

Strategies and Role of Parents on Language Acquisition of Children with Special Needs

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Abstract

Parents play a significant role in the language acquisition process of children with special needs. This study aims to reveal the strategies and roles parents play in supporting the language acquisition process of children with special needs, which should be implemented in educating children at home. In this study, subjects were children with special needs diagnosed with autism and intellectual disability, with parents acting as resource persons. This research uses descriptive qualitative techniques with triangulation techniques as data collection methods and analysis using behavioristic theory. As a result, in supporting the language acquisition process of children with disabilities, parents face challenges, provide appropriate treatment, and create effective strategies for dealing with language acquisition challenges. There are six challenges in supporting children with language acquisition: communication, social stigma, learning consistency, limited resources, social interaction, and emotions and psychology. The resulting treatments and strategies provide actions used to deal with these challenges.

Keywords: *strategies, parents' role, language acquisition, children with special needs*

Introduction

Language acquisition, also known as language acquisition, is the process of gaining language skills in humans. According to Darjowidjojo (2012), language acquisition is a natural and continuous process in children when learning their mother tongue. During the acquisition period, children imitate the words spoken by parents and the surrounding environment. Because parents are identification figures for children, children will imitate what is captured and what is obtained from their family environment. Parents also have the most intense time with their children. Therefore, the language acquisition process in children is determined mainly by parents (Pramitasari, 2023).

Children will acquire their first language from 0-5 years old. The process of language acquisition in every child around the world is the same (Suardi, Ramadhan, & Asri, 2019). However, it is different if the child is a child with special needs. In normal children, the language acquisition process will only last until the age of 5 years, and by the time they are 6-7 years old, they have reached the stage of language development. However, the language acquisition process may be slower in children with developmental disorders or differences than in normal children. Speech delay occurs due to abnormalities that interfere with body systems such as the brain, hearing, and other motor functions.

(Madyawati, 2016). Although basically, the development of each child is different, the development of children with special needs has unique characteristics related to psychological and physical conditions that require special attention to optimize their potential.

Children with disabilities are divided into several types, one of which is ASD or autistic spectrum disorder and intellectual disability. ASD, better known as autism, is a disorder and delay in cognition, language, behavior, communication, and social interaction, which is part of pervasive developmental disorders. (Madyawati, 2016). Intellectual disability is a lack of intelligence below the average level. Children with intellectual disabilities have language limitations accompanied by delays in visuomotor problem-solving.

Unlike other normal children, children with disabilities need special and unique strategies to make them want to learn and receive lessons well. They cannot sit still and focus for long periods. Many parents use a variety of ways to keep their children learning, even if the learning is not academic. Parents of children with disabilities cannot force their children to be academically proficient. However, they try to get their children to communicate with gestures and words. According to Juniardi, Putra, & Jaelani (2021), Parents significantly influence children's growth and development; good habits will leave an impression and produce good things, and vice versa.

Parents must provide treatment appropriate to the child's condition, especially for children with special needs who need appropriate stimulation and stimulus to help their ability to speak. According to Brown (in Madyawati, 2016), natural language acquisition cannot happen without as much uniform positive stimulus as possible. So, parents need to interact and communicate with their children actively.

Language acquisition is essential for children because humans must master a good language to communicate and interact (Siregar, 2022). However, children with special needs, such as autism and intellectual disabilities, whose brain nerves are disturbed, will find it challenging to communicate. Indriati (in Siregar, 2022) stated that if the brain and speech organs are disrupted, it will also impact the language and speech production process disruption.

The process of language acquisition in children with autism is prolonged, and it takes a long time for them to speak in proper sentences. For this reason, autistic children usually use gestures or make strange sounds to communicate with parents and others. According to Farihat and Chairuddin (in Sulistyowati, Mayasari, & Hastining, 2022), autistic children cannot pronounce syllables and phonemes. Unlike typical children who get their first utterance when they reach several months, autistic people can only make their first utterance when they reach the age of one year or more. (Rakhmanita, 2020). Likewise, children with intellectual disabilities, due to their impaired way of thinking and reasoning, have delays in language acquisition. In addition, they also need help adapting to the environment.

According to Madyawati (2016), children imitate everything in the surrounding environment. Goodwyn, Acredolo, & Brown (2000) state that the behavioristic external position children are born into the world like a blank sheet of paper. This means the family environment, especially parents, dramatically influences children's language acquisition. If parents speak the correct language, the child will also speak the right language and vice versa.

In line with this, the behaviorist school states that children are born with learning potential and behavior that can be shaped by manipulating the environment. Behaviorism theory emphasizes that language is acquired through habit or habituation.

This theory highlights linguistic behavior that can be seen directly and has a relationship between stimulus and response. Skinner (in Darjowidjojo, 2012) said that the acquisition of knowledge, including knowledge of language use, is based on stimulation followed by a response. He also stated that language is nothing but a set of habits that can be acquired through repeated practice. (Darjowidjojo, 2012).

Research on strategies and the role of parents in the language acquisition of children with special needs aged 7-8 years is fundamental. Children with special needs require different learning approaches and strategies, including language acquisition. The home environment, especially parents, strongly influences language acquisition in children, so the role of parents is vital in this process. So, it is necessary to know parents' strategies and roles to support the language acquisition process in children with special needs.

This research will focus on the strategies and roles of parents in the language acquisition of children with special needs. The main subjects in this study are two children with special needs diagnosed with autism and intellectual disability disorder, with their parents acting as resource persons. The main subjects in this study are children with special needs diagnosed with autism and intellectual disability disorder. The resource persons in this study are the parents of the two children.

Research on language acquisition in children with special needs has been done, and this research continues previous research to understand the factors of language acquisition more deeply. Research conducted by Rahmania, Pratiwi, & Permana (2020) which is entitled *Pemerolehan Bahasa Pada Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus* the results show that poor parenting in the home can inhibit the language acquisition process of children with disabilities. However, once positive parenting is applied, children with special needs can acquire language well. Positive strategies applied by parents in parenting children with special needs will help form potential and good growth and development for children. (Harahap & Irman, 2024). This is in line with research conducted by Syaputri & Afriza (2022) in his research entitled *Peran Orang Tua Dalam Tumbuh Kembang Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus (Autisme)*, which states that the growth and development of children with special needs cannot escape the enormous treatment of parents.

In her research entitled *Dampak Pemerolehan Bahasa Anak dalam Berbicara terhadap Peran Lingkungan*, Astuti (2022) mentioned that children's language skills will develop in line with their increasing needs and experiences. This experience will first be obtained through interaction with the home environment. That is why the role of the home environment is essential for children with special needs; the interaction between children and parents will provide a communication experience that helps in language acquisition.

Previous studies only had one focus and needed to address strategies and parents' roles in depth. In contrast, this study will discuss the issue of strategies and parents' roles in more depth. The novelty of this research is its research on the strategies and roles of parents.

Based on the above background, this study examines language acquisition in children with special needs who have disorders or disorders of autism and intellectual disability disorder. To know the challenges parents face in language acquisition in children with special needs aged 7-8 years, knowing the role of parents in helping children with special needs acquire their language, and knowing effective strategies to deal with the challenges of children's language acquisition.

Methods

This study's qualitative method helps obtain detailed and meaningful data. (Sugiyono, 2013). Qualitative research is conducted on human behavior and the meaning behind actions that cannot be measured numerically but can be explained descriptively with words and language. This study used qualitative methods to describe the challenges parents face in supporting language acquisition in children with special needs, parental treatment in supporting language acquisition, and practical strategies to overcome the challenges of language acquisition in children with special needs.

This study uses two children with special needs as subjects and their parents as resource persons. The first subject is Yosua, and his mother named Niluh as a resource person. Yosua is a 7-year-old child with autism who is currently receiving complete education at home. Yosua was diagnosed with ASD at the age of 3 and underwent various tests to get diagnosed with ASD by the doctor. Meanwhile, the second subject is Raffa, who has intellectual disability disorder, and his mother is named Wahyuni. Raffa is currently eight years old and is about to undergo tests to confirm his disorder. In his daily life, Raffa depends more on his parents and brother because he has difficulty speaking and mingling with the surrounding environment.

The data in this study are the challenges parents face in supporting the language acquisition of children with special needs and the role and practical strategies parents use in facing these challenges. The data was obtained directly from the subjects and sources of the research using two cell phones as data collection tools. This research was conducted in the homes of each respondent located in Pondok Melati, Bekasi, and Bambu Kuning, East Jakarta.

The data was collected using triangulation, observation, interview, and documentation techniques. The triangulation technique tests the validity of the data by checking it through different collection techniques and data sources. This is in line with what Afifuddin (in Hadi, Rusman, & Asrori, 2021) says: the triangulation technique is a data validity checking technique that involves using something other than the data for verification purposes or comparison with other data.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman technique (in Hadi et al., 2021), data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, data obtained from the field is transcribed, analyzed, and focused on matters related to the research objectives. Data is presented by forming a brief description using tables to clarify the research results. (Hadi et al., 2021). Concluding is used to answer the formulation of problems that have been formulated since the beginning of the research. Conclusions in qualitative research can be in the form of a description or description of objects that are not yet clear so that after research, it can become clear, and the results can be causal or interactive. (Hadi et al., 2021).

Results

The research was conducted in the homes of each respondent located in Bekasi and Jakarta. The data in this study is presented using qualitative descriptive techniques and tables to clarify the study results. This research uses 7-8-year old children who have autism and intellectual disability disorders as research subjects, and the parents of the subjects act as resource persons.

Table 1. Language Acquisition Challenges of Children with Special Needs

Aspects	Parental Challenge	Description
Communication	Difficult to establish effective communication with children with special needs	Children with special needs usually have difficulty communicating verbally
Social stigma	Facing stigma and discrimination from society	Parents feel fear and worry about negative views of their child
Learning consistency	Consistency in using the learning methods used	Consistency is very important in learning, but children with special needs cannot maintain consistency for a long time.
Limited resources	Limited access to resources to support therapy and education	Therapy and education are very important for children with special needs, but they are often very expensive.
Social interaction	Difficult to adapt to new environments	Children with special needs find it difficult to adapt to new environments and are very dependent on parents.
Emotional and psychological	Managing emotions and stress for parents and children	Emotional and psychological challenges are great for both parents and children.

Researchers asked several questions about the role played by parents in the language acquisition of children with special needs.

Table 2: Parents' treatment of children with disabilities

Aspect	Parental Challenge	Description
Total communication	Using oral and written communication, such as reading, writing, and singing.	Total communication is essential in the learning process of children with autism and intellectual disability disorder.
Home environment	Creating a safe and comfortable home environment that supports children's interaction and communication.	A warm home environment will greatly affect the language acquisition process in children with special needs.
Social interaction	Encourages children to be able to interact with their peers	The surrounding environment also influences language acquisition so that children's language can be further developed if they have interactions
Learning	Using a variety of learning	Interesting and varied learning

methods	methods so that children want to participate in learning	methods will greatly help the language development of children with special needs.
Response and stimulation	Providing the right response to stimulation or stimuli given to children	Responses and stimuli provided by parents play a very large role in children's language acquisition.
Use of technology	Using visual aids such as cartoons or <i>flashcards</i>	Watching cartoons and using <i>flashcards</i> as visual aids can support the language acquisition process in children.
Be consistent and patient	Consistency and patience in teaching language to children	Parents' consistency and patience are very important in supporting children's language acquisition process.
Psychological approach	Understand and appreciate children's psychological differences and needs	Special treatment to the child will help to fulfill the child's psychological needs.

In addition to questions about parents' role in language acquisition, researchers also asked questions related to parents' challenges and how to deal with them. Many parents do not understand the difficulties of educating children with special needs well. For this reason, these questions are asked so that they can be a reference for other parents.

Table 3. Parents' Anticipation Strategies

Challenges	Form Anticipation Total	Before Anticipation The words that are released are only garbled	After Anticipation Able to speak words, write, and sing
Difficult to establish effective communication with children with special needs	communication, such as reading, writing, and singing		
Facing stigma and discrimination from society	Following the community and ignoring bad speech	Parents feel embarrassed and sad	Able to accept the child's condition and be open to others
Consistency in using the learning methods used	Creating a routine schedule and involving family members in the learning process	Teaching children a variety of things so that children are unable to absorb lessons	The child's learning is more organized and purposeful and the child enjoys learning
Limited access to resources to support therapy and education	Learning about learning for children with disabilities and teaching the child herself at home	The child just cries and doesn't make any progress	The child becomes more linguistically developed and independent
Difficult to adapt to a new environment	Putting the child in public school	Indifferent and ignorant to the surrounding	Few children want to be close to children with

Managing emotions and stress for parents and children	Consult a psychologist and join a community	environment Parents get stressed and tired easily	special needs More accepting of the child's condition and light-hearted parenting
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Discussion

Parental challenges

Based on the research results, parents face six challenges in supporting the language acquisition process of children with disabilities. These include difficult communication, bad stigma from the surrounding environment, difficulty establishing consistent learning, limited resources, children not having difficulty interacting, and the emotional and psychological conditions of parents and children. These challenges are the main things that parents face. So, parents need to understand the child's condition first. Parents need to find out the type of disorder or disorder suffered by the child so that they can know the following action and get direction from a psychologist or therapist.

However, to be able to get a definite diagnosis of the child's condition, parents need much money. This can also be a challenge for parents who are not well-off. It can be difficult for parents to understand their child's condition if they do not have the money for treatment, so many parents tend to be careless or ignorant in dealing with children with disabilities. This cost problem will continue if the child's disorder is severe. Parents inevitably have to take their children for therapy and take a series of tests that are very expensive.

Some parents also complain about the fatigue of educating children with special needs. Their energy and minds are drained because they have to pay attention to and assist their children more intensely than other children. In addition, educating children with disabilities requires special knowledge and skills that not all parents may have. So, parents must continue to seek information and learn to find the best way to support their children's development.

These challenges will also become more significant for parents as their children grow older. Especially if the child has a high dependence on parents, it will be difficult for the child to let go of the parent's role in his life. The child will continue to depend on their parents without being able to become independent.

For this reason, parents need to find the right methods to support language acquisition and child development so that children can be independent and able to interact with the social world. Parents must be able to implement good habits that stimulate positive stimuli in the child's brain so that the child can apply them and avoid bad habits for the good of the child.

Parental Treatment

In educating typical children and children with disabilities, total communication is the main thing to do. Because communication is essential, children must first be taught how to communicate. In children with special needs, parents cannot emphasize that their children can communicate like other children. However, parents need to emphasize that children can at least say words.

The observation results show that parents who communicate completely with children with special needs tend to have children who can be invited to two-way communication. This means that children can respond to what is said by parents both

with words and with gestures. A comfortable home environment also makes children feel safe and comfortable moving and mingling with other family members, such as brothers and sisters. They do not even hesitate to seek attention from other family members first.

However, on other occasions, the researcher found that children with special needs tend to avoid and do not want to interact with others because they feel comfortable only communicating with their families. Even though parents have encouraged them to interact with others, they still prefer to draw boundaries with people.

For children with autism, they avoid other people because they feel comfortable with the routine and environment they know. They will throw tantrums and cry if things do not match the activities they are used to. As for children with intellectual disabilities, they find it challenging to participate in the same activities as other children, so they feel inferior and eventually choose to be alone.

Therefore, parents' methods for educating children with special needs must be based on recommendations from psychologists or the results of consulting with experts. This is required so that parents have a clear direction and purpose in educating children. Consulting with experts will also make it easier for parents to handle children with special needs.

Experts will certainly provide a variety of methods that can be tailored to the needs of children with special needs, such as providing material for children to learn to read or count by pairing pictures or letting children play in nature while learning. However, remember that these methods will only work if parents can consistently and patiently carry them out. In addition to consulting with experts or psychologists in educating children, parents also need to consult about the challenges they face while educating children at home so they do not feel excessive psychological pressure due to fatigue.

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Parental Anticipation Strategy

Researchers observed more deeply the strategies and roles played by parents in the language acquisition of children with special needs, focusing on children with autism and intellectual disability. The results of the study prove that in supporting the learning process of language in children with special needs, parents face many challenges, both

internal challenges that include themselves and their children and external challenges from the surrounding community environment.

From the observations, parents play a significant role in supporting language acquisition in children with special needs. Although many challenges must be overcome, over time, parents have managed to face these challenges. Initially, parents did feel denial when they first learned about their child's condition; over time, parents can accept the situation and can provide the treatment needed by their child with special needs. Support from therapists and the surrounding environment dramatically affects the psychological condition of parents so that parents can be more open with others about their child's condition. Parents also become more compassionate towards their children and can decide on learning methods that are by the child's wishes so that the child does not get bored quickly during the learning process. That way, parents can maintain consistency in the learning process.

Based on this analysis, parents must initially accept the child's condition. If parents want to accept their child's condition, various challenges will be faced. In this study, researchers want to know what kind of treatment parents give after receiving the child's condition. Based on the study results, the treatment parents give to children becomes more like inviting children to socialize, providing facilities to support language acquisition in children, and providing positive stimuli children need.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, this research concludes that in the process of language acquisition for children with special needs, parents need the right strategy and treatment so that it can provide stimulus to the child's brain. There are six challenges faced by parents, including communication, social stigma, learning consistency, limited resources, social interaction, and emotional and psychological conditions of parents and children. However, these six challenges can also be overcome with appropriate treatment and strategies that meet the needs of children with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities can implement these strategies and roles to support language acquisition. Researchers hope that this research does not end here because there is still much to be studied about the strategies and language acquisition of children with disabilities, both with a multidisciplinary approach and the use of technology to assist learning.

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