, teaching reading remains challenging due to students' difficulties with symbol recognition and memory retention. Limited teaching time further exacerbates these challenges. The study underscores the need for innovative and engaging methods, such as visual aids and technology, to enhance learning. Recommendations include providing additional teacher training, increasing collaboration among educators and parents, and adjusting teaching schedules to allow for more personalized attention. This research highlights the importance of consistent, patient, and creative approaches to support the educational needs of students with intellectual disabilities.

Keywords: Intellectual Disabilities, Mental Disabilities, Obstacles, Teaching English

INTRODUCTION

According to the 2020 Population Census conducted by BPS, the number of mentally disabled people in Indonesia reached around 6.6 million people (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020). Intellectual disabilities are characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour, covering a range of everyday social and practical skills (Mckenzie et al., 2016). Individuals with intellectual disabilities often require support in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and independent living. The level of support needed can vary widely among individuals, ranging from intermittent to pervasive assistance. The goal of support is to enhance the person's functioning within their environment and improve their quality of life.

Physically, they have different characteristics. The physical characteristics of people with intellectual disabilities (ID) can vary widely, but some common factors include physical disabilities and ageing-related symptoms (Bossink, Putten and Vlaskamp, 2017). Some common barriers to physical activity for individuals with intellectual disabilities include health issues (overweight, illness, ear problems, and heart conditions are frequently reported as barriers), motivation and preferences (many individuals with ID lack motivation and prefer sedentary activities), social and environmental obstacles (negative social attitudes, lack of understanding about disabilities, and discrimination by peers and parents are also reported barriers).

Additionally, individuals with intellectual disabilities commonly face challenges in cognitive functioning, encompassing deficiencies in intellectual abilities and adaptive behaviour. This impacts their conceptual, social, and practical skills. Decision-making,

primarily involving complex planning and abstract concepts, can be particularly challenging for them. People with intellectual disabilities may require additional time to comprehend information and articulate their desires or choices (Kirkendall, Linton and Farris, 2016).

Individuals with intellectual disabilities frequently display specific emotional characteristics, such as involuntary emotional expressions like mood swings, which can lead to destructive behaviour, emotional volatility and sensitivity, resulting in impulsive actions, limited ability to empathize and show compassion, challenges in understanding social cues, making them less responsive to potential threats, disruptions in emotional and behavioural regulation (Kislyakov, 2017). These traits may lead to challenges in social settings and a higher likelihood of engaging in antisocial behaviours.

Children with disabilities in Indonesia encounter notable disparities in various facets of their welfare, such as education, health, and social integration. Despite a 29 per cent rise in inclusive schools from 2020 to 2021, children with disabilities still have lower opportunities to access and finish their education compared to their peers without disabilities. A significant 36 per cent of children with disabilities do not attend school, in contrast to only 8 per cent of children without disabilities facing a similar circumstance (UNICEF, 2023). Implementing inclusive education is crucial to supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Inclusive education is vital in promoting equality and social justice by ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, have access to high-quality education (Haug, 2017). Embracing diversity and fostering acceptance, it integrates students with various needs into regular classrooms to support holistic development. This inclusive approach enhances learning outcomes as teachers tailor strategies to cater to diverse learning styles. Aligned with global initiatives advocating for children's rights, inclusive education creates more tolerant and inclusive communities. However, its effectiveness hinges on teacher proficiency and the quality of teaching methods, necessitating ongoing research and improvement efforts.

Teaching English to individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) comes with various challenges. One key issue lies in the gap between identifying and applying evidence-based practices (EBPs) by special educators (Knight *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, special educators may feel less equipped to teach English language arts than other subjects, possibly due to inadequate training and resources. Additionally, individualized instructional approaches are not consistently implemented, even within particular education environments, making it challenging to effectively cater to each student's specific needs.

In Indonesia, teaching English to students with intellectual disabilities requires specialized knowledge and skills. Effective instruction involves tailored lesson plans, appropriate teaching methods, and suitable learning materials. Strategies like prompts, discussions, Total Physical Response, and media like realia kits and interactive videos can enhance learning outcomes for these students (Dewi, 2019).

Teaching English to students with intellectual disabilities comes with various challenges. These students usually have lower-than-average intelligence levels, hindering academic progress and growth. This situation calls for tailored interventions in their learning process. Abstract thinking difficulties hinder their comprehension and memory retention of new information, especially in language acquisition. Moreover, their challenges with self-regulation add further complexity to their learning journey. As a

result, these hurdles make it difficult to effectively teach English to students with intellectual disabilities (Zudeta and Fitriani, 2023).

A practical approach to teaching English to students with intellectual disabilities involves visual aids, systematic prompting, and repetition. Visual tools like pictorial task analysis and graphic organizers aid comprehension and information retention. Systematic prompting and feedback ensure immediate correction and reinforcement, which is essential for acquiring new skills. Furthermore, incorporating varied formats of extensive repetition helps sustain student interest and facilitates skill development. Introducing technology can also be advantageous (Browder *et al.*, 2017). Seeing the importance of the approach in teaching English to intellectual disabilities, this research is essential to be done.

METHOD

The research methodology employed in this study is descriptive qualitative, intending to comprehend and depict the occurrences within the realm of English language teaching for students with intellectual disabilities in SLB YKK Pacitan. The research was done from June 14 2024 to June 27, 2024. The primary data source is an English teacher. Information was gathered through semi-structured interviews, enabling the researcher to delve into the teachers' experiences, perspectives, and instructional approaches. Interviews were conducted in person and recorded for precision in data collection. The interview revealed the teachers' techniques for teaching four skills of English, including speaking, writing, listening, and reading. The interview also revealed the obstacles found. After being collected, the data were discussed, and a conclusion was drawn.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Strategy Used to Teach English for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Teaching Writing

The most popular strategy used by the teacher in SLB YKK Pacitan was repetition and imitation techniques. The teacher used repetition and imitation techniques as the primary method in teaching writing skills. The repetition technique in teaching children with intellectual disabilities involves consistently repeating material or activities to strengthen the child's understanding and memory. The teacher repeated certain words, phrases or activities daily to improve children's understanding. Repetition can also be done using visual and audio aids like picture cards or songs. By repeating information in a structured manner, intellectually disabled children will more easily absorb and remember the material being taught, thereby improving their learning and cognitive skills.

This technique involved students in the writing process repeatedly and imitating the examples given by the teacher. This repetition aimed to help students remember and understand how to write correctly. For example, the teacher may provide an example sentence or word, and students are asked to imitate it many times until they can write it independently.

Teaching Speaking

The teacher used techniques of imitating and repeating the words or phrases taught. "The technique of imitating and repeating taught words or phrases" was an

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effective teaching method for intellectually disabled children in learning to speak. This method involved the teacher saying the word or phrase clearly, and the students were asked to imitate and repeat it several times. This process helped students understand and remember the word or phrase better. With constant repetition, students could develop better speaking and pronunciation skills. Apart from that, this technique also allowed students to practice language intonation and rhythm to speak more naturally and confidently.

Like writing skills, repetition and imitation techniques were also applied to speaking skills. The teacher said a particular word or phrase and asked the students to repeat it several times. This technique helped students with intellectual disabilities form and improve their pronunciation and speaking skills. This repetition also allows students to become more confident using the language they are learning.

Teaching Listening

Repetition was also used in teaching listening. This method involved using speaking techniques such as imitating and repeating taught words or phrases, which are then applied in listening lessons. Children with intellectual disabilities were asked to listen to the words or phrases spoken by the teacher and then imitate and repeat them. This repetition helped them understand and recognize words better through hearing. With this technique, they learn to identify sounds and patterns in the language they hear, so their listening skills improve gradually through repeated practice. The repetition technique used in listening skills is similar to that used in speaking. The teacher would play or say a word, phrase, or sentence several times, and students were asked to listen carefully. This repetition aimed to improve students' listening skills by strengthening their memory and understanding of sounds and intonation in language.

Teaching Reading

The teacher stated that teaching reading skills to students with intellectual disabilities is challenging. These challenges may be caused by various factors, including difficulty understanding symbols and letters, limited vocabulary, and lack of motivation to read. Teachers may need to use more creative and focused methods, such as exciting reading materials, images that support the text, or reading games to make the learning process more fun and effective.

Teaching reading to students with intellectual disabilities presents significant challenges due to their weak memory and difficulty recalling information. These students often take a long time to spell letters and struggle to remember them even after repeated assistance. Teachers need to employ extra patience and innovative methods, as traditional approaches may not be practical. Additionally, students with intellectual disabilities require continuous support and repetition to grasp reading concepts, making the teaching process demanding and time-consuming. Effective teaching strategies often involve using visual aids and technology to enhance understanding (Jiu et al., 2020).

Obstacles Experienced by Teachers

The teacher stated that limited time was the main obstacle to learning. This means teachers may not have enough time to implement optimal and in-depth teaching methods for each student. Limited time can also cause stress for teachers and students,

which in turn can affect learning effectiveness. Teachers may choose between providing individual attention to students or completing the curriculum within the allotted time.

Analysis and Recommendations

Consistency of Teaching Methods

Consistent use of repetition and imitation techniques in writing, speaking and listening skills shows a systematic approach by the teacher. This method is effective in helping students with intellectual disabilities internalize new information. Teachers need to find and apply new teaching methods that are more interesting and effective, especially for reading skills. Methods that can be used include technology, picture books, and educational games. Provide additional training for teachers in effective teaching techniques for students with special needs. This may consist of classroom management strategies, motivation techniques, and innovative teaching aids. Increase collaboration between teachers, parents, and other professionals to create a supportive learning environment. Support from various parties can help overcome existing obstacles and increase learning effectiveness.

Challenges in Reading Skills

Reading skills are recognized as a challenge in itself. This may require a more varied and innovative approach. Teachers must look for additional methods to help students understand and enjoy reading.

Learning Time Constraints:

Time constraints mentioned by the teacher indicate a need for adjustments in the schedule or teaching methods. Limited time can hinder in-depth and personalized learning for each student. Consider adding particular time for learning for students with intellectual disabilities. This could be in the form of additional sessions outside of regular class hours or reducing the number of students per class to allow for more individual attention.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings from SLB YKK Pacitan, it has been determined that repetition and imitation techniques are highly effective in teaching English to students with intellectual disabilities. These methods have been successfully utilized across various language skills, including writing, speaking, and listening. Repetition is crucial in reinforcing learning as it continuously exposes students to the same material, enhancing their memory and comprehension. On the other hand, imitation allows students to emulate correct language usage, which is particularly beneficial for improving speaking and pronunciation skills. Nevertheless, teaching reading poses a significant challenge due to the students' struggles with symbol recognition and memory retention. The study underscores the importance of innovative approaches, such as integrating technology, visual aids, and interactive activities, to enhance the accessibility and enjoyment of reading for these students. Furthermore, the research points out that limited teaching time is a crucial hurdle, suggesting that longer learning sessions or smaller class sizes could offer more personalized support. In conclusion, consistent implementation of these strategies, alongside continuous teacher training and collaborative assistance, can significantly enhance the academic achievements of students with intellectual disabilities.

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