

# LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR EARLY CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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## **Abstract**

*This article is intended to reveal the importance of learning strategies for children with special needs. The results of literature review show that there are some learning strategies that can be used in the teaching and learning process for children with special needs. Those learning strategies cover: First, perceptual-motor training, such as training the ability to distinguish shapes, symbols, letters, etc. and training on the ability to remember. Second, auditive, such as training children to distinguish consonant and vowel sounds. Third, modeling which is a learning activity by following the styles of others as a model and being able to imitate the behavior of teachers or parents.*

**Keywords:** Learning strategy, Early Childhood, Special Needs.

## **A. Introduction**

All children, including the children with special needs, have the same right to get a good education quality. Children with special needs (*Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus* abbreviated as *ABK*) are children who have impaired visual function (blind), limbs (disabled), mental / intellectual delays (mentally retarded), hearing (deaf), and social deviation (*ADD / ADHD / Tunalaras*) (Friend, 2005). They experience such a certain growth and development obstacle that they have certain limitations and need trained services from professional educators in the learning process. It is not easy to provide learning material to children with special needs

because their physical and intellectual weaknesses are slightly disturbed which requires special strategies in the process of teaching and learning activities (Mangunsong, 2009).

Historically, education for children with special needs was born from the initial awareness that some of them physically and psychologically have differences with normal children. Along with this reality, children who have such differences also need different services education that their potentials can be developed. One of the ways was by establishing a residential institution. Gradually the introduction of special education as a profession requiring expertise has stimulated the development of this field so that professional organizations began to be established and became a force in giving birth to various other special education services (Aziz, 2015).

As a matter of fact, learning for early childhood has the principle of playing while learning. In other words, learning is done by various fun activities and children are given the freedom to choose activities. Thus they do not feel so pressured by the activities that are being carried out that joyful learning can be achieved (Suyanto, 2005).

Problems related to the learning process of children with special needs generally stem from inconsistencies in meeting both the needs for education and the learning service strategies implemented in the institution. However, it does not mean that children with special needs do not have the potential to develop their abilities in institutions.

Early childhood with special needs learning must be so oriented towards the competence of child development that the learning strategies must be well selected and applied. In this case, learning strategy is an effort for educators to implement various ways of providing learning to children to achieve the desired goals (Masitoh, 2005).

Considering the importance of the well-applied various learning strategies, this study was conducted to explore some learning strategies for early childhood with special needs. This is a descriptive qualitative study of library research. The researchers used written texts as the data sources.

## **B. Types of Education Services for Early Childhood Special Needs**

There are several types of educational services for children with special needs including: education services for children with visual impairments, education services for children with hearing impairment, education services for mentally retarded children, educational services for children with disabilities, and services for children with hearing impairments. To achieve optimal education services with special needs, the learning strategy must be integrated in the form of cooperation with families, schools and also the community.

### **1. Education Services for Blind Children**

Children with visual impairments are expected to be able to identify various objects that exist in the form of sounds, conditions and objects. The ability to distinguish objects from one another is then able to verify the ability to ascertain the correctness of an object by further recognizing the characteristics of the object.

### **2. Educational Services for Deaf Children**

There are four levels of educations that are needed to be discussed dealing with the educational services for deaf children, covering: the low level which is for kindergarten (*Taman Kanak-Kanak Luar Biasa* abbreviated as *TKLB/TKLH*), the first level which is for the elementary school (*Sekolah Dasar Luar Biasa* abbreviated as *SDLB/SDKH*), the third level is for Junior high school (*SLTP / SMPKH*), and the last level is for senior high school (*SMPLB/ SMAKH*).

First, as directed by the Directorate of Special School Development, children with hearing impairment can be given education through the low level of *TKLB / TKKH* deaf education. In this case, the child is given stimulation in developing language skills, communicating especially in speaking skills, and in sensory-motor skills.

At the second level of education, namely *SDLB / SDKH* with high class deafness, children are taught the aspects of communication skills,

motor sensory skills, and also basic development in academics and social skills.

The third level of education is *SLTP / SMPKH* Deaf. At this level, the communication skills and senso-motor skills to apply basic skills in the academic field in solving problems of everyday life are emphasized.

The fourth level of education is *SMPLB / SMAKH* with hearing impairment. Here, the children are taught the communication skills and basic skills in fulfilling their daily needs.

### **3. *Educational Services for Mentally Retarded Children***

The third educational service is for both the mild mental retardation and moderate mental retardation. Mental retardation services emphasize more on motion therapy so that the children can train their overall body functions. In this case, providing game models, as a learning method for mentally retarded children, are able to help the children catch an object easily. As for the formal education pathway, mentally retarded children can learn a certain thing based on their level of ability. Deeply, it is important to be noted that educational institutions play an important role in providing facilities for the learning of mentally retarded children as an effort to expand learning opportunities through integrated steps.

### **4. *Education Services for Children with Disabilities***

Educational services for children with disabilities are opened to those who have serious problems in mental retardation, difficulty moving, mild disability and moderate disability. Children with disabilities can actually participate in learning activities like other normal children. Special education for children with disabilities is so crucially needed when they cannot interact with their social environment that they have stable emotions. Guidance for children with disabilities must be given intensively.

Therefore, the educators are tasked to provide special programs related to the special competencies that children with special needs must acquire. The special needs program is a special guidance program that is provided in accordance with the specific needs as a substitute for the

obstacles experienced by the disorder. Special needs programs can be in the form of Braille and mobility orientation programs for children with visual impairments or development of sound and rhythm perception for children with visual impairments and so on. The special needs program that is implemented properly will help children with special needs to adapt to the surrounding environment and minimize such obstacles that they can carry out tasks as well as interact and communicate well.

Overall, the importance of education services for children with special needs should be provided in an integrated manner as it will not work well if there is no collaboration with families.

### **C. General Principles of Early Childhood Learning with Special Needs**

The main ability problem of the early childhood with special needs deals with the concept understanding. The child's ability is still not at the concrete understanding stage. They also still have limited vocabulary and low learning motivation. Thus, it is necessary to apply learning strategies that are appropriate to the abilities of children with special needs through general principles about early childhood learning with special needs (Ayu, 2017).

In the implementation of the learning process for children with special needs, there are several general principles that must be considered, some of which are:

*First*, the teacher must know and understand the conditions of their students. *Second*, teachers must always motivate their students to always be enthusiastic to participate in learning activities. *Third*, the teacher has a directional principle, meaning that the teacher must know and carefully formulate clear activity objectives for their students.

*Fourth*, the teacher provides the opportunity and activity to get the students to develop and not to depend on others. *Fifth*, the teacher must also be able to provide assignments or activities based on the abilities of their students. Besides, the teacher also should know the readiness of the students to receive learning material. *Sixth*, teachers must be firm in not spoiling their students so that they can develop aspects of their

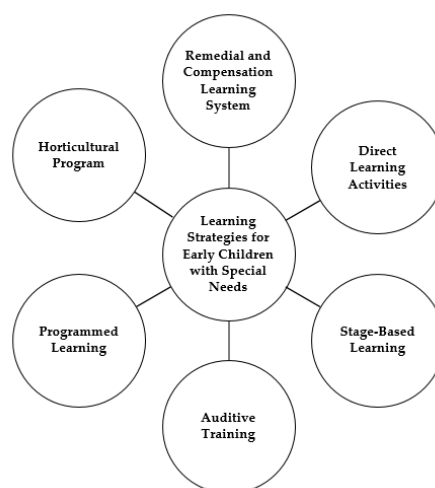
independence. *Seventh*, a teacher must have and develop learning strategies so that children are able to optimize their abilities for the realization of directed teacher and student interactions (Abdullah, 2015).

#### **D. Learning Strategies for Early Childhood Special Needs**

Learning strategy is an activity that has been designed and selected by the teacher as a way of delivering material in the teaching and learning process to facilitate students so that learning objectives can be achieved. Learning strategy should have been so well prepared before being carried out that the learning material can be more effectively delivered. Learning strategies for early childhood with special needs can be done by observing various conditions and different learning abilities. This is very applicable because a learning strategy that has been chosen by the teacher is not necessarily the best and most effective for all students with special needs. In other words, the most effective learning strategy is such an applicable one that it can be adapted to the conditions of the students (Masnipal, 2013).

The way to consider the learning strategies is to look at the type of disability and the severity of the child according to the child's age level. Therefore, the strategies may differ from one child to another.

There are seven learning strategies that can be used for children with special needs as described in the picture below:



*Picture 1. Learning Strategies for Early Children with Special Needs*

The first one is a remedial and compensation learning system. This step is used to fulfill skills in carrying out a repetitive activity to achieve optimal learning goals.

The second one is direct learning activities. It deals with the assessment of learning while learning takes place.

The third one is stage-based learning. It has something to do with how the educators carry out teaching and learning activities starting from the easiest level to the more difficult skill levels.

Fourth, learning activities to train *auditive*, which is the ability to store and remember sounds, sound combinations, etc.

The fifth one is programmed learning. This strategy allows children to learn certain material which has been divided into sub-sections that are made possible by sequential material. All of them are done in order to achieve a certain goal of activity by playing.

The sixth one is by holding a horticultural program, which is a therapeutic activity for early childhood with special needs to be trained to look after and care for living plants. This is done to train a sense of responsibility and develop independence through caring for their plants (Aziz, 2015).

In short, all of the above learning strategies for children with special needs that have been described can foster a sense of confidence because of the competency support that has been given by both the teacher and parent. Here, the most important thing for the success of a learning strategy for early childhood with special needs is the achievement of life independence so that children can do the best for their lives (Hildayani, 2010).

#### **E. Concluding Remarks**

Learning strategies are an inseparable part of teaching and learning activities and as indicators of the achievement of certain goals in the learning process of early childhood. The learning strategy used for children with special needs is certainly a little different from normal children. Selecting the right strategy for children with special needs is by observing and understanding the condition of each of their students as

every student with special needs must have a different type and level of disability. In other words, one learning strategy cannot be given to all students' conditions. However, the essence and urgency of learning strategies for early childhood with special needs have several things that must be considered. There are seven learning strategies that can be done in order to achieve children's competence in life independence, such as the remedial learning system which is carried out by repeating an activity, and a learning system that offers a horticultural program which is caring for the children' plants. All of them are done to foster a sense of responsibility and increase the independence of early childhood with special needs.

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